HFS Pitch

Don't unwrap your presents yet.

I want to thank everyone for coming along today, and being willing to listen to a story told in earnest yet terrible metaphor. The story I'm going to tell is about a new project of mine, and I am very invested in getting you to believe in it.

To begin, I'd like you to bring your wrapped presents to the centre table and see if you can build something out of them.

It's a bit tenuous, isn't it? Nothing sticks together, it mostly relies on gravity, and when something introduces change, all it does is fall down a bit and rearrange itself.

This is what UNE culture is like at the moment. Nobody has given much thought to looking after it so we are all individually wrapped boxes, creating decorative wrappings for ourselves, sitting in a pile vaguely near each other. In other words - culture by default. Nothing is easily built, and all we can do is guess what's inside the wrapping. And significantly, the only thing you can really do is keep rearranging the pile of boxes, there's no ability to transform beyond that.

You can go back to your seats now; take your present with you.

How did that feel, as a human? Hovering around the table, not sure where to put your box, not sure if your box would fall over, not knowing what's inside, wondering if your wrapping was pretty enough - how did you experience that? Those feelings, whatever they were, are what results when you have a culture of default. Uncertainty, anxiety, awkwardness. If we let you carry on long enough that way then those feelings might amplify and manifest in negative or even toxic behaviours.

So via terrible metaphor, we have learned that default culture - the culture we have at UNE - impedes change and results in a suboptimal human experience.

And this is the wicked problem that I am going to try to solve, using the PhD Innovation (PhDI) as my medium.

The literature tells us a few things about organisational culture:

- Strategic vision is not enough to produce change - culture will make or break strategy (or eat it for breakfast, if you prefer) and if you are not actively taking care of culture you are doomed to fail.
- Taking care of culture can look like *intentionality* - the deliberate crafting and nurturing of culture
- This crafting of culture can happen using a design thinking process
- Rituals, languages and artefacts are components of culture, and are good places to focus design efforts

So what we are going to do - not me, *we*; I am doing *with*, not *to* - is co-create a *Cultural Design Framework*, that makes a space for us to do this intentional crafting, to create an intentional culture - a human culture - from scratch. And maybe, just maybe, this will increase our change capability and resilience so that we aren't just a pile of boxes vaguely rearranging themselves over and over. This framework might also be an answer to 'but where are the staff in this 2025 vision?' - the space that sits alongside that vision and allows us to make it happen.

The wrapping for this is a modified participatory action research framework, which starts with a reconnaissance phase of data collection, then follows an iterative spiral of design, implementation, evaluation and redesign. This spiral will continue until we get it right, or until my candidature runs out, whichever happens first.

This reconnaissance phase I mentioned is a diversion from the standard action research methodology, and has three key components that run simultaneously. First is a deep dive into the literature. Second is an assessment of researcher and participant competency - how well are we all equipped to actually *do* this thing? And the third component, arguably the most important, is a learning of the landscape through inquiry.

You can open your presents now.

Before we can design anything, we need to really understand what our human experience of being at UNE is - to diagnose our culture. We have to unwrap our boxes and start exploring what's inside. Participatory narrative inquiry - a methodology for asking questions, exploring experiences, telling stories and working with stories - is how we can do this.

What is inside? On one hand, we have the three aspects of culture I mentioned earlier - we

have an artefact, we have a ritual (writing), and once we start writing we will have languages. But on the other, more significant, hand, we have our stories and experiences (pencil and paper), and we have our agency (lego). We are all culture-carriers, who all hold a piece of the puzzle, we all have a part to play. And when we bring these together, which you can feel free to do now, now we can build something intentional, something that sticks, something that doesn't fall down when the environment changes. We understand the shape, so we can see a path forwards.

You can go back to your seats again now.

You might ask why a learning designer would focus on organisational culture? You might say it's not your role, it's not your discipline. I am going to argue that this is entirely not the case. Firstly, I have just made the point that change and culture is everyone's domain, and the literature suggests that third space roles have more agency than most in shaping the university in this way. I also don't think we can afford to continue accepting that culture is carried only in the hands of leadership that comes and goes. It's time to ask, if not us, then who? Secondly, creating and facilitating conceptual experiences using a design process is the bread and butter of learning design, it's only a small shift from pedagogical experiences to cultural experiences. Thirdly, change involves learning, both individual and organisational. Learning is grounded in pedagogy and pedagogy is my gig. And finally, my professional identity has been fundamentally built on a desire to question, to effect change, to help people think differently, to make things better, and if being a pedagogical innovator isn't the way through then I'm going to find a way that is. It's time to unwrap my own identity and expertise and do more than just vaguely rearrange myself.

You might ask - why now? We could find answers to that in various places. It's in the ever-pressing narratives of 'if we don't change, we will be eaten by Deakin, or Swinburne, or...'. It's in the future of work narrative - if we don't start focusing on our human skills and that which makes us human, the robots will come take our jobs. And, perhaps closest to my heart, it's in the work I have done over and over again that did little more than fade into institutional history. Project after project of limited or no impact. And I'm tired. I can't do that for another 10 years. But even more than that, my story here is much much longer than 10 years - I grew up embedded in the landscape of this place, it's part of me and I'm part of it, and I really really don't want to see it die simply because nobody looked after it. Because we all shrugged our shoulders and said that's how things are, what can we do. So the question is really - if *not* now, then when? When is the time to step up?

To conclude, I want to invite you all to share in this process with me. Tell stories. Listen to stories. Work with stories. And then join me in co-creating a better, more *intentional*, way

to do and be UNE. Even if we fail, even if the mountain turns out to be insurmountable, at least we didn't stand at the bottom saying 'we've tried nothing, and we're all out of ideas'.

You'll see on the screen the website I have created as the curation point for this project - please visit it from time to time as it evolves. For now you can read more about my methodology and research framework there, as well as some key quotes from the literature that have shaped by thinking thus far, and if you have a story that needs to seek me instead of the other way around, you can use the website to either contact me or submit a written narrative.

Thank you all once again for coming along to listen - storytelling is a new skill for me too, and I hope I have done it justice.