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# CCO Guide to Culture Change & Management

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September 2023

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Every organization has its own living, breathing culture. Like any living thing, culture needs constant care and nurturing. Like all organisms, organizations need to adapt to environmental changes to thrive. Culture is no different.

Managing organizational culture requires a comprehensive view of how people, processes and systems contribute to achieving objectives. The chief communication officer (CCO) has a unique vantage point across multiple stakeholders to bring unique value to the enterprise and must be a key partner with other senior leaders in leading organizational culture.

Page's **Building Belief: A New Model for Activating Corporate Character & Authentic Advocacy** urged CCOs to instill a new kind of corporate culture – one that is simultaneously

an expression of corporate character, which is to say the unique and differentiated identity of the enterprise, and designed to enable the enterprise to execute its operating plan and achieve its strategic objectives.

The C-Suite needs a deep understanding of the strategic value of culture and the personal and financial investment required to foster the right culture for the organization. Bad cultures cost money and create lost opportunity. Good cultures become competitive differentiators.

As with each Page guidebook, this is meant to be a practical guide, not a white paper. It offers a blueprint for CCOs and their teams to enable strong enterprise cultures and establish a culture management system.

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# Introduction to Culture

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## What is Culture

Is your organization's identity rooted in pioneering innovation? In inclusive, collaborative approaches? In customer centricity? Do your brand attributes match the workplace culture? Any of these answers dictate a series of choices about how employees perform, collaborate, solve problems and deliver on your organization's value promise. This, in essence, is culture.

As Vasundhara Sawhney wrote in [Harvard Business Review](#) (HBR), "...culture is an organization's DNA. It's the shared values, goals, attitudes and practices that characterize a workplace. It is reflected in how people behave, interact with each other, make decisions and do their work. It impacts everything – including an employee's happiness and career."

It is often called "the way we do things around here," a quote attributed to Marvin Brower of McKinsey by Terry Deal and Allan Kennedy in their 1982 book [Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life](#). In [The CCO as Pacesetter](#), Page picked up on that language in its own definition:

*"A company's culture is the collective behavior of its people – the explicit and implicit 'way we do things here.' Weak cultures result from ambiguity, inconsistency and a chasm between what the company says and how it behaves. Strong cultures are rooted in shared beliefs and values; learned through stories, object lessons and role models; reinforced by rituals, symbols, rewards and recognition; and supported by the company's leaders, processes, systems and the workforce itself."*

Culture is influenced by and reflected in several aspects of an organization: its purpose, beliefs, values, mindset, policies, processes and procedures, systems, work environments, reporting structure, ethics and goals. Every organization has its own culture, intentionally or not, and those cultures change over time, intentionally or not.


A healthy organizational culture creates an environment in which employees can flourish, learn and, most critically, grow in support of achieving strategic outcomes. Any organization in the 21st century would find it hard to argue that a multistakeholder approach, agility and data-driven shouldn't be cultural hallmarks. Culture becomes a competitive asset and strategic differentiator, an engine for inclusive problem-solving, accountability, attracting and retaining top talent, quicker cycles of innovation and speed to market, etc.

Importantly, culture is not a detailed instruction manual for employees. It is fundamentally the result of their collective choices and actions, and these are guided, more than anything, by personal beliefs and shared values. While behavior is the result we see when attempting to define and monitor culture, we recognize that belief underlies behavior; behavior is the result of beliefs, even if these beliefs have been formed from watching others' behaviors. (We might also call these beliefs "values" if they are held collectively.) [Research](#) by the employee experience firm Integral shows that employee perceptions about the alignment of their personal values and beliefs to organizational values significantly changes their likelihood to do prosocial things (go the extra mile, engage in volunteerism, recommend the company, etc.) or negative things (sabotage the company, ignore security protocols, quit, warn candidates away, etc.).



A collective set of values creates a template for enterprise and individual behaviors that make up a culture. It's important, therefore, to be specific about the desired behaviors that derive from values and how these contribute to the organization's ability to deliver on its purpose, mission, strategy and operating plans.

While we can change behaviors in these categories by edict, we cannot change them long-term without changing individual beliefs and shared values about these categories. We'll talk more about how we might do this later in this guide.



“A healthy organizational culture creates an environment in which employees can flourish, learn and, most critically, grow in support of achieving strategic outcomes.”

## The Essential Behaviors Resulting from Beliefs

In 2018, Larry Senn, founder of Senn Delaney Culture Shaping, Heidrick Consulting, [blogged about the essential behaviors in healthy, successful people and organizations](#). Based on research validating these concepts globally across decades, he identified behaviors that drive healthy, high-performance organizations.

**Positive Spirit/Vitality.** Creating an environment where there is teamwork, mutual support and cooperation between and among people. For example, one where people are fun to be around, proud of what they do and willing to put in the effort that is beyond normal expectations.

**Agility/Innovation/Growth.** Encouraging people to innovate, create and be open to change. Empowering people and having a bias for action and an urgency to move forward.

**Direction/Purpose.** Providing a sense of direction and purpose. Having clear alignment connection to achieving the organization's strategic goals.

**Customer and Quality Focus.** Having a high focus on and awareness of quality and customer service.

**Ethics & Integrity.** Acting with honesty and integrity. Core values and ethics are very important and drive decisions made for the organization's greater good. Seeing healthy differences and diversity as strengths.

**Collaboration and Trust.** Creating frequent and open two-way communication with people, openness and trust among people with high levels of feedback and coaching.

**Performance Orientation.** Having high expectations for performance and accountability for actions and results. Being a self-starter.

**Appreciation/Recognition.** Appreciating and valuing people and recognizing and rewarding performance.

# Page Thinking on Culture

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Corporate culture is perhaps the purest expression of the enterprise's corporate character, as defined in the Page Model, explained below. It may aspire to be innovative, socially conscious, inclusive or any other positive attribute. But its design and implementation are where those aspirations become a reality (or don't).

A 2019 **blog** by Maril MacDonald on the leadership role of the CCO in shaping culture, highlighting the role's unique skills to assemble coalitions and bring emotional intelligence, intuition and investigatory skills to cross-functional partnerships.

To be genuinely what the enterprise claims and aspires to be requires authenticity – meaning that it is, in actuality, those things. In 2007, Page published [The Authentic Enterprise](#) in the face of a wave of business disruption – the emergence of what we then called “the digital networking revolution” but now regard as social media, the consequent empowerment of stakeholders and the rise of a globalized economy. Even then, we understood the stakes:

*“The people a business needs to attract today – its employees, clients and partners – will not accept old-fashioned, hierarchical cultures and management approaches. In place of ‘the voice of authority,’ they demand proof of authenticity. As a strictly operational matter, it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve the speed and flexibility to run a successful business by sticking with traditional command-and-control systems.”*

That might as well have been written yesterday.

Five years later, in [Building Belief](#), Page put forth a model for what that management looks like. The Page Model placed at its core the concept of corporate character, the unique and differentiated identity of the enterprise. For that character to be authentic, it must permeate everything that the enterprise says and does. It must be present in its mission, purpose, values, culture, brand, strategy, business model, policies and positions, as well as its communications. Though we acknowledged that CCOs are unlikely to



have responsibility for all of these, they should function as a unifying force, working across the C-Suite and the enterprise to ensure that coherence. In [The New CCO](#), published in 2016, we labeled that role “the CCO as integrator.”

