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Hickory Nut Gap Farm Culture Change

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Consultancy Project & Report

Organization: Gardner-Webb University College of Education

Project Title: HICKORY NUT GAP FARM: CULTURE CHANGE

Candidate: Stacia Harris

Consultancy Coach: Dr. Dale Lamb

Defense Date: June 27, 2022

Authorized by: Jamie Ager, Hickory Nut Gap Farm

Approval

This consultancy project was submitted by Stacia Harris under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Dr. Dale Lamb, Faculty Advisor
Gardner-Webb University

Date

Jamie Ager, Site Advisor
Owner, Hickory Nut Gap Farm

Date

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Abstract

HICKORY NUT GAP FARM: CULTURE CHANGE. Harris, Stacia, 2022: Consultancy

Project, Gardner-Webb University.

Organizational culture is crucial to success yet incredibly difficult to thoroughly understand and, when needed, change. This mixed methods study examined the specific culture at Hickory Nut Gap Farm to better define challenges and opportunities for growth and improvement. Using data and published research on organizational culture, this consultancy yielded custom strategies to help Hickory Nut Gap Farm create a consistent culture and also address other specific challenges revealed through research.

Keywords: culture, climate, leadership, professional development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Purpose

Hickory Nut Gap Farm (HNG) is a family farming operation located in Fairview, NC. The organization is comprised of a warehouse, a working farm/event space, a retail store, and a corporate office. Its brand and mission relate to regenerative farming and humane treatment of farm animals. Alongside partner farms, the company raises cows, pigs, and chickens using this model and philosophy. They serve customers through their retail store and online orders, and they also sell to local grocery chains.

The employees are scattered across several locations. This has created an inconsistent culture. Additionally, HNG has aggressive growth goals. They have several effective systems in place to help staff reach those goals; however, personal leadership development is recommended to ensure staff has the capacity to handle change and challenges that will come with growth. Additionally, there is staff interest in addressing issues surrounding racial equity and bias in the values and training. Specifically, the staff is interested in partnering with more diverse farmers.

There are several key facets of a culture change initiative. There is the overall culture change strategy. Subsets of this initiative are improving communication across the organization, intentional staff development (to build skills and include them in the culture change process), and recruiting talented and skilled employees to join the organization.

Employees are feeling motivated and empowered to be a part of a solution and seeking training to address the aforementioned issues. The project manager will primarily explore HNG's current culture and suggest strategies to create a consistent and modern corporate culture that reflects these central beliefs and motivations.

1.2 Project Qualification

After several conversations with organizational leaders, a very specific concern rose to my attention. As the conversations and analysis continued, I identified several ancillary issues that were indirectly related to the central problem. I had a very specific vision for how I would consult with the organization. I imagined more in-person interactions. The pandemic shutdowns hit just a few weeks after we agreed on our partnership. This drastically changed my timeline and my methods to gather data, and I switched to a new project host. Despite the challenges, the central problem was still a relevant challenge to address. There was a clear path for data collection and analysis and a clear date for the culmination of Phase 1.

I chose this partner and this project based on my personal interest in regenerative farming and saw it as an opportunity for both personal and professional growth. Additionally, the concerns brought to me seemed indicative of a growing, successful, family-owned business. The process of addressing their concerns and providing specific strategies is a powerful skill set that could be used for future consulting projects.

1.3 Project Complexity and Impact Assessment

After several conversations with my project host and project sponsor, this portion of the project is on the cusp of medium to major. Because I have decided on a firm timeline where I will step away and another DEOL student could take over or the organization can facilitate implementation, it is a manageable medium project. I assessed the organization and created a narrow focus on the central problem and just a few secondary problems. The organization is also solid in many other aspects, so I felt it could devote the resources to implementing my strategies independently. Had I agreed to the implementation of strategies as well, this project would have become too complex.

1.3.1 Project Complexity

The project complexity assessment matrix includes the following criteria: delivery timeline, stakeholder impact, operational change, supplier contract complexity, in-house expertise, and correlation with other initiatives.

The timeline was impacted by pandemic shutdowns but still fell within the 12- to 18-month window. The strategies will impact internal and external stakeholders. The strategies will lead to new processes and training for all staff. As strategies will include partnering with leadership consultants, there will be new contracts for services. The organization already uses a powerful and intentional sales goal-setting software (Entrepreneurial Operating System); the language of change, growth, and vision alignment should be familiar to all staff. This leads to the final criteria; these strategies should complement their current sales software.

1.3.2 Project Impact

The project impact matrix includes the following considerations: strategic contribution, return on investment, and operational effectiveness.

HNG has major growth goals over the next 5-10 years. As they plan for expansion, consistent organizational culture and building leadership capacity in all staff are relevant and important. This project directly aligns with and supports those growth goals. The return on investment should be felt within a year of implementation. Surveys and employee feedback will help the organization maintain momentum. The strategies will improve the work of all staff and partnering organizations.

1.4 Project Charter Information

Date: 6/21/2020 (revised 2/2022)

Project Title: HICKORY NUT GAP FARM: CULTURE CHANGE

Project Host: Jean-Paul Lausell/Jamie Ager

Project Sponsor (GWU): Dr. Dale Lamb

Project Manager: Stacia Harris

Project Participants and Roles

Project Manager: Stacia Harris

Team Members: Jean-Paul Lausell, COO, HNG; Jamie Ager, Owner, HNG; Amy Ager, Owner, HNG

Stakeholders: HNG staff, customers, and Vendors

Project Purpose Statement

Purpose

HNG's leadership team is in the process of revising the organization's core values. The goal is a more modern and relevant reflection of who the organization is now.

Specifically, there is interest in addressing issues surrounding racial equity and bias in the values and training. Employees are feeling motivated and empowered to be a part of a solution and seeking training to address the aforementioned issues. The project manager will explore HNG's current culture and design a training protocol to create a consistent and modern corporate culture that reflects these central beliefs and motivations.

Resources

Host will provide time to interview and/or survey all current employees, especially the leadership team.

Host will provide time for outside experts to present to the staff.

Deliverables

Analysis of current organizational culture, training protocol in order to encourage a consistent culture across several HNG locations, method to measure effectiveness

Milestones

Project manager must complete CITI IRB Certification Process by July 31, 2020.

