

# Leading CULTURE Change

Creating  
Constructive  
Work Cultures

## Culture-Building Services for Leaders & Teams



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*Learning Solutions*  
for Leadership & Change

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# 1. The Culture Change Imperative



Some talented leaders have been sunk by bad cultures. Sometimes, the very things that once made a culture strong and successful, years later, turn out to be the same things that hold it back or even lead to its demise...

**“Until I came to IBM, I probably would have told you culture was just one element in organisation success (but) culture isn't just one aspect of the game - it's the game.”**  
 Louis Gerstner IBM CEO & author of *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?*

Culture is a crucial ingredient of all organisations. It affects strategy, performance, behaviour and change-responsiveness, all of them key determining factors in organisation survival and success.

Most leaders are acutely aware how constructive cultures help people perform, and equally aware of how dislocated ones breed bad behaviour, toxic climates and under-performance.

### Culture change is on every leader's lips nowadays...

It's been around for a long while, but there's no doubt that culture change is still one of today's hot business topics. It's on every organisation's agenda.

Companies from Google to Virgin are quick to trace their success to dynamic cultures that foster high levels of commitment, innovation, employee satisfaction and identification with what the organisation is all about.

We assume renovating or revitalising culture is high on your strategic agenda too or soon will be – otherwise you wouldn't be reading this.

This service profile outlines what we think culture is all about. It furnishes you with useful pointers on changing it, gives a run-down on our culture-building clinics and other ways we help with culture change and provides answers to questions like:

- ? What is culture and why bother with it?
- ? What are the components that make it up?
- ? What are the traps in trying to change it?
- ? Where do I start with a culture change effort?

We don't have all the answers or put ourselves up as the best choice to assist you with your culture change challenges. In fact, we suggest you think carefully about what you need, shop around, talk to providers and learn what you can before you start. Because real culture change is never, or rarely, easy.

Even if you choose not to contact us for a conversation about your culture, we hope this outline helps you get clear on what actions you can take to make your place a more vibrant, warm and welcoming culture for people to work in.

### Bill Cropper – The Change Forum

March 15, 2011

## 2. Why Bother with Culture?



Culture has a profound effect on every facet of your organisation: you, your people and how you operate...

“Culture matters because it determines individual and collective behaviour (and) because cultural elements determine strategy, goals, and modes of operating.” Ed Schein *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* [thoh](#)

“We need to change the culture” is a much-repeated management mantra, but it’s notoriously difficult.

Some dismiss culture as a soft-issue, too fluffy and ephemeral to tackle, a distraction from the real game of performance improvement and business strategy. But they’re wrong. *Getting the culture right* is one of the most critical facets to focus on for sustainable results and long-term success...

### Why bother with culture?

The simple answer is because it determines strategy, affects performance and influences behaviour.

- ❑ **Culture affects what strategies you adopt.** It acts either as catalyst or constraint. Leaders concerned with strategy need to equally concern themselves with culture because it determines the kind of strategy and modes of operating they adopt. Strategies that work well in one organisation can fall flat in another and the variable is often culture.
- ❑ **Culture’s is a critical performance component.** More leaders are now acutely aware how a constructive culture helps people perform, creates commitment and contributes to superior quality and teamwork. They’re equally aware of how dislocated cultures breed bad behaviour, toxic work climates and sap performance.
- ❑ **Culture drives behaviour** and leaders at all levels should be concerned with that. Culture influences attitudes, behaviour, what we feel, how we think, act, respond to pressures, problems and challenges and how receptive we are to change and innovation.

### A few other reasons to bother about culture...

- ❑ It’s the hidden ‘X’ factor in change success. When change fails or gets staunchly resisted, culture’s often behind it.
- ❑ Great cultures spark creativity, engagement, commitment and generate positive energy that’s contagious.
- ❑ Great cultures attract talented people and then retains them. Everyone wants to come and work in a great culture,
- ❑ Great cultures help people collaborate, get along well, stick together and it gives them a sense of identity.

It’s for reasons like these culture matters. Creating healthy and vibrant cultures isn’t only a good thing to do to from a people perspective, it makes lots of good business sense too.

***And that’s why leaders need to be culturally concerned...***

### 3. Culture Change Traps



Leaders have to be clear about the difference they want to make in a culture – and that takes vision, perseverance, passion and courage. It also takes the right knowledge and tools...

“The bottom-line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them.” Schein Organisational Culture & Leadership p 22

If you don't create a culture by design, you'll most likely inherit a culture by default and it may be one you don't want. New leaders coming into an existing culture face some difficult choices.