The rampant disruption that characterized the 2000s and 2010s led us to look at the CCO's unique role in enabling enterprise transformation. In [The CCO as Pacesetter](#), we identified four crucial dimensions of transformational CCO leadership. One was CommTech, the emerging discipline of using new tools and techniques to understand stakeholders through data, engage them as individuals and move them to action at speed and scale. The other three are expressions of corporate character: brand stewardship, which is about delivering on-brand experiences for all stakeholders, including employees; societal value (now most commonly referred to as stakeholder capitalism), which requires a systematized commitment to maximizing value for all stakeholders and for society at large; and corporate culture, without which none of the other three would be possible because it enables their achievement.

The CCO as Pacesetter observed that "In virtually every industry and region, CEOs are driving significant, often radical, transformation agendas ... driven by technology or changing consumer or socio-economic demands. Many describe this as an 'existential moment' for their companies."

It was clear to us then, and is even clearer today, that to enable the achievement of a new strategy and business model, corporate cultures must also change to meet an emerging set of demands. The Pacesetter research shows a strong culture requires becoming more agile, dynamic, stakeholder-centric and data-driven. The Pacesetter report explained:

*"A new business design requires the workforce to possess new skills, exhibit different behaviors and mindsets and work in different ways. Digital businesses move at the speed of innovation and insight, continually learn, make decisions based on data and are truly customer-centric and agile. Modern businesses eschew hierarchy, thrive on diversity in every dimension and authentically contribute to society. CCOs are working to establish or scale such cultures."*

The COVID-19 pandemic became the ultimate test of the resiliency of culture. Knowledge workers abruptly shifted to working remotely while frontline workers either stayed home, couldn't work or persevered through the risks and safety precautions. Scores of employees changed jobs, seeking employers with cultures that better matched their needs and values, while others left the workforce entirely. Senior leaders who focused on empathy, flexibility and grace earned positive employee reactions.



**"The people a business needs to attract today – its employees, clients and partners – will not accept old-fashioned, hierarchical cultures and management approaches."**

# Factors and Models Influencing Culture

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CCOs need to be aware of factors influencing individual beliefs and organizational values and to find ways to address them or take full advantage of them to drive culture change. Here are some important inputs to a culture management effort:



## **Multilayered, Complex Employee Expectations.**

Today's employees are seeing unprecedented change in the workplace – more autonomy, flexibility and agency in their jobs. They're demanding more attention to mental health, diversity and inclusion, collaboration, upskilling and more. Amid a decline in participation in social clubs, civic groups and membership organizations, the modern workforce expects to engage with one another and with the enterprise in new ways. The lines between consumer experience of technology and work-related technology are blurring, with employees now expecting the same robust experience across both. Moreover, they expect the enterprise to advocate for certain societal issues and operate with a broader civic mindset.



**Remote and Hybrid Work.** The abrupt shift to remote work challenged long-held notions that work is a place and that knowledge workers are most productive sitting within a corporate facility. The “work from anywhere” model has presented new challenges to maintaining company culture while “return to office” efforts run against employees’ expectations for the freedom of remote work. Today, many companies are holding a firmer line on expecting employees to work from the office – at least part-time.



**Decentralized and Globalized Teams.** With more companies introducing Agile operating models to drive customer centricity and develop and maintain global products, teams must interact and share knowledge seamlessly across geographies and with adjacent functions. This requires employees and leaders to change their ways of working.



**Gig Work.** “Digital platform earners” perform nontraditional, short-term and contract work for a specific purpose for a defined period, like driving for a ride-hailing app, shopping for or delivering groceries or writing a piece of collateral. They are part of a new debate, impacting reputation and culture, that has played out with advocates, lawmakers and gig companies debating their legal status.



**Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.** These technologies have become increasingly present in the tools and systems of our work, allowing for far greater speed, scale and efficiency. The introduction of generative AI tools is being heralded as the arrival of a new era, totally transforming how we interact with systems, obtain information and generate all sorts of content. Alignment between an enterprise's culture and values and its use of technology is critical to developing and maintaining trust.





**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.** Strong cultures embrace diversity and foster an environment where everyone feels welcomed, valued and included. As Julia Taylor Kennedy and Pooja Jain-Link noted in an [HBR](#) article, a crucial way to galvanize support and manage complex change is to create a culture where all employees, regardless of their background, feel that they belong.



**Mental Health and Wellbeing.** In the 24/7 world of work where everything is online, family and work lives are blurring. Many companies are expanding their definition of health and wellness and there's a growing shift from work/life balance to multiple forms of well-being: physical, mental, financial, career, spiritual, social, community, etc. – and a new focus on self-care. Giving employees opportunities to practice personalized and meaningful self-care at work will create new demands on leaders and culture.



**Organizational Resilience.** [Organizational resilience is](#) “the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper.” When employees and the culture in an organization are resilient, stress levels decrease, performance heightens and conflict is resolved more easily, as [Cheryl Keates wrote in Forbes](#).

Resilience allows people to get out of fight-or-flight mode quickly and, therefore, think and act more objectively. Resilient teams thrive even during difficult times. Developing a growth mindset, increasing emotional intelligence, encouraging effective communication and creating psychological safety are the four components of a resilient culture.



**VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity).** A concept that originated with students at the U.S. Army War College to describe the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of the world after the Cold War is gaining new relevance to characterize the current environment. VUCA demands



**Data Culture.** The democratization of data and the proliferation of its access demands a data-driven culture that can address disruption and market shifts in real time.

As Seigyoung Auh of Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management wrote in the paper, [“The missing link between analytics readiness and service firm performance,”](#) a data-driven culture is defined as “the extent to which organizational members (including top-level executives, middle managers and lower-level employees) make decisions based on the insights extracted from data.” Developing a data-driven culture requires management to base their decisions on data rather than instinct and change their attitude towards data-driven decision-making. Organizations will need to integrate systems to make data accessible, shareable and reviewable; data in silos leads to missed opportunities to gain broader insights.



**Customer-Centricity.** Customer-centricity is about prioritizing the customer in all decisions related to your products and services to boost customer satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy. This requires leaders to rethink or evolve culture to put customers at the center and consistently communicate how customer obsession shapes decisions and actions. While there are obvious benefits to a customer-centric philosophy, worth noting is the stakeholder capitalism mindset of solving in the interest of all stakeholders. Care should be taken to see that the needs of the customer (or, for that matter, any one stakeholder) aren't met at the expense of other stakeholders. A customer-centric model that exploits employees or neglects the interests of partners or shareholders would cause its own set of problems.

## Models of Culture

Models developed by management experts and academics provide insight into various approaches to address the above elements. While there is no universal model for an ideal culture, these models may help inform your thinking.

**Schein's Culture Model:**<sup>1</sup> This model emphasizes that organizational culture is made up of three levels: artifacts (visible symbols of culture), espoused values (beliefs and attitudes of employees) and basic underlying assumptions (implicit assumptions and beliefs that drive behavior). Schein, along with Kurt Lewin, a modern pioneer of social, organizational and applied psychology, also developed a **Cultural Change Model**, which involves three stages: unfreezing (recognizing the need for change), changing (implementing new behaviors and attitudes) and refreezing (making the changes permanent).