One-on-one interviews with the leadership team, survey of remaining HNG employees (qualitative and quantitative data collection)

Target Completion: September 30, 2020

October through November: Project manager completes literature review.

Draft of recommendations complete:

Target Completion: November 1, 2020.

Final recommendations complete:

Target Completion: November 30, 2020.

December through January: Project manager completes literature review.

Target Completion: March 31, 2021

Host may implement recommendations independently or partner with another GWU DEOL student for full implementation/ evaluation.

Project manager will assemble capstone project for presentation during the summer of 2022. Project host is invited to this presentation: Date/Location: TBD.

SMART Objectives

- Craft strategies to encourage a consistent culture in the organization
- Incorporate elements of racial equity and diversity awareness into this protocol
- Design criteria to measure the effectiveness of the strategies
- Conduct frequent surveys and interviews to maintain relationships with key staff members

Major Known Risks

- Staff perception and buy-in: medium
- Employee workload (time to assist with gathering data): low
- External threats such as coronavirus pandemic and social unrest affecting employee morale and engagement: high
- Intrinsic difficulty in changing organizational culture: medium

Constraints

- Possible financial limitations if paid experts are required as part of strategy implementation
- Staff turnover could create disruptions.

External Dependencies

Cooperation of leadership team and staff members is critical to success.

Communication Strategy

The project manager will provide a monthly situation report via email to the COO or designee for the duration of the project. Communication will be supplemented with virtual face-to-face meetings or presentations as needed. Due to health concerns, communication will be electronic or virtual for most or all the project.

2. Project Objectives

This project addresses an issue that the COO, who is no longer with the company, identified before we met. He recognized that the organization, being scattered across multiple locations, lacked a consistent culture. He reported it felt like each location was a stand-alone company. This observation, coupled with feedback from both owners regarding their goals for the organization, helped clarify strategies to address the concerns. From my perspective, this project will help build a skill set that will inform future consulting opportunities. As I will not assist with implementation, success will depend on clear communication with the organization as well as establishing criteria (in the form of staff surveys) for them to measure success. They will need to implement strategies independently, so providing the organization with a way to measure effectiveness is critical.

2.1 Outline of Partnering Organization's Objectives

2.1.1. Objectives

This project will help create a seamless culture across the organization. Additionally, leadership training for all staff will help the organization tackle current and future challenges as the organization grows.

- Culture change and building leadership capacity
- The organization has aggressive growth goals. It must solidify a more consistent identity and build capacity in all staff in order to ensure those goals can be met.
- HNG is a growing family-owned business. It already possesses many strengths as an organization, per data collected by me. These strategies will serve to enhance existing strengths.

2.1.2 Success Criteria

Implementation is not part of the project. Through staff surveys and one-on-one feedback, leadership at HNG should be able to quantify the success of strategy implementation. Additionally, as growth challenges and opportunities arise, leadership should be aware of how staff responds (themselves included) and if new behaviors remain frozen as part of the culture change.

2.2 Student's Personal Leadership Objectives

2.2.1 Objectives

When I reflect on the concept of leadership and the classes we have completed so far, I feel that leadership is not a fixed set of skills. Also, I can see how a person might need multiple leadership skill sets in order to navigate difficult situations or move a team through various kinds of challenges/opportunities. I think, in a sense, we all are who we are on a very foundational level, but it is helpful to understand various leadership styles and be comfortable deploying them depending on the situation and personalities with which you are dealing. This project helped me see the value in possessing multiple communication styles and leadership skill sets. I was thankful to have the opportunity to speak to several members of the organization. As a consultant, it is valuable to be able to build trust and rapport. I felt those employees were honest and open and not fearful of being judged. In a real-world consulting scenario, gathering qualitative data from staff is paramount to identifying a central problem in an organization. As implementation is not part of this project, I have no way to measure that set of leadership skills; however, as I reflect on my experience so far, I am confident that I could navigate the challenges and successes of implementation.

2.2.2 Success Criteria

Student leadership is measured in the growth of soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, creativity, and innovation. This project had to be modified several times as the pandemic shutdowns impacted both the partner business and me. This process provided opportunities to learn to persevere, be flexible, predict threats on the horizon, and remain positive.

3. Project Scope

3.1 Definitive Scope of Work

This project will provide actionable strategies to the partnering organization to create a consistent organizational culture. The strategies will also help the organization train and prepare for successful growth aligned with its organizational goals.

3.2 Project Benefits

The experience, despite the pandemic disruptions, has created a framework that I could use for future clients. Culture change and building capacity in employees are likely concerns of many organizations. The process to assess HNG could be duplicated with other organizations.

3.3 SMART Goals

- Design a strategy to encourage a consistent culture in the organization.
- Incorporate elements of racial equity and diversity awareness into the strategies.
- Measure the effectiveness of the strategies.
- Conduct frequent surveys and interviews to maintain relationships with key staff members.

4. Disciplined Inquiry

4.1 Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Through a survey, observation, and interviews, I first assessed the current culture and climate of the partnering organization. The quantitative tool used is the Denison Culture analysis tool. The quantitative method included a review of organizational artifacts, observing staff members, and conducting interviews.

Theoretical Framework

Using qualitative and quantitative data, I will provide several strategies to recruit and retain talent, build leadership capacity in the staff, and improve communication across the organization. Culture change will be at the center of these strategies. Using Lewin's Three-Step Change Model, I will work with the organization to facilitate the adoption of the new behaviors that are aligned with organizational goals. This

three-step model, "Unfreezing – Moving – Refreezing," is widely used in the change literature, as it provides strong support for leadership interventions and managing employee perceptions during organizational changes. It also supports that status quo is the main stage of driving and restraining forces where leaders and employees interact with each other as the former strives to break it and the latter to maintain it. (Bakari et al., 2017, p. 156)

With the support of the leadership team, I will unfreeze current behaviors (the status quo) by explaining the vision and belief for the need for change to occur. The staff seems motivated by a sense of social justice, so this type of tie-in could garner buy-in, which is critical.