**Competing Values Framework:**<sup>2</sup> This model identifies four different types of organizational culture: clan culture (family-like atmosphere), adhocracy culture (innovative and creative), market culture (competitive) and hierarchy culture (structured and formal). The authors also developed **The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI)**, a diagnostic tool to help organizations understand their current and desired culture. Likewise, their **Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) Model**, created with Jane Dutton, also at the University of Michigan, focuses on identifying and building on an organization's strengths rather than solely addressing weaknesses. The model emphasizes positive leadership, positive work relationships and positive meaning in work.

**Denison's Model:**<sup>3</sup> This model identifies four traits of high-performing organizations: involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission. The model suggests that these traits are interrelated and must be balanced for an effective culture.

**McKinsey 7-S Model:** Featured in the book *In Search of Excellence* by former McKinsey consultants Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, this model identifies seven factors that contribute to effective organizational

performance: strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills and shared values. The model suggests that these factors must be aligned to achieve success.

**Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions:** Developed by Geert Hofstede, a Dutch management researcher, this model identifies six cultural dimensions that influence organizational culture, including power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint.

**Deal and Kennedy's Cultural Model:** Developed by organization consultants Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy, this model identifies four types of culture: tough-guy/macho, work-hard/play-hard, bet-your-company and process culture. The model emphasizes the importance of aligning culture with strategy.

**Handy's Cultural Model:** Developed by Charles Handy, a well-known philosopher who has specialized in organizational culture, this model identifies four different types of culture, including power culture (centralized control), role culture (structured and hierarchical), task culture (results-oriented) and person culture (individualistic).

**The Culture Code:** *The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*: New York Times bestselling author Daniel Coyle explains what makes successful groups tick and identifies psychological safety factors that can generate team cohesion in any walk of life. He examines the verbal and physical cues that bring people together with specific strategies that encourage collaboration and build trust.

1 Developed by Edgar Schein, Society of Sloan Fellows professor of management emeritus at MIT Sloan.

2 Developed by Robert Quinn, Margaret Elliot Tracey Collegiate Professor at the University of Michigan who serves on the faculty of Organization and Management at the Ross Business School, and Kim Cameron, the William Russell Kelly Professor of Management and Organizations at the Ross School of Business and Professor of Higher Education in the School of Education, both at the University of Michigan.

3 Developed by Daniel Denison, professor of organization and management at IMD Business School in Lausanne, Switzerland, and chairman and founding partner of Denison Consulting.

# Securing Buy-In for Investing in Culture

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Given CCOs' unique multi-stakeholder view and their role as integrator and unifying force, CCOs have a leadership responsibility vis a vis culture greater than any other functional leader. Leading on something as permeative as culture requires commitment and effort that is top-down, bottom-up and across the organization.

CCOs may need to gather evidence to document a culture that is working or that needs to better align to desired outcomes, especially where there is apparent evidence that the culture is lacking. This could show up as internal data, including anecdotal insight that enables storytelling or cases-in-point, discovered by the CCO/team through wide-ranging employee focus groups and other exercises they must lead as part of their internal communications roles. It could indicate a lack of "engagement" by employees (a term with myriad definitions, often varying to reflect the types of mindsets and behaviors a given organization desires in its people). Or it could include external data from customers or employee posts that show a lack of (or great) customer centricity.

To this end, the CCO has the unique ability to gather more depth (to "out-know") on the subject of culture than any other leader. Throughout the buy-in process, the CCO must take care to share findings and build agreement among the leads for Strategy, HR, Operations and Marketing.

Investing time and resources to either curate a good culture or improve what's not working will require buy-in from the entire C-Suite.

There are a number of levers a CCO can use to get the attention of their peers:

- In LinkedIn's 2021 Workplace Culture Survey, **86% of millennials** indicated they would take a pay cut to work at a company whose purpose and values align with their own.
- Harvard Business School professors John Kotter and James Heskett found that over a decade-long period, purposeful, value-driven companies **outperform their counterparts in stock price by a factor of 12**.
- Companies led by culture accelerator CEOs have financial performance (assessed by a three-year revenue CAGR) that's **more than double** that of other companies surveyed by Heidrick & Struggles.
- CCOs can also turn heads, lead on the subject of culture and gain buy-in using their own knowledge base. This can include use of employee engagement or customer data that's available to others, but – uniquely for CCOs. They also can combine this with their deep knowledge of actual rubber-meets-the-road beliefs and values learned from the hard insight-gathering they do for internal communications. Sharing through storytelling (a unique strength of the Communication function) how different the culture is in the real world vs. beliefs (very often naive and insular) held by the C-Suite can bring fresh light and new vigor to culture change efforts, solidifying the CCO as the leader on culture work going forward.



## Cases in Point

**USAA.** The executive team developed a list of new values, such as “integrity” that they communicated broadly. The CCO, Wendi Strong, met with individual employees and learned that their own definitions of these values differed greatly vs. the assumptions of the C-Suite. The CCO further formally surveyed a population of employees and backed up these findings to further engage the C-Suite in the need to do regressive work to get the team on the same page before going any further with misaligned understandings. The CCO also became the irreplaceable leader on all things culture.

**Sabre.** Deregulation and rapid globalization (from 85% U.S.-based employees to 45% in three years) was changing this travel technology company. The C-Suite was convinced the company still suffered from arrogance, slowness and bureaucracy (from years as a monopoly), and they said the new culture needed to be “humble, urgent and scrappy.” The CCO, Al Comeaux, visited employees on six continents to better understand the culture emerging from the globalization. He found new employees eager to move fast and eschew bureaucracy. He turned heads with this question: “Did you know that in almost every non-U.S. English-speaking country, the word ‘scrappy’ means ‘crappy’? People want to know why we want them to do ‘crappy’ work.” He similarly became his company’s culture leader.

Once CCOs have convinced their peers that a dedicated focus on culture is required, the next step should be the establishment of a working group sanctioned by the CEO (ideally led by the most knowledgeable person on culture, the CCO) with representation from senior leaders in every staff and line function across the organization. Establishing a working group with accountability to the CEO can signal the importance of the need to proactively manage culture and serve both as a shaper and champion of the culture work. This working group should be directly involved at all steps in the process, debating learnings and insights and designing the next steps.

Next, establish a project management office (PMO), under the direction of the culture working group chair or co-chairs, comprising leaders and practitioners who will drive the culture effort (again, either curating your good culture or examining how to improve one that isn’t working). The PMO should report regularly to the culture working group, which, in turn, must report regularly on its progress and findings to the executive leadership team, getting feedback and input from the CEO and the rest of the C-Suite.

The diversity of thought from across the business on the culture working group will provide a more impactful

sounding board to validate needed change and shape a new culture. It would be impossible to create an effective culture without a deep understanding of the strategic and operational challenges faced by each function, business unit and geography. Further, involving each area of the business will ensure a sense of buy-in that is critical to achieving commitment to change across the organization.



## Case in Point

**Aetna.** When Dr. Jack Rowe became CEO of Aetna and decided to transform its strategy and business model, he realized the company culture would have to fundamentally change in order to implement the new approach. He asked the CCO, Roger Bolton, to lead the change. They created a Council for Organizational Effectiveness and Dr. Rowe required each staff and line function in the company to assign a highly regarded senior leader to the council. Members had staggered two-year terms to bring in new voices while preserving continuity. As a result, senior leaders across the enterprise were deeply involved in – and therefore bought into – the culture change initiative that resulted.