The stage of unfreezing requires disintegrating employees' contemplation of existing situation, creating dissatisfaction and disconfirmation with status quo, creating an appealing future vision, enhancing self-efficacy and optimism that future state will be more beneficial than the current state and will have long-term benefits. (Bakari et al., 2017, p. 161)

Bakari et al. (2017) went on to discuss the importance of strong leadership in the change process. This connects to one of my recommendations to build leadership capacity among all staff. The next step in Lewin's model is to move the staff to align with the new goals of the organization. This will entail changing behaviors, protocols, and even the language used among staff. It will require intense communication and deep listening to ensure staff members understand the desired changes. The final step is to refreeze. This is when the desired new behaviors and attitudes become the new status quo. Leaders should evaluate or test to make sure the new behaviors and attitudes fit the individual. Leaders should also ensure others within the organization accept the new behaviors and attitudes (Young, 2020).

The organization itself must provide support by ensuring the necessary resources are available, which can include access to technology or people. For example, if a group member requires access to a senior-level leader but that access is blocked, the new behavior and attitude will not stick. (Young, 2020, para. 19)

This part of the process will require leaders to check in frequently with staff who are assigned to several locations. The location and separation of each HNG office create a disjointed culture and will also present a challenge to the culture change.

4.2 Hypothesis

As an organization, HNG is operating with many strengths. They have aggressive growth goals. The strategies provided will help them now and as they realize that growth. Consistent culture, improving communication, building leadership capacity, and intentionally focusing on inclusion and equity will poise HNG to address and overcome future challenges.

4.3 Research Questions

- What are the overall culture and work environment of the organization?
- Of what does the training for new hires consist?
- Do employees feel that they have adequate training to meet the current demands of their job?
- How are organizational goals set and measured?
- Is the communication within the organization adequate?
- How could communication within the organization be improved?
- What organizational improvements have been made in the last year as a result of partnerships with professional consultants?
- What social justice causes should be a part of the HNG value system?

4.4 Literature Review

Building/Changing Culture

Schein (2017) asserted that organizational culture is created through artifacts; espoused beliefs, values, and behavioral norms; and basic underlying assumptions. These are important clues to evaluate an organization's current culture. Organizational culture, organizational effectiveness, and employee involvement are intertwined (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

Denison and Mishra (1995) discussed the progress made by researchers over the past 50 years to explore these relationships. Denison and Mishra proposed that there are four traits of organizational culture that determine effectiveness: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. These traits can be measured and evaluated to determine a baseline for organizational culture and also to measure the success of a culture change initiative.

Jiony et al. (2015) also explored employee involvement and engagement and their role in organizational culture. Jiony et al. discussed the importance of organizational communication in the process. Jiony et al. defined employee engagement as staff members being committed to the mission and goals of the organization and motivated to contribute to its success.

Organizational communication is defined as the way language is used in relationships, teams, and networks within the organization. It is also defined by how the organization presents its culture and climate to staff. Specifically, Jiony et al. concluded that organizational communication (relaying expectations and providing support to employees to be successful) can help staff manage their jobs better and feel more engaged and involved in the organization. This leads to improved organizational effectiveness as goals and objectives are met.

In Chapter 4 of Fiedler (2007), Conway and Schaller provided significant insight into how communication shapes culture. Like a potter molding clay, Conway and Schaller (as cited in Fiedler, 2007) described communication as the tool that shapes shared cultural norms into the final form that culture will take. Effective organizational communication serves a primal need for people.

As human beings, we are fundamentally driven to know things and, ideally, to know them with confidence. To some extent, this fundamental epistemic need may help explain why culture exists at all. Our epistemic needs compel us to communicate with others, not only to obtain their knowledge but also to obtain validation for our own perceptions. (Conway and Schaller, as cited in Fiedler, 2007, p. 118).

Conway and Schaller (as cited in Fiedler, 2007) went on to explain how communication is successful: It is about the message's stickiness, pitchiness, and catchiness. Does the message stick in the recipient's memory? Is it pitched in the appropriate arena to be received? And is that entire message received? "In order for information to be culturally successful, that information must be 'catchy' too" Conway and Schaller (as cited in Fiedler, 2007, p. 115). These important concepts about how communication shapes culture are relevant to HNG, as quantitative research reveals that poor communication is a concern among all levels of staff.

How does the organization begin this process of shaping organizational culture? It starts with measuring for a baseline of staff involvement and engagement and using those survey results thoughtfully and effectively. The Denison consulting group published a case study on corporate culture change and employee alignment to those values and principles (Denison & Schlue, 2007). Henkel is a Fortune Global 500 Company in the personal and home care industry. Their core values include being customer-driven, developing high-quality items, embracing change and innovation, and recognizing that they are successful because of their staff. Using survey data, Henkel was able to focus on a key area for change: addressing the strategic direction and intent of the organization and better communicating that to the staff. Essentially, it revealed that Henkel needed to provide a clearer picture and understanding of the goals and direction of the organization. The survey also revealed that staff wanted more cross-departmental cooperation and collaboration. The entire management team at Henkel worked together to implement a strategy to address these employee concerns. The following year, the staff was surveyed again. There was more participation in the survey, which revealed an overall improvement in team orientation, coordination, and integration (Denison & Schlue, 2007). This case study is significant and relevant to HNG in that it highlights the importance of measuring employee sentiment with a reliable tool, encouraging collaboration among managers to evaluate and understand survey results, devising a strategy and consistently implementing it, and then using the same survey to measure the effectiveness of those strategies. Communicating the culture and values of an organization is a two-way street.

Obstacles to Culture Change

Change projects fail at a high rate, according to Percy (2019). Percy explained that businesses know change is not only important, but it is the key to survival in a competitive world. In an interview with Lior Arussy, Percy discussed some of the reasons why change projects fail. The answers range from lack of budget and time to poor communication of the problem the organization needs to overcome and a poor explanation of the purpose of the change. There are also the psychological aspects of change. Change threatens self-esteem and a sense of security, and to some employees, implies a sense that they have previously failed their organization somehow. Leaders must drive change, and employees must buy into that change (Percy, 2019). As HNG looks to embrace a culture change initiative for their organization, it is critical that the leaders understand how hard change can be for the people of the organization.