# Assessing the Culture

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After considering the factors influencing your organization's culture and current strategy, reviewing models and securing C-Suite buy-in, a logical next step is to assess your current culture and determine what, if anything, needs to change.

## What to Evaluate

A culture assessment framework typically consists of key dimensions that help evaluate and analyze an organization's culture and its impact on the business. It's often true that what might have been a great culture for many years no longer fits as a company's business model changes. The assessment of the current culture must take into account the changing needs of the organization.

It also should include a thorough effort to take into account the perspectives of all stakeholders, both internal and external.

**Research** from Gagen MacDonald suggests culture assessments play an important role as a tool to align the business strategy with the behaviors critical to successful execution and greater employee engagement and satisfaction.

Many companies tailor their assessments to their culture evolution and strategic goals; common dimensions measured include:

- **Values and Beliefs:** Evaluates the extent to which employees share and uphold these values in their behaviors and decision-making.
- **Communication and Transparency:** Evaluates the effectiveness of communication channels, the openness and transparency of information sharing and the quality of relationships in the organization.
- **Leadership Style:** Identifies the gaps in leaders as role models, how they motivate and empower employees and how they handle conflicts or challenges.
- **Employee Engagement:** Examines factors such as job satisfaction, motivation, intent to stay and overall employee morale.
- **Collaboration and Teamwork:** Evaluates the extent to which employees work together, share knowledge and support each other's success.
- **Innovation and Risk-taking:** Evaluates whether employees are encouraged to generate new ideas, experiment and take calculated risks to drive innovation and improvement.



## Case in Point

**Aetna.** The culture working group, led by CCO Roger Bolton, interviewed 50 senior executives and conducted 28 focus groups of front-line employees in all sectors of the company. It also surveyed customers, doctors and patients. Most important, it took into account the fundamental strategic changes that the new CCO and company president were designing that would radically transform the company's operating model and require everyone in the enterprise, at all levels, to think and act differently.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Evaluates the extent to which the employee population contains a diverse array of people and the extent to which they feel that they belong and are included, respected and valued.
- **Customer Focus:** Examines how employees prioritize customer service, understand customer expectations, and strive to deliver high-quality products or services.
- **Adaptability and Change Readiness:** Indicates if employees are flexible, open to change and willing to learn and develop new skills.
- **Performance Orientation:** Assesses whether employees are motivated by challenging goals, how performance is recognized and rewarded and the presence of a culture of continuous improvement.
- **Malleability:** Evaluates how susceptible employees (and for that matter, the C-Suite) are to change.

Once an organization recognizes culture as a critical success driver and a source of competitive advantage, it must define the unique values and beliefs that lead to desired behaviors and behaviors that build belief and inspire action in the future state. Many leaders feel their culture is unique yet they are unable to articulate or express it. This is where a culture assessment can help define the current and preferred culture and provide insights into areas of misalignment. It can also provide a comprehensive view of cultural strengths, areas for development and insights for creating a better workplace environment.

For example, one organization seeking to evolve its culture to be more customer-centric, agile and collaborative – including operating with a global mindset – developed a culture dashboard to identify and track the set of observable behaviors supporting its refreshed values and future state culture goals. From there, the culture team used a set of measurement tools to track the impact of the culture shift together with improvement in business performance.

Four dimensions were monitored quarterly:

- Knowledge or awareness of the company values
- Perception of the validated observable behaviors in action against the stated culture
- Leadership capabilities necessary to lead the culture change and drive engagement
- Business performance or the impact and competitive advantage of the new behaviors, refreshed values and leader commitment

In addition, the team used external benchmarks or industry standards from their internal and engagement surveys and external assessments to understand how their culture compared to others in the same industry or similar contexts. These were added to the dashboard to provide valuable context and identify areas for continuous improvement.

## How to Evaluate

No single tool can adequately probe the questions above to determine your organization's culture. A combination of the following will provide a robust picture.

**Internal assessments.** Consider various quantitative and qualitative methods beyond the traditional employee engagement survey, such as focus groups/roundtable discussions, executive interviews, feedback from company-wide events (such as town hall meetings), exit interviews, productivity measures, safety/accident rates and quality scores and attrition. Include assessments of your messaging and narratives to determine if your brand attributes resonate with employee groups or if there are inadvertent discrepancies between what employees see and feel. Take time to go visit employees, from the factory floor to ride-alongs with drivers. Hear first-hand what's on their mind and understand how they are experiencing culture. One such ritual is to hold a retrospective meeting with working groups (often called a "retro") to openly discuss what worked well, what could be improved and any action items for future projects.

In one example, a Page member created a voluntary listening program called Exchange, inviting employees and managers to discuss enterprise matters, but in a forum where the managers were not allowed to speak. Participants were encouraged to talk directly to managers, leaving the agenda entirely up to them. In the first pilot meeting, no one spoke for 40 minutes because they had no idea how to speak up. Over time, research showed those who attended these exchange meetings were happier, more positive about the organization and stronger belief in its culture because they felt they were being listened to and held a stronger belief in its culture.

**External assessments.** It's often easy to find evidence of how employees describe their work culture (and those of your competitors), from social media channels to ratings and comments on Glassdoor.com, Reddit, Discord and similar forums. In fact, [recent research](#) analyzing email, Slack messages and Glassdoor postings is introducing new ways to think about culture and how it's measured.

Employee comments can be influenced by how they view decisions by the leadership team responding to social and political developments, the public persona of the organization's founder and even the level of flexibility in their work environment. Employees aren't shy about describing their culture in favorable terms, such as caring, collaborative, supportive and purposeful, or in negative terms, such as toxic, risk-averse or authoritative.

Additionally, are customers and business partners aligned with your organization's culture? Customer feedback, net promoter scores and surveys of key stakeholders will help identify the perception of your corporate culture.

**Generational factors.** Today's workforce employs five generations (Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation). In any given organization, especially during an era of high turnover, a significant percentage of employees may have limited experience working at your organization. Assessing corporate

culture should go beyond diverse areas of gender and race and include age and length of service, as there may be significant differences between populations with 20+ years of company history versus those early in their career. For example, according to research by [Integral](#), the appeal of remote full-time work declines from younger to older workers, with just over half of Gen Z (56%) and Millennials (57%) wanting full-time remote compared with only 35% of Baby Boomers.



“Employee comments can be influenced by how they view decisions by the leadership team responding to social and political developments, the public persona of the organization's founder and even the level of flexibility in their work environment.”

# Mapping Organizational Ways of Working to Desired Culture

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TOC	Introduction	Thinking	Influencing	Buy-In	Assessing	Mapping	Actualizing	Measurement	Resources

As part of cultural change, the CCO can be instrumental in shifting a company's ways of working.

In 1967, computer programmer Melvin Conway introduced [Conway's Law](#), which states that an organization's design systems mirror its own communication structure. Conway's Law can be applied to any system, not just software systems. A company with a hierarchical structure is likely to design a system with a similar structure. This is because the people who design the system will naturally communicate with the people who are most closely connected to them, and these relationships will be reflected in the design of the system. Imagine, then, that your product or service reflects how well your organization communicates.