While change is hard, it is not impossible. Kotter et al. (2021) discussed how change and new behaviors can be woven together to create a lasting and meaningful transformation of an organization. Kotter et al. began by recognizing that the typical approach to culture (the leaders defining culture and trying to push that culture from the top down) does not often produce the desired result. Instead, Kotter et al. wrote that new actions and greater collaboration through action can create a successful culture change. This includes seeking input from all staff, including newer staff members, and including stakeholders and customers in the change initiative. These new actions generate results that can spread across the organization. The cycle of new productive behaviors that are in line with the organization's strategy triggers new habits. These habits are perceived by the team members as a sustained, normalized, and collective effort rather than isolated or temporary shifts in

behaviors. Additionally, change initiatives are successful when the following benchmarks are enumerated: connect the culture change to business outcomes; leaders should model desired behavior and inspire members to embrace change rather than forcing change from the top down; and new behaviors and habits must be sustainable (Kotter et al., 2021). Kotter et al. concluded with sage advice that is relevant to HNG. The pandemic proved how volatile the business world can be. Organizations must learn to embrace change if they are expected to successfully navigate a quickly changing, competitive, and global business environment. An organization's basic survival depends on embracing and understanding the science of culture change.

Professional Development to Support Culture Change

The relationship between an organization and its staff is symbiotic. The organization must clearly communicate its values, norms, goals, vision, mission, and beliefs to staff. In turn, staff may need help in building the skills that support those aforementioned facets of organizational culture. Montague et al. (2014) explored how growing leadership capacity among staff members is tied to culture change. Montague et al. studied a multinational corporation, FrieslandCampina, that merged in 2009 to create a 19,000-member dairy farmer network that sold products to 100 countries across the world. The organization understood that the success of the merger depended on building skill capacity in staff and prioritizing a harmonious relationship with the environment and customers around the world (This was dubbed the FrieslandCampina route2020 strategy). The portion of this initiative that is relevant for HNG is the cornerstone of the plan: developing talent in future leaders. Managers participated in a highly experiential and deeply personal series of professional development activities over a 9- to 18-month period; the talent development process specifically included activities such as executive coaching, visiting various partner farms, community service, mentoring, team-building challenges, exploring cultural differences, conflict resolution training, and internal work on personal challenges and barriers to success. This coaching program helped stimulate culture change within the organization, in part, by creating new ways of working together and encouraging and supporting innovation. The talent pipeline in the organization improved as did managers' leadership capacity and capability (Montague et al., 2014). While a talent development program like this might be too complex for a smaller organization like HNG, it certainly provides rich evidence supporting the effectiveness of leadership training and development for all managers and members of the leadership team.

Recruiting Talent

Another aspect of shaping and molding staff in a way that is culturally relevant to the organization is the process of recruiting and retaining staff who are the right fit for the needs, goals, and values of the organization. As HNG looks to its short- and long-term goals, it is undeniable that recruiting and retaining the right talent are critical for success. Langan (2000) equated the search for talent to finding a needle in a haystack. Langan cited low unemployment and changing employee expectations as the challenges that organizations face in recruiting and retaining top talents. Specifically, salaries and benefits can be a driver of employee motivation; these factors could be overshadowed by other workplace expectations. Top-performing employees are looking for a challenging (in a healthy way) work environment with opportunities for growth. They are attracted to reward systems, and they

want autonomy to complete their tasks. Top performers do not want too many rules and regulations, an overemphasis on policy, or long meetings (Langan, 2000).

Top performers by the very nature of who they are and the skill set they possess are those employees who want to be allowed to use their expertise on the job and then be held accountable for their performance. Top performers want work to be fun in the sense that as highly skilled employees working in jobs that appeal to them, they find enjoyment in being able to utilize their skills and expertise. Top performers have very high expectations for themselves and for the people with whom and for whom they work. (Langan, 2000, para. 8)

The insight provided by Langan (2000) is relevant to HNG as they reimagine their talent and recruiting efforts.

Additionally, the next challenge for HNG is how to attract this top talent. Eger et al. (2019) asserted that recruitment begins with consistent employer branding. This is defined as the functional, economic, and psychological benefits an organization can provide employees. The organization must embody characteristics that are appealing to a certain type of employee (ideally one that is attracted to the mission, values, and strategy of that organization). These characteristics must differentiate the organization from other businesses and highlight the perks, culture, and environment that might be appealing to the desired job candidate. This organizational attractiveness helps drive employee loyalty, engagement, and retention. This can also impact how stakeholders and potential employees view the organization (Eger et al., 2019). This relevant research is beneficial to HNG. This organization must be clear about who they are and what experience they will offer an employee. According to Eger et al., this intentional focus on branding and attractiveness can impact the kinds of candidates who apply for jobs and strengthen the loyalty of current employees.

The next pillar of recruiting the right people for a job is how to reach them. Aggerholm and Anderson (2018) discussed the value of social media and the Internet to communicate to and attract top talent. Aggerholm and Anderson echoed the importance of using social media to strengthen the brand of an organization. Studies show that a positive brand image can increase the effectiveness of a recruiting strategy. Social media, as a tool, is powerful in its ability to reach a large audience; the platform can be managed and controlled, and social media is designed to increase engagement with an audience. Aggerholm and Anderson went on to focus on the strategy, rather than the social media platform itself. Social media should have a role in communicating the beliefs, goals, and mission of the organization. These elements coalesce to create an organization's brand that appeals not just to customers but also to potential employees. Aggerholm and Anderson studied a specific recruiting campaign and concluded that a successful campaign focuses on job competencies that bridge the gap between who we are as people and who we are as employees; essentially, the tactic considers who people are outside of their normal work hours and how those passions, interests, and outside social networks impact who they are. Organizations must recognize that potential employees are not just a reservoir of brainpower, they are complex human beings (Aggerholm & Anderson, 2018). While this makes the social media strategy more complex,

it can help organizations hone what they want to communicate and how they want to communicate those values and expectations with the goal of attracting the right talent.

Conclusion

HNG is a strong organization with many positive attributes. According to quantitative data gathered through a staff survey, overall, staff members feel connected to the mission and vision of the organization and connect to leadership. These attributes will, hopefully, make culture change successful. The strategies and research presented address specific opportunities that will help HNG continue to thrive and be prepared for organizational growth goals (short-, mid-, and long-term goals). Most importantly, the leadership has a growth mindset and will be instrumental in encouraging and supporting change throughout the organization.