Many enterprises are still organized in ways born from 20th Century manufacturing models, focused on efficiency, productivity and consistency. This model limits the ability for teams to form autonomously to address challenges and opportunities in real-time. Instead, every organization involves some measure of complex knowledge work that needs a different model.

For example, is your organization too focused on a waterfall model, where iteration happens linearly until there eventually is an end-product? Certainly, many industries, such as financial, semiconductors, healthcare, etc., need this kind of development model. Or, is it more agile, trying to meet ever-changing customer needs quickly with frequent iterations? Organizational design is a field under a lot of pressure to keep up with changes in how people organize around work.

As the CCO, first consider your own function's structure. How do you determine work and how it is assigned? Is

it linear or decentralized and flexible? How are priorities set? Who determines what success looks like? Some Communications departments intentionally separate media relations and employee communications in distinct siloes. Does that, however, promote collaboration and the "cross-pollination" of ideas? Likewise, is your Communications function completely separate from HR and Marketing, surrounded by fences of a "not invented here" mentality? This, too, hampers the ability to chart a course that best serves the culture and business strategies and instead is protectionist and narrow-minded. Consider teams with members across these groups to ideate on some element of the new culture.

After looking at your own team in this context and expanding its influence, apply the desired model to the rest of your organization. Beyond HR and Marketing, partner with IT to review tools and ensure they are helping to inspire new ways of working. Likewise, ensure that your working group reflects the desired ways of working you are seeking for the rest of the organization.

**“A company with a hierarchical structure is likely to design a system with a similar structure.”**





“Organizational design is a field under a lot of pressure to keep up with changes in how people organize around work.”



# Actualizing Culture Change

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TOC	Introduction	Thinking	Influencing	Buy-In	Assessing	Mapping	Actualizing	Measurement	Resources

At this point you've had senior-level discussions about mission, purpose, business model, strategy and all the rest. You've engaged various stakeholders to evaluate the current culture — its current fitness and its apparent weaknesses. Some aspects of the culture exist for a good reason, and there could be a strong case for carrying those into a new culture; they've served the enterprise well and can link to its history. Others, however, might be vestigial artifacts of “how it's always been done” – practices that may have made more sense at some point in the past but no longer support the desired business model and strategy. A careful review of what exists establishes a starting point from which the enterprise can journey to its future state. It's also easier to change a few elements than to try to remake everything.<sup>4</sup>

**“Engage the culture working group on these questions to build consensus about the desired culture and behaviors.”**

It's now time to identify desired cultural attributes and, importantly, the observable and measurable behaviors that will demonstrate it. For example, a culture that prizes collaboration might look at its positive behaviors – things like cross-functional ideating and problem-solving – but

also ways that it might be detrimental – like slowing project progress because of a desire to include too many colleagues. Another culture might have strong beliefs about the power of fostering innovation, so associated behaviors might be iterative problem-solving, controlled risk-taking and a fail-fast mentality. Many functions are adopting Agile methods and the like because they systematically build in these behaviors.

Engage the culture working group on these questions to build consensus about the desired culture and behaviors. Solicit input from stakeholders, especially the C-Suite, as you go. The more inclusive the process, the more the resulting culture feels like it belongs to everyone.

Being a journey, culture change can best be conceptualized as a roadmap that sequences everything your organization will do to shift the culture, highlighting interdependencies and gaps. It should create an overview of the full employee experience and touchpoints and how these map back to desired values and behaviors.

Still, not everyone will welcome the idea of changing the culture. There will be those frozen by inertia or opposed for one reason or another. Culture change is not a campaign with an end. Leadership must understand that it requires an abiding, years-long commitment of resources and attention. And, even then, you're never done. As we said at the start—culture lives and breathes and needs care and tending to thrive, and it requires an abiding, years-long commitment of resources and attention.

4. Jon Katzenbach, managing director at PwC where he leads The Katzenbach Center, focusing on organizational performance, culture change and employee motivation, expands on this point in his book, [The Critical Few](#).

Here are some things to keep in mind:

**Start at the top.** The CEO must be fully invested in the culture management effort, from establishing the culture working group through every step to determining the desired culture. Being the most visible leader, the CEO must also model desired behaviors at every opportunity. Create opportunities for the CEO, and other C-Suite leaders, to model these behaviors, and suggest other ways to keep them top of mind — like opening every meeting with a discussion of the company's values and desired behaviors and how they pertain to the work being done.

**Identify role models.** Tap into employees who already believe, think, feel, work and behave in ways aligned with the new culture. Use their emotional energy to attract the attention of employees affected by the change. Senior leaders must visibly model these new behaviors right from the start because employees will believe real change is occurring only when they see it happening at the company's top.

**Legitimize culture change.** Consider the extent to which employees at all levels can contribute to your roadmap. Change efforts will run immeasurably smoother if programs address pain points uncovered in previous stakeholder listening efforts. Likewise, engaging employees at all levels can smooth the way for culture change initiatives, whereas their resistance will make implementation an ongoing challenge.

**Make it emotional.** Employees respond to calls to action that engage their hearts and minds, making them feel as if they're part of something bigger than their work group. Activate a strong personal connection to the company's heritage, purpose and the eras of change it has already led, even as you establish a sense of purpose as a basis for the culture for the next era.

**Begin small.** You may start with one symbolic yet tangible change. For example, removing the cap on annual vacation days can underscore a new culture of trust and personal accountability while lowering the friction of requiring such documentation. The emotional connection fostered by such moves will likely make a significant difference.

**Make change routine.** Ensure employees' daily routines reflect the new culture. Put culture messaging on Zoom backgrounds and in email signatures. Establish new practices like the one above about beginning meetings with a discussion of values. Define a few critical behaviors that will be essential to the success of changing the culture. Then, conduct everyday business with those behaviors front and center



## Case in Point

**Aetna.** When Dr. Jack Rowe arrived at Aetna, the once-proud 100-year-old company was floundering, and he had radical plans to transform the company's strategy and business model. He was explaining the plans for change to a packed auditorium at Aetna's headquarters when an employee rose and asked, "I don't understand, Jack. What does it all mean?" Dr. Rowe paused for only a brief moment before responding, "Jeannie, it's about restoring the pride." He received a standing ovation and earned their trust and respect in that moment. Over the ensuing six years, pride in working for Aetna rose from 48% to nearly 90% on the employee survey, and pride turned out to be highly correlated with all of the desired employee engagement metrics. turned out to be highly correlated with all of the desired employee engagement metrics.

**Develop a governance model.** Establish cultural guidelines at the enterprise level while allowing teams to create complementary features that fit best with their context. Team-specific performance/accountability elements, such as competencies, should align with the identified enterprise-wide cultural elements, including your purpose, mission, vision and values. Allow for flexibility without straying from your organization's values and desired behaviors.

People, processes, policies and systems all shape and reify enterprise culture. This is literally proving it through action! Many of these elements must be updated to become systemic and reflect your ideal culture:



**Training (or Learning & Development).** Some changes may be so new that people – at all levels – may need to learn new approaches and behaviors. If, for example, you want to adopt Agile, that is a project management approach with a specific method that must be taught and used consistently. If the change is important enough, and to change beliefs and help employees understand the importance of a move to Agile, senior leaders may want to become trainers themselves. When a very busy CIO showed up as a trainer on Agile, beliefs changed about its importance.

**Moments of truth.** Being people, we're impressionable at certain "moments of truth." For example, an employee onboarding is a moment to express your organization's brand. Most organizations ask new hires to review payroll and benefits forms. But are there ways to make them feel welcome, to introduce them to "who we are" as an organization, to inspire them with a sense of purpose? Apple, a company with about as strong a brand as there is, connects that brand to employee culture by greeting every new employee with a short note that is vintage Apple. It reads, simply:

*There's work and there's your life's work.*

*The kind of work that has your fingerprints all over it. The kind of work you'd never compromise on. That you'd sacrifice a weekend for. You can do that kind of work at Apple. People don't come here to play it safe. They come here to swim in the deep end.*

*They want their work to add up to something. Something big. Something that couldn't happen anywhere else.*



Welcome to Apple.

A less known moment of truth came from Dan Gilbert, the owner of a small brick and mortar mortgage lending firm started in 1985. To grow his business and build belief in his company's "isms" (a set of beliefs such as "Simplicity is Genius" and "Yes Before No"), Gilbert taught every single

new-employee orientation class at his company. With the ingrained shared belief structure at his company, he unleashed a growth mentality, and the company is now known as Rocket Companies, owner of Rocket Mortgage by Quicken Loans; it recently became the number one mortgage lender in America.

Another key moment of employee experience might be a work anniversary. Does the culture value longevity, in which case is celebrating work anniversaries an important cultural ritual?

**Career development.** Career conversations often become a matter of cultural management; how we do them (which is different at every organization) reflects what we think the culturally correct approach to human capital management should be. Likewise, incorporate discussions around skills and behaviors required to achieve the next opportunity to guide a path for skill development.

**Policies and practices.** Many of the beliefs and behaviors in the old culture that you want to change may be rooted in the organization's processes and practices, which directly impact employee behavior. The culture working group can undertake a systematic review of those in all departments and make recommendations to update policies, or add new ones, as needed to align them with the desired culture. For example, might policies around spending limits change to demonstrate more trust?

**Systems.** Your organization's internal systems have a significant impact on culture. Is getting approval for a replacement laptop power cord so difficult that employees simply pay out of pocket? Are the company's online resources so hard to find that word-of-mouth is a more reliable search engine? Here are some systems that commonly reflect culture:

- Intranets and internal communication channels
- Collaboration tools and ways of working
- HR applications and employee training
- Manager/leadership training
- Feedback mechanisms and performance reviews



**Structure.** Team composition, and perhaps even organizational structure, should reflect the behaviors of the desired culture, notably if you are shifting to a more nimble, agile environment. Changing the structure also will require clarity around how decisions are made and who is empowered (and how).

**Workspaces.** Digital and physical workspaces can enable and reinforce desired values and behaviors. For instance, if your organization prioritizes collaboration and knowledge sharing, is your organization's technology and digital workspace providing the tools your employees need to maximize these behaviors? Are your physical workspaces designed to facilitate teamwork? Also, consider environmental branding to provide visual cues of your culture.

**Measure progress.** It's critical to understand what's working and what isn't. The best way to do that is by listening to employees, for example, by asking them questions about their daily experience through surveys, focus groups, interactive workshops, or online pulse checks. Are the desired behaviors taking hold in their department? See Section 8 for more on measurement.

**Set plans to close the gaps.** Each leader and manager at every level in the organization must hold meetings with their departments to discuss employee engagement survey results and the areas that need improvement, along with plans to make the necessary changes. That includes the CEO. There should be a companywide report on progress led by the CEO with a plan to improve in the most critical areas that are not changing quickly enough.

**Hold leaders accountable.** Each leader and manager can have a specific plan with goals to close the culture gaps in their annual operating plan and personal performance objectives and can be rated on whether those goals are achieved based on the employee listening. The culture working group, accountable to the CEO, can serve as a point of aggregation and analysis for these goals.

**Employee performance evaluation.** When David Norton and Robert Kaplan introduced the [Balanced](#)

[Scorecard](#) in 1992, they stated senior leaders realized that no single measure could provide a clear performance target or focus attention on the critical areas of the business. Managers want a balanced presentation of both results and behaviors. How you produce results matters as much as the results you achieve. Ensure that every employee's performance review includes values and behaviors necessary for the desired culture.

**Rewards and recognition.** Create moments of positive reinforcement. These could be tied to a performance evaluation or the conclusion of a big project, generating rewards like bonuses, gifts or extra vacation time. Even a peer-to-peer recognition program shows appreciation for collaboration and hard work while reinforcing enterprise values. Bring in employee voices to crowd-source recognition program names.

**Traditions, symbols and rituals.** Whether employees remain in your organization for two years or 20, they may remember key moments well beyond their employment. The right traditions, symbols and rituals help build meaningful connections between employees and your organization, forging bonds and creating a positive work environment. Here are a few examples:

- Establish a way to recognize individuals and leaders whose behaviors align with the new, desired culture. This could be a coveted award, named after a founder, for individuals or teams.
- An occasional "Think Friday," when teams that don't normally come together to co-create ideas to address a specific challenge.
- Intentional onboarding experiences to immerse new employees into your company branding and character.
- Create traditions for employee work anniversaries.
- Open meetings with someone reading the values aloud or giving a recent example of seeing the values in action.
- Hold retrospective meetings after significant milestones to determine what went well, what needs to change and what actions need to be taken.



## Case in Point

**Southwest Airlines.** Southwest has long understood that treating their employees well results in great customer service. One of the biggest drivers of engagement is promoting an environment in which employees feel valued, cared for and appreciated. As Southwest grew from a small regional airline to a larger domestic presence, they recognized a need to invest in programs to meet the need. That's when Southwest Airlines Gratitude (SWAG) was born.

The SWAG platform enables Southwest employees to send and receive recognition through a variety of peer-to-peer and leader-given programs. Many of the awards come with SWAG Points that employees can use as currency to redeem items in the SWAG store like merchandise (with several top brands), experiences, gift cards, charitable donation options, and even Rapid Rewards™ Points.

The Recognition programs include:



**Kick Tail™:** When sending a Kick Tail™ (a peer-given thank you note), the employee simply selects one of the nine Company Values the recipient demonstrated along with an e-card of their choice, writes a heartfelt message, and hits send. The recipient receives it instantly via e-mail as well as in their SWAG account.



**Southwest Champion and Southwest Star:** The Southwest Champion and Southwest Star Awards (each level receives a different SWAG Point level) are peer-nominated and leader-selected for employees who excel in their roles. These are given throughout the year to thank employees for exceptional contributions.



**On the Spot:** On the Spot Awards enable Leaders to recognize Employees with SWAG Points, whether for great work in the moment or collaborative efforts as a Team. Much like Kick Tail™, the Leader selects the Company value the Employee demonstrated.



**Winning Spirit:** These peer-nominated or customer-commended recipients represent the Heart of Southwest through sacrificial actions, personal initiative, and extraordinary acts of service within or outside of the company. They are honored at a meaningful and intimate event where the stories of all of the recipients are shared by Southwest executives. They also receive a commemorative trophy as well as SWAG Points.



**President's Award:** The highest individual honor for a Southwest Employee, this award is peer-nominated and selected by their Leaders one time a year. They consistently represent the Southwest Way Values. These Employees are celebrated at an annual President's Award dinner and receive a commemorative trophy as well as SWAG Points.