4.5 Methodology

An important first step in assessing HNG was administering the Denison Organizational Culture Survey. The survey measures employee sentiment in these key areas: empowerment, team orientation, capability development, core values, agreement, coordination and integration, creating change, customer focus, organizational learning, strategic direction and intent, goals/objectives, and vision. The leadership team and employees were given the same questions, just different surveys in order to compare and contrast these two groups. The questions are as follows:

1. Decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available.
2. Information is widely shared so that everyone can get the information he or she needs when it's needed.
3. Everyone believes that he or she can have a positive impact.
4. Business planning is ongoing and involves everyone in the process to some degree.
5. Cooperation across different parts of the organization is actively encouraged.
6. People work like they are part of a team.
7. Teamwork is used to get work done, rather than hierarchy.
8. Work is organized so that each person can see the relationship between his or her job and the goals of the organization.
9. Authority is delegated so that people can act on their own.
10. The "bench strength" (capability of people) is constantly improving.
11. There is continuous investment in the skills of employees.
12. The capabilities of people are viewed as an important source of competitive advantage.
13. The leaders and managers "practice what they preach".
14. There is a clear and consistent set of values that governs the way we do business.
15. When people ignore our core values, they are held accountable.
16. There is an ethical code that guides our behavior and tells us right from wrong.
17. When disagreements occur, we work hard to achieve "win-win" solutions.
18. There is a clearly defined culture.
19. It is easy to reach consensus, even on difficult issues.
20. There is a clear agreement about the right way and the wrong way to do things.
21. Our approach to doing business is very consistent and predictable.

22. People from different parts of the organization share a common perspective.
 23. It is easy to coordinate projects across different parts of the organization.
 24. There is good alignment of goals across levels.
 25. The way things are done is very flexible and easy to change.
 26. We respond well to competitors and other changes in the business environment.
 27. New and improved ways to do work are continually adopted.
 28. Different parts of the organization often cooperate to create change.
 29. Customer comments and recommendations often lead to changes.
 30. Customer input directly influences our decisions.
 31. All members have a deep understanding of customer wants and needs.
 32. We encourage direct contact with customers by our people.
 33. We view failure as an opportunity for learning and improvement.
 34. Innovation and risk-taking are encouraged and rewarded.
 35. Learning is an important objective in our day-to-day work.
 36. We make certain that everyone is informed about what is going on across the organization.
 37. There is a long-term purpose and direction.
 38. Our strategy leads other organizations to change the way they compete in the industry.
 39. There is a clear mission that gives meaning and direction to our work.
 40. There is a clear strategy for the future.
 41. There is widespread agreement about goals.
 42. Leaders set goals that are ambitious, but realistic.
 43. The leadership has clearly stated the objectives we are trying to meet.
 44. We continuously track our progress against our stated goals.
 45. We have a shared vision of what the organization will be like in the future.
 46. Leaders have a long-term viewpoint.
 47. Our vision creates excitement and motivation for our employees.
 48. We are able to meet short-term demands without compromising our long-term vision.
- (DennisonConsulting.com)

There are seven members of the leadership team and five completed the survey. The Denison Survey is on a Likert scale, so I analyzed the frequency of each response option. For the majority of the questions (31), the most frequent response was “agree.” “Disagree” was the most frequent response for 14 of the questions. Three of the questions were a tie between agree and disagree.

31 Questions	Mode= Agree
14 Questions	Mode= Disagree
3 Questions	Mode= Tie between Agree and Disagree

The following questions received “agree” from all five respondents:

- There is a clear mission that gives meaning and direction to the work of the organization. (Mission/Strategic Direction and Intent)

- Individual goals are aligned with the overall goals of the organization. (Involvement/Team Orientation)
- Everyone believes that he or she can have a positive impact. (Involvement/Empowerment)
- Business planning is ongoing and involves everyone in the process to some degree. (Involvement/Empowerment)
- The organization actively encourages participation in the programs of the organization. (Involvement)
- Members work as a team. (Involvement/Team orientation)
- Member's input directly influences decisions. (Involvement)
- The organization encourages direct contact with members and the leaders. (Involvement)
- The organization sees failure as an opportunity for learning and improvement. (Adaptability/Organizational Learning)
- Learning is an important objective in our day-to-day work. (Adaptability/Organizational Learning)
- The organization's leadership ensures that the staff is informed about what is going on across the organization. (Involvement/Empowerment)

The following question received five “disagrees”:

- Information is widely shared so that everyone can get the information he or she needs when it's needed. (Involvement: Empowerment)

It should be noted that “strongly disagree” was only the response four times, and three of those were from the same respondent. “Strongly agree” was the response only seven times, and five of those were from the same respondent. These are outliers but worth noting. This leads to another takeaway from these results – the general lukewarm survey results from the leadership team. The vast majority of results were a simple “agree” or “disagree.”

Staff

The staff results were interesting to analyze. Only 10 of 25 employees responded, so the participation was not as high as I would like. The vast majority of the questions received a mode of Agree (35 questions), Strongly Agree (five questions), or a tie between Agree/Strongly Agree (two questions). Five questions had a high frequency of Disagree, and then one question was an even split between Agree and Disagree.

5 Questions	Mode=Strongly Agree
35 Questions	Mode= Agree
2 Questions	Mode= Tie between Strongly Agree/Agree
5 Questions	Mode=Disagree
1 Questions	Mode=Tie between Agree/Disagree

For the purposes of this analysis, let's look at the 19 questions that received unanimous or nearly unanimous positive feedback and the five questions that the majority rated as disagree.

Disagree:

- Our approach to doing business is very consistent and predictable. (Consistency/ Coordination and Integration)
- It is easy to coordinate projects across different parts of the organization. (Consistency/ Coordination and Integration)
- Authority is delegated so that members can act on their own. (Involvement/ Capability Development)
- All leaders have a deep understanding of the wants and needs of the staff. (Involvement)
- The organization's leadership ensures that the staff is informed about what is going on across the organization. (Consistency)

Agree/Strongly Agree:

- There is a long-term purpose and direction for the organization. (Mission/Strategic Direction and Intent)
- There is a clear mission that gives meaning and direction to the work of the organization. (Mission/Strategic Direction and Intent)
- The organization has a clear strategic direction/plan. (Mission/Strategic Direction and Intent)
- Leaders set goals that are ambitious, but realistic. (Mission/Goals and Objectives)
- The organization's leadership has clearly stated the goals/mission of the organization. (Mission)
- The leaders and members have a shared vision of what the organization would like to do in the future. (Mission)
- Our leaders have a long-term vision. (Mission)
- Our vision creates excitement and motivation for the members. (Mission)
- The leaders "practice what they preach. (Consistency/Core Values)
- There is a clear and consistent set of values that governs the way the organization does business. (Consistency/Core Values)
- There is an ethical code that guides our behavior and tells us right from wrong. (Consistency Core Values)
- There is a clearly defined culture (values, beliefs, and principles). (Consistency/ Agreement)
- Individual goals are aligned with the overall goals of the organization. (Consistency/ Coordination and Integration)
- Everyone believes that he or she can have a positive impact. (Involvement/ Empowerment)
- Business planning is ongoing and involves everyone in the process to some degree. (Involvement/Empowerment)
- Members work as a team. (Involvement)
- The ability of the members to do their work is constantly improving. (Involvement)
- Member's input directly influences decisions. (Involvement)
- The organization sees failure as an opportunity for learning and improvement. (Adaptability/Organizational Learning)

Analysis of Findings and Recommendations

I view the Denison survey as a granular roadmap of what a successful organization looks like. It addresses some very specific subcategories of the big picture traits used to evaluate an organization (Adaptability, Consistency, Mission, Involvement). To see overall results, especially from the staff, that are so positive and enthusiastic is helpful. It is an interesting comparison to the leadership team results, which were very lukewarm. This could be a function of being overwhelmed with responsibilities or their place in the organizational chart.

Strengths

Overall, the survey results show some agreement on the existing strengths within HNG. The mission/vision of the organization is clear to employees. The staff feels heard, seen, empowered, and involved in the organization. There is a sense of team. They feel the organization is consistent in its values and operations. The employees feel the organization is adaptable and can learn and grow from mistakes. I have requested further documentation explaining how goals are set and measured for employees. I have also requested a copy of the employee handbook. I need to better understand how these survey results seem to be coalescing in a positive way around these notions of involvement, empowerment, mission, vision, and adaptability. Due to the personality and style of the owners of the company, is this a natural element of the culture? What training is happening to garner these results?

Opportunities for Growth

While generally, the strengths of this organization exist among the concepts of involvement, mission, consistency, and adaptability, there are some subcategories that need to be addressed. These are the questions that earned “disagree” with the highest frequency.

- Our approach to doing business is very consistent and predictable. (Consistency/Coordination and Integration)
- It is easy to coordinate projects across different parts of the organization. (Consistency/Coordination and Integration)
- Authority is delegated so that members can act on their own. (Involvement/Capability Development)
- All leaders have a deep understanding of the wants and needs of the staff. (Involvement)
- The organization's leadership ensures that the staff is informed about what is going on across the organization. (Consistency)
- Information is widely shared so that everyone can get the information he or she needs when it's needed. (Involvement: Empowerment)

These questions, in particular, garnered consistent and almost unanimous answers of “disagree” from staff. What is striking about these results is they seem to mirror what the COO said from the very beginning of this process: HNG does not have a consistent company culture and every different office and location feels like its own disparate organization. As such, employees feel this lack of coordination and consistency. It also seems like there are some barriers to communication. General organizational information does not seem to be flowing effectively down through the organizational chart. It may not be flowing well horizontally among the leadership team. Conversely, the leadership team may not be taking enough time to listen deeply to their staff members and really hear their feedback, needs, or wants.

5. Continuous Improvement Systems

5.1 Continuous Improvement Planning

Based upon my qualitative and quantitative analysis and research on the topic of organizational change, strategies, recommendations, and training information will be provided to the partnering organization. I will recommend that the implementation of strategies is followed up with frequent surveys and other methods to seek feedback from staff. Implementation will not be a part of this project.

5.2 Continuous Improvement Actions

Partnering organization will implement strategies independently.

5.3 Continuous Improvement Feedback

I recommend that all employees take the Denison Organizational Culture Survey annually in order to monitor sentiment and adjust strategies.

I recommend that HNG create a password-protected staff intranet where all communications, training, news, and important HR information live. Part of this intranet will include an anonymous reporting form where staff can report concerns or provide suggestions.

5.4 Continuous Improvement Implementation

Qualitative survey data are important to track, measure, and analyze. The Dennison survey yielded both positive feedback and important insight into where improvements can be made. The survey should be consistently administered and the results analyzed once a year.

6. Deliverables

6.1 To Partnering Organization From Candidate

- The improvement strategies were turned in as part of the literature review.
- I will preview strategies with partnering organization during the summer of 2022.
- I will deliver research results and strategies after the defense date. This will include recommendations and resources for leadership and equity/inclusion training.
- The strategies and training address the core challenges to the organization:
 - Inconsistent culture across the organization;
 - Increase leadership capacity to prepare for organizational growth;
 - Formalize training and onboarding and update training to address any operational changes to challenges due to the pandemic;
 - Improve employee recruitment strategies. This includes improving internal communications and working with the marketing team on employee recognition campaigns.

6.2 Deferred Deliverables

N/A

7. Communications Plan

7.1 Communications Plan Development

- I will provide the CEO of the partnering organization with copies of all assignments related to this project.
- I will provide a brief summary of recommendations and supporting research.
- I will provide coaching recommendations for diversity/equity training and leadership training.
- I will provide recommendations for implementation.
- I will also provide a list of recommended readings on leadership.
- All recommendations will be provided via email and verbally to provide the partnering organization an opportunity to ask questions.
- I will present findings to the leadership team at the CEO's discretion.

7.2 Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Primary stakeholders for the purposes of this consultancy are the HNG staff and leadership team. These groups were engaged through surveys, observations, and interviews.

8. Risks

8.1 Mitigation and Contingency

Risk Description	Mitigation Plan (what to do to avoid the risk occurring)	Contingency Plan (what to do if the risk occurs)	Impact (what the impact will be to the project if the risk occurs)	Likelihood of occurrence (e.g., %, or high/medium/low)
Further Pandemic Disruptions	n/a	Based on past experience, pivot business to respond to the threat	Significant	Low
Staff Perception and buy-in	Strong communication from partnering organization to staff	Continue to have conversations with staff to communicate the importance of recommendations.	Significant	Low
Employee workload/finding time to	Leadership team will need to discuss	Organization will need to prioritize tasks and training.	Significant	Medium

accommodate training	how to incorporate recommendations.			
Intrinsic Difficulty of Culture Change	CEO must provide consistent and clear reasoning to all staff when discussing recommendations.	I can recommend a DEOL student to manage implementation as part of their consultancy.	Significant	Medium

8.2 Constraints

Major constraints were disruptions caused by the pandemic. HNG had to completely reimagine its business model after the consultancy had begun. The pandemic also limited my access to staff.