In their monthly "LUV Mail," Southwest shares inspirational stories of their employees contributions to the company, customers and the community. This storytelling is designed to inspire action in others, yet another way to acknowledge an employee's contributions.

Southwest also celebrates milestone service anniversaries. In recent years, Southwest enhanced the program with some early career milestones to help with retention in the first few years and added

### Milestone Service Anniversary Recognitions



a gifting strategy beginning at the three-year mark in which employees can select a gift from a curated list. Milestone service anniversary pins are also a beloved by many Southwest employees, so this element was kept. And because Southwest likes to celebrate, employees celebrating a milestone (starting at ten years) are invited to a Southwest anniversary party.

## Preparing to launch a culture change effort

The pieces of your culture campaign are coming together, and it's time to make them pervasive and systemic. As stated in Page's [Culture Progression Path](#), use your organization's culture to play offense. At the heart of change is a decision, made by every person in the organization. We have to get people from wanting to change to deciding to change. Making a case for the change answers the reason component of the decision. Leader ownership, pulling people to the change rather than pushing the change onto people, listening first, and modeling through thick and thin are key ways to reach people on an emotional level to help them decide to change.

As with any change effort, applying principles of change readiness and change management to a culture campaign is appropriate.

**Strategy:** Ensure the goals and objectives of the culture effort ladder up to the business imperatives you are trying to address.

**Change narrative:** Create a compelling case for change, including facts and proof points that speak to employees' hearts and minds. Include context for change and a sense of urgency. And, clearly, include benefits from the change at an individual and enterprise level.

**Audience segmentation:** Develop employee personas to ensure you are reaching the right audiences with messaging and channels. Culture change will impact front-line employees differently than senior leaders.

**SMART goals:** Define what success looks like. How will you measure and track progress? Without all aspects of SMART goals, you might be goal-setting but not effectively creating a plan for success. SMART goals can provide a method to track milestones and provide moments of celebration and recalibration.

**Existing measures:** Track the benchmarks that will help show change is underway. For example, many organizations conduct regular employee engagement surveys. These and other metrics, such as exit interviews, communications channel performance, manager feedback mechanisms and others, can inform how culture change elements are being received. Additional recommendations on measurement are addressed in Section 8.

**Know, Believe and Do:** Document what you want employees to Know, Believe and Do. Beyond metrics, what other characteristics will you be looking for? For example:

- Know: We want employees to know the enterprise's strategy is the right one we need now. Our strategic investments will ensure future growth.
- Believe: Our leaders live by our values. Our organization is a good place to grow a career.
- Do: Give discretionary effort to help the enterprise succeed. Tell friends and colleagues about the benefits of joining the organization.

## Tying it all together

While communication is 90 percent action and only 10 percent words, our words and how we communicate through them must be best-in-class, especially during a culture change.

Be creative in your approach. Does the culture effort warrant creative assets (a mantra, a design element used in various channels, etc.)? Are you introducing so much at once that it requires a launch event or will you be seeking incremental change? Use the Page Model – from belief to action to confidence to advocacy – as a journey

map to teach employees to become not just examples of, but also effective advocates for, the company's brand and culture.

Maximize all of your touchpoints, whether or not they are tied together via CommTech tools. For example, create a microsite on your organization's intranet to collect resources and updates about the change process. If your portal has an AI chatbot, prepare it with answers to the top 25 questions employees may ask. Develop mobile-friendly assets for your front-line team, ensuring everyone can access the key messages. Importantly, plan to sunset legacy cultural elements and programs deemed out of line with current culture aspirations.

**“Maximize all of your touchpoints, whether or not they are tied together via CommTech tools.”**

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Create artifacts that address the essential behaviors found in the Larry Senn model within the sidebar in Section 2. Here are a few examples:

- Signing a commitment, which can be an actual document or printed on walls throughout company locations. Typically, the CEO first commits to what they will change.
- Setting expectations to start every meeting with a slide showing the enterprise's values and desired culture behaviors to ground discussions in achieving both.
- Creating new training for all managers and employees specific to the culture narrative and new behaviors that will help drive culture. This needs to be modeled from the top.
- Updating and relaunching values to make them more people-centered and reflective of the true DNA of the organization.
- Launching new leadership behaviors and creating new required training.
- Announcing new performance management practices, incentives and rewards. Creating peer-nominated awards for visible signs of living new behaviors (such as accumulating points for company merchandise).
- Creating or updating an enterprise-wide purpose to describe success in terms of impact on business and society.
- Creating or updating an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) to help differentiate your enterprise as an employer to keep critical employees and attract new ones.
- Revisiting questions in your employee engagement survey to align to your values and behaviors and seek input on how these values show up in your organization.
- Creating new experiential elements, such as introducing new rituals (such as weekly team retrospective meetings or, as Amazon does, keep an empty chair open in all meetings to represent the customer), tools (such as shared workspaces such as Mural or Miro) and physical environments (re-imagining in-person workspaces).
- Hard-wiring the new culture into the new-hire process, from pre-interview to onboarding and orientation.
- Celebrating a key cultural milestone with an event or team award.

No culture change effort will deploy without impediments. When you roll out new or revised values and desired changes, you can only assume that some will have a different understanding of what they mean. It requires an ongoing conversation within the entire enterprise at all levels to get alignment over how the values influence behaviors and what those behaviors really should look like.



## Case in Point

**Aetna.** CEO Jack Rowe and President Ron Williams began every meeting, internal and external, with The Aetna Way graphic depicting the company's values, and they stressed this importance of the beliefs and the behaviors to the new Aetna they were creating. As Dr. Rowe traveled to Aetna sites around the country, he was amazed to find the creative depictions of that graphic on the walls, in staff members' cubicles, and on business cards, none of which was orchestrated by the culture working group.



# Measurement

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As your culture change effort aims to improve business performance, we want to drive behaviors that lead to business outcomes. We expect our outcomes to include improving sales, increasing productivity, boosting employee engagement, opening the doors for your recruiters and improving retention of highly valued employees, among others. Yet, no one method holistically tracks employee behavior.

As it likely will take an extended period to launch every element in your culture program, it will take even longer to see changes to some of your desired behaviors.

**Employee Engagement and Activation.** An employee engagement survey provides objective feedback regarding how well leaders model organizational values and behaviors. In some organizations, managers and leaders must include improvement in the uptake of the desired behaviors in their annual performance management goals and their scores can impact their bonus potential. Employee engagement surveys also allow employees to rate their department's work environment against the range of values and desired behaviors.

Do you have questions that make the connection between being heard and valued, company purpose and pride? By measuring values in a structured and disciplined way, you can refine every leader's efforts and, ultimately, improve the health of your company's culture. CCOs should partner with the CHRO to ensure the desired behaviors are reflected in the survey. Occasional pulse surveys (e.g., quarterly) will show progress and overall sentiment, pride and morale.

Additional measures can show how well employees participate in various enterprise programs. For example, are employees taking important development and training courses? How many employees participate in corporate giving or volunteering programs? Measures such as these are observations of behaviors that are either happening or not – a clearer signal about connection and culture than could be determined via self-reporting through a survey.