9. Budget

There is no firm budget for the implementation of strategies. The only recommendations that would cost money are consultants for diversity and inclusion goals and leadership training. The organization would contract with these third-party vendors at their discretion.

10. Analysis and Recommendations

My qualitative and quantitative analysis and literature review provided valuable data in order to determine the key areas where HNG should focus its efforts. The following strategies are also informed by the short- and long-term goals of the organization. They have aggressive goals for expansion. The strategies can help ensure that as more people are hired and more locations are established, there is a sense of consistency and connection to the mission, vision, values, and beliefs of the organization. Each new location should feel like it belongs to the whole.

Culture Survey – Implementing Recommendations Based on Data

The Denison Survey revealed some strengths and opportunities for growth in the organization. Overall, the staff is connected to the mission and vision of the organization. HNG earned high marks in the categories of involvement, empowerment, and team. This was a nearly universal sentiment among respondents. This sentiment will be very helpful during the implementation of strategies. There were almost unanimous low marks in the categories of consistency, coordination and integration, and capability development. Questions about communication within the organization also earned low marks. This leads to the first recommendation. HNG should work with their web developer and create an employee intranet. This would be a password-protected section of the website. Here, employees could access various HR-related items such as the employee manual, their timesheets, and paycheck information. This is where all CEO communications should be posted. These communications are currently emailed to staff. This practice should continue, but the information should also be posted for employees to easily access and revisit. Communications should be short and frequent. HNG should also post a form to allow staff to anonymously report any concerns or provide feedback. HNG consists of several locations. The leadership team, including the owner, cannot be in all these places at the

same time. While site visits and friendly check-ins can build morale and help create a consistent connection, there is important information to which staff need easy access. Also, on this intranet site, all training and onboarding documents should be posted. These documents must be evaluated at least twice a year to ensure effectiveness. Since the pandemic disruptions, I recommend these documents are all evaluated and updated for accuracy. Leadership can work with key staff members for feedback and relevant updates to processes or procedures that have been discovered since the business began opening up after the pandemic shutdowns and returning to a new normal. As staff innovates more efficient ways to complete tasks or experience positive breakthroughs when dealing with challenging situations, the training manuals should be updated and not rely on word-of-mouth knowledge sharing.

The design of the employee site is also crucial. It can be used to reinforce and introduce key language and concepts that represent the mission, vision, and values of the organization. In the summer of 2021, HNG reimagined and updated its core values to be passionate, relationships matter, reliable, and resilience. The leadership team wanted more authentic values that did not seem too corporate. These values are relevant and honest and speak to the beliefs and goals of HNG. These values should be built into the design of the employee site so staff get in the habit of seeing them every time they log on. Ensuring staff are being exposed to and using the same language within the organization can help create that consistent culture.

Staff Recruitment and Retention

Like many businesses post-pandemic, HNG reports challenges in finding qualified and diverse job candidates. Per Eger et al. (2019), staff recruitment begins with consistent marketing, branding, and communication of company values; this boosts organizational attractiveness to job candidates. I recommend the marketing department design a campaign specifically around highlighting staff members: their roles in the organization and how their personal values align with what they do. The content should be on social media as well as the website. Aggerholm and Anderson (2018) discussed how important social media is to staff recruitment. Used in conjunction with a data-driven strategy, it is a tool that can help appeal to job candidates as people. Candidates are more than just what tasks they accomplish at work; they are complex human beings. HNG has a unique and solidified mission that already appeals to current staff. This should be communicated in order to appeal to the heart, not just the minds of job candidates.

Furthermore, there is already a page on the website with staff bios and professional photos; I would like these campaign photos to remain on brand but show staff members in their element highlighting the unique aspects of their work life. Photos and articles about staff members will help put a human face on the organization and allow staff to communicate what they love about their job in their own words. This staff highlight/meet the team strategy would provide consistent and inspirational content that will generate interest in the business before a staff position needs to be filled. Staff recruiting must be ongoing and proactive. Also, staff members would be asked to have friends and family share the post. HNG's Facebook page has nearly 15,000 followers, so it already has a significant reach. Highlighting diversity among staff could attract the attention of potential job candidates.

The marketing team is already using strong and positive photography to advertise for jobs and connect with business partners. This strategy will feel familiar to those who follow the HNG pages.

Professional Development/Personal Growth Strategies/Leadership Training

HNG utilizes a powerful managerial software system called Entrepreneurial Operating System. This software helps staff set priorities based on current goals. It encourages staff to focus on success and resilience. This tool is an amazing first step in helping staff grow in their leadership and confidence. Entrepreneurial Operating System is augmented by a series of books from the creator, Gino Wickman. According to the company website, different books are recommended for different members of the organization. I recommend that all staff read the entire library. Implementation of these personal growth strategies is not within the scope of this project. The concepts should be personalized for HNG and their unique goals, beliefs, and values (<https://powertraction.com/eos-books/>).

Additionally, I will provide leadership book recommendations to the CEO to consider for staff. I will also recommend consultants who can help the leadership team build capacity and be prepared for future growth or future challenges, such as pandemic shutdowns.

Per Lewin's Three Step Change Model, the implementation should include identifying undesired behaviors or habits of staff members, implementing new desired behaviors, and frequent check-ins to ensure the new behaviors become new habits. I recommend that any leadership training includes training and information about organizational change.

Montague et al. (2014) provided compelling evidence that building leadership capacity among all staff members can help support a culture change initiative. This type of coaching can help improve and solidify the new behaviors that will help HNG have a more consistent culture and maintain that culture through future growth.

Diversity and Inclusion Training

Increasing diversity and becoming inclusive is a message heard during an HNG staff meeting. Staff members were aware that the organization as a whole, as well as partner farmers, were overwhelmingly racially homogenous. Per Jiony et al. (2015), employee involvement is improved with organizational communication and a clear understanding of organizational culture. This type of training would satisfy the staff's desire to prioritize inclusion practices and help the organization adopt a shared language and vision for what inclusion and equity mean for itself and its stakeholders. Creating a shared experience of inclusion training could solidify employee commitment to the organization, increase involvement, and encourage staff to become more aligned with organizational goals (Jiony et al., 2015). Additionally, this training would create an environment that could attract job candidates from more diverse backgrounds.