**Employee Behaviors.** How do leaders and managers see their employees actually demonstrating the desired behaviors? It may be time to reconsider your organization's feedback process and tools. Recently, some organizations have ditched the long-engrained [annual performance review](#) and forced-ranking process in favor of regular and frequent check-ins. This new method encourages managers to have regular conversations with their employees regarding their performance around key behaviors.

**Keep out of the ivory towers yourself.** It's important for the CCO to remain grounded in what's really taking place. Continue traveling, meeting employees and leaders and refreshing your and your group's knowledge of the real culture and how it is changing. Provide storytelling that reinforces your findings.

**Message comprehension and retention.** Form an employee advisory board comprising a cross-section of employees from all walks of your organization. This group can act as an occasional sounding board to pre-test (and even retro-test for future) messaging and actions. Importantly, they can give real-time, on-the-ground feedback on how employees respond to change. For example, simply asking the group to share

what messages they recall hearing in the past month will speak volumes about what is landing with employees.

**Manager feedback.** Establish a mechanism to check in with managers occasionally to get reactions from employees about various aspects of the culture campaign and behavior change. Similar to the Employee Advisory Board, consider a small group of managers who can give trusted feedback.

**Reputation and public sentiment.** So much of the modern organization's culture is on constant display through websites and apps where employees share their estimation of the overall value of working at that company. The frequency and sentiment of these observations can be assessed both qualitatively and quantitatively. For example, sites like Glassdoor offer workplace rankings in a variety of dimensions related to culture and the comments are a veritable goldmine of employee sentiment.

## Measuring business outcomes

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The work undertaken to capture the desired culture and observable behaviors in collaboration with business leaders provides the foundation for what to measure. Consider these measures to gauge the progress and success of your culture effort.

**Sales:** Increasing sales is likely a key business driver. Is the cultural effort having an impact on profit? Has empowering employees to be more active and autonomous in a customer-centric culture improved customer satisfaction?

**Employee productivity.** Employee productivity is an important measure, particularly in the manufacturing and logistics industries. Find the right benchmark to track productivity over time. Other areas can be measured, such as the time needed to create reports, launch campaigns, etc.

**Labor cost.** In Harvard Business School's Felix Oberholzer-Gee's enlightening [ten-minute video](#) about strategy, he describes how culture and brand value can directly drive profit by lowering cost of labor through non-monetary value creation for the employees.

**Employee retention:** Working with HR, review retention rates, the number of open roles and the number of employees being promoted to new levels. Is your enterprise successfully recruiting and retaining employees from all walks of life? Further, collaborate with HR on following Glassdoor ratings and how responses are provided.

**Cost of talent acquisition.** A healthy, thriving culture is an attractive differentiator in the marketplace of talent. For some firms, the cost of hiring can be twice the annual compensation for that role. Healthy cultures not only result in more applicants, but will increase the quality and the likelihood of offer acceptance (especially in a tight labor market.)

**Cost, quality and safety:** A positive culture is one way to address the 'shared commons dilemma' in which members of a group who share resources can inadvertently exhaust those shared resources in pursuit of their own self-interest (for example employees making use of common stock of supplies). Employees and teams united by a positive culture will seek new ways to be good financial stewards of the business – and those changes are measurable. Is it having an impact on your bottom line? Likewise, can you document an improvement in quality and time to market? Can you determine if employee safety scores have improved?

**Stakeholders:** Is your culture supporting the building of trusted, value-added relationships with all constituents? What measures indicate your company's purpose and culture are having the desired impact on business and society? Are you improving diversity, training skilled workers or improving the communities where you operate?

# Additional Resources to Shape Your Thinking

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Nurturing an effective culture is part of an ongoing process to ensure your organization achieves its strategic outcomes in a thriving environment. Culture requires continuous assessment and refinement – and endurance. Here are additional resources that may provide helpful insights:

## Periodicals

**Creating a positive emotional culture: Effect of internal communication and impact on employee supportive behaviors:** A ScienceDirect report by Rita Men, Ph.D., Director of Internal Communication Research, University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications, examining the effect of internal communication on positive emotional culture.

**The Employee Experience Formula For Success:** Forbes article about how employee experience durably drives the bottom line and multi-stakeholder value.

**Culture Is A Company's Single Most Powerful Advantage. Here's Why:** Forbes article on how culture is fundamental to an organization's success.

**How to Fix a Toxic Culture:** MIT Sloan Management Review article on three critical drivers companies should focus on to fix toxic culture.

**What is company culture?** An overview by Indeed exploring types of organizational culture and tips on strengthening culture.

**Company Culture Is Everyone's Responsibility:**

A Harvard Business Review article on how a new culture-building approach is already in place at some organizations, one in which everyone in the organization is responsible.

**Company Mission & Culture Matter More Than Salary:** Glassdoor survey measuring sentiment around mission and culture in the workplace.

**It's Tough to Build a Corporate Culture in a Remote-Work World:** A Wired Magazine overview of creating connections at work in a hybrid environment.

**Employee Experience: The Critical Ingredient to Workplace Culture:** Forbes article unpacking the relationship between global trends in employee experience, organizational design and the need to differentiate through culture.





## How-to Guides

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### [The 4 elements of organizational culture](#)

**transformation:** Korn-Ferry 's take on building a solid structure for a positive workplace culture.

**[Measuring Culture in Leading Companies](#):** A report on organizational culture from MIT Sloan Management Review and Glassdoor based on an analysis of 1.2 million employee reviews on Glassdoor using machine learning and human expertise.

**[Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture](#):** A culture toolkit from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

**[Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument](#):** A web-based tool to assess your organization's culture.

**[Organizational Culture Inventory \(OCI\)](#):** A validated survey that measures the current culture of an organization in terms of shared behavioral norms.

## Best Practices

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**[The CCO as Pacesetter](#):** Page Society's viewpoint on how the CCO is at the nexus of enterprise transformation, producing new demands and requirements that, when met, elevate the function to be more essential and strategic than ever before.

**[How Microsoft Became Innovative Again](#):** A Harvard Business Review article on how Microsoft shifted its culture to gain an innovative edge in AI.

**[Embracing culture change on the path to digital transformation](#):** MIT Technology Review article on how National Australia Bank transformed through culture change.

**[5 Comms Strategies for Stronger Workplace Culture](#):** An Axios overview of culture insights from leaders at Salesforce, UPS, Gallup and more.

**[Cultural Change That Sticks](#):** A Harvard Business Review article on five principles for culture change featuring Aetna.

**[The Case For Culture](#):** A Gagen MacDonald white paper to unleashing an organization's potential through the six levers of culture change.

## Books

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**[The Critical Few](#)** by Jon Katzenbach, James Thomas and Gretchen Anderson: A practical guide to working with culture and tapping into catalytic change within your organization.

**[Radical Candor](#)**, by Kim Scott, emphasizes multi directional feedback for team and large-group effectiveness.

**[Drive](#)**, by Daniel Pink, emphasizes the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things and to do better by ourselves and our world.

**[Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't](#)**, by Simon Sinek's, focuses on servant leadership.

**[Winning Teams, Winning Cultures](#)**, by Larry Senn and Jim Hart, details essential behaviors in healthy, successful people and organizations.

**[Win from Within: Build Organizational Culture for Competitive Advantage](#)**, by James Heskett, documents how effective organizational culture provides businesses with a major competitive advantage, allowing for higher employee and customer engagement and loyalty, all of which translate into greater growth and profits.

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