11. Reflection

11.1 Professional Learning

This experience was valuable; it allowed me to improve skills that I do not typically use each day during my job. I enjoyed learning and practicing both the qualitative and quantitative research methods. Acquiring tools and methods to gather data that are unique to an organization is the foundation of good consultancy. I learned how to identify specific challenges and strengths in order to provide customized solutions. This process was an important exercise that can be duplicated with other organizations, should other consultancy opportunities arise. Additionally, I learned to be flexible and resilient as the pandemic created many obstacles to the consultancy.

11.2 Personal Development

The personal growth I have experienced during this program is amazing. I feel so much more confident in my leadership ability. So many of the readings, assignments, and class discussions have taught me valuable lessons about who I am as a leader and areas where I need to improve. I have learned the importance of practicing leadership, especially in difficult situations. The pandemic has created plenty of opportunities and difficult situations to navigate. I am more sensitive to the goals and professional needs of my team. I have learned to actively work to create opportunities for them to learn and grow in their professional development. As we learned early in this process, leadership is a set of skills, not a static trait. The challenge to myself is to keep reading, keep learning, and keep growing in my skills even when this program is complete.

Appendix

CONSULTANCY PROJECT CHARTER

1. General Project Information				
Project Title:	Creating a Consistent Culture for Hickory Nut Gap (HNG)			
Project Host(s):	Jamie Ager			
Project Sponsor (GWU):	Dr. Dale Lamb			
Project Manager:	Stacia Harris	Date:	2/27/22	
Project Description	Student will conduct research and provide strategies to partner organization to create a consistent organizational culture; should include diversity, equity, and leadership training for all staff.			
2. Project Participants and Roles (add or delete lines as needed)				
	Name	Role	Telephone	E-mail
Project Manager:	Stacia Harris	consultant		
Team Members:	Jamie Ager	Owner, Hickory Nut Gap		
	Amy Ager	Owner, Hickory Nut Gap		
3. Stakeholders (e.g., those with a significant interest in or who will be significantly affected by this project)				
HNG staff, customers, and Vendors				

4. Project Purpose Statement
Project Purpose <i>Describe the need this project addresses</i>
<p>HNG's Leadership Team is in the process of revising the organization's core values. The goal is a more modern and relevant reflection of who the organization is now. Additionally, HNG is focused on growing the organization.</p> <p>Specifically, there is interest in addressing issues surrounding racial equity and bias in the values and training. Employees are feeling motivated and empowered to be a part of a solution and seeking training to address the aforementioned issues. The project manager will research HNG's current culture, conduct a relevant literature review, and provide strategies to create a consistent and modern organizational culture that reflects these central beliefs and motivations and prepares staff for organizational growth.</p>
Resources <i>Describe the resources made available by the project host for this project</i>
<p>Host will provide time to interview and/or survey all current employees, especially the leadership team.</p> <p>Host will provide time for outside experts to present to the staff</p>
Project Deliverables <i>List the high-level "products" to be created (e.g., improved xxxx process, employee manual on yyyy)</i>
<p>Analysis of current organizational culture, strategies in order to encourage a consistent culture across several HNG locations, method to measure effectiveness.</p>

Project Milestones <i>Project significant accomplishments anticipated over the life of the project with estimated timeline</i>	
<p>Project Manager must complete CITI IRB Certification Process by July 31.</p> <p>One-on-one interviews with Leadership Team, survey of remaining HNG employees (Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection) Target Completion: September 30, 2020</p> <p>Final strategies designed Target Completion: November 30, 2020.</p> <p><i>Dec-January- Project Manager Completes Literature review</i></p> <p>Tool (survey) to measure effectiveness Target Completion: March 31, 2021</p> <p><u>Host may implement strategies independently or partner with another GWU DEOL student for full implementation/ evaluation.</u></p> <p><i>Project manager will assemble capstone project for presentation during Summer of 2022. Project Host is invited to this presentation: Date/Location: TBD.</i></p>	
Project SMART Objectives <i>Include 3 to 5</i>	
<p>Design a strategy to encourage a consistent culture in the organization</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Incorporate elements of racial equity and diversity awareness into this protocol</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Design a tool to measure effectiveness of training</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Conduct frequent surveys and interviews to maintain relationships with key staff members</p> <p>1.</p>	
Major Known Risks (including significant Assumptions) <i>Identify obstacles that may cause the project to fail.</i>	
Risk	Risk Rating (Hi, Med, Lo)
Staff perception and buy-in; Intrinsic difficulty in changing organizational culture	Medium
Employee workload (time to assist with gathering data)	Low
External threats such as coronavirus pandemic creating uncertainty and constant change; health issues affecting employee morale and engagement	High

Constraints List any conditions that may limit the project team's options with respect to resources, personnel, or schedule (e.g., predetermined budget or project end date, limit on number of staff that may be assigned to the project).

Possible financial limitations if paid experts are required as part of strategy implementation
 Staff turnover could create disruptions

External Dependencies Will project success depend on coordination of efforts between the project team and one or more other individuals or groups? Has everyone involved agreed to this interaction?

Cooperation of Leadership team and staff members is critical to success

5. Communication Strategy (specify how the project manager will communicate to the Host, Sponsor, Project Team members and Stakeholders, e.g., frequency of status reports, frequency of Project Team meetings, etc.)

Communication will be primarily via email, supplemented with virtual face to face meetings or presentations as needed. Due to health concerns, communication will be electronic or virtual for most or all of the project.

6. Sign-off

	Name	Signature	Date (MM/DD/YYYY)
Project Host	Jamie Ager		
Project Sponsor	Dr. Dale Lamb		
Project Manager	Stacia Harris		2/27/22

7. Notes



Completion Date 02-Aug-2020
Expiration Date 02-Aug-2023
Record ID 37341724

This is to certify that:

Stacia Harris

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification
through CME.

Graduate School of Education Research Investigators

(Curriculum Group)

Graduate School of Education Research Investigators

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Gardner-Webb University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?we7adad32-b00e-47d7-9432-538bdc334a8d-37341724

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