Do you dismantle the current culture? Do you try to superimpose your own beliefs and values on it? Do you give in to the current culture and simply try to make improvements inside it or do you assimilate enough to figure out what's going on, then gradually try to re-shape it over time?

#### What are the traps of trying to change culture?

The first difficulty is finding it. Culture is hard to grasp hold of. No-one objectively observes culture. We see it through the warped lens of our own cultural conditioning, preconceptions and prejudices.

#### Here's a few other culture change traps...

- ❑ Culture change attempts fail if they're shallow and short-term, because culture is deeply rooted. It can absorb, neutralise, reject or outlast your changes.
- ❑ You can change surface trappings, without affecting the deeper culture. Culture can handle changes - a new piece of technology or changing a poor work process - just so long as you don't touch on deeper layers like long-held assumptions and beliefs. If you do, it's fiercely defended.
- ❑ Top-down won't change culture. A new executive arrives and turns the culture on its head, only to find it goes to ground and re-emerges once they move on.
- ❑ Top management turns turtle. They say they want culture change but turns out they weren't committed to it in the first place or back off if they see it threatens them.
- ❑ 'Yes-ing' to death. Everybody says yes, they support the change but do nothing to make it happen, clinging covertly to the old culture.
- ❑ Absorption is where the culture acculturates the culture-changer, wearing down energy and gradually absorbing them over time.

Finally, there's the quick-fix mentality. Bottom-line managers who want tangible solutions and concrete action plans have little tolerance for such soft areas. It's much harder to justify spending funds on intangible changes.

Yet, ironically, failure to address culture is behind so many failed change initiatives.

## 4. Characterising Culture



Culture is commonly yet inadequately described as *'the way we do things around here'*. But it's much more than that...

Culture consists of deeply ingrained, often taken-for-granted patterns of feeling, thinking and responding, along with resident rites and rituals, that dictate how teams, individuals and entire organisations operate in order to navigate their environment, make sense of it and survive in it.

*That's our definition....*

Before you can come to grips with changing it, it's wise to spend time working out what culture really is. If you don't, you're likely to waste time and effort making superficial changes your current culture can easily absorb, ignore, repel or neutralise.

Understanding what things make up culture at least gives you a chance of being able to see it, interact with it, and begin changing it for the better.

### What are the components that constitute culture?

Single-component concepts of culture abound. We want to create a coaching culture, a customer-service culture, a 'one-team' culture. You can't knock the good intentions behind these sentiments, but the reality is that culture is complex, multi-layered and deeply rooted. It's not a single thing. Culture is hard to see, hard to find and hard to get a hold on. But here are 7 patterns we think really count in any culture...

- ❑ **Thinking Patterns:** prevailing beliefs, assumptions and mental models a team or entire workplace hold collectively that often operate unconsciously
- ❑ **Patterns of Feelings:** dominant emotional states most usually experienced and displayed in your workplace, that effect how we think and how we behave
- ❑ **Patterns of Leadership:** The style of leaders, how this fits in the culture, resonates with people and how their words, actions, motives and directions are perceived
- ❑ **Patterns of Tradition:** stories, myths, creeds, customs, rituals and routines that give a particular culture its identity, continually reinforce it and deflect efforts to change it.
- ❑ **Patterns of Responsiveness:** how the culture responds to challenges in its environment, how reactive or proactive and how rigid or adaptive it is to change and innovation
- ❑ **Patterns of Conversation:** the nature and quality of conversations – the accepted ways people talk to each other, handle conflict and how open or closed they are
- ❑ **Patterns of Behaving:** the accepted behavioural "rules" resident in a culture that govern the way people interact. These rules are implicit and unconsciously followed.

It's essential to know what you're dealing with, but this levels-and-layers talk can be confusing. So where do you start? **That's where our culture-building clinics for leaders and managers come in...**

## 5. Culture-Building Services



We design down-to-earth change programs people can easily understand, that strengthen leadership capability, deepen learning capacity at organisation, team and individual level and assist you in creating constructive work cultures. We overview our culture change services below. You can read more about them in parts 6, 8 and 9 of this service profile...

We believe learning is at the heart of successful change – that what sets successful organisations apart is how well they learn to lead it. We work on the close connection between leadership and learning to help people engage with change and constructively navigate their way through it...

### An overview of our culture change processes and clinics

We've been designing and delivering leadership, culture and change programs for more than 15 years now...

Our change consulting services cover areas like change facilitation, strategic visioning, redesigning teams and work processes, cultural revitalisation, mapping change plans and processes, transferring change leadership skills to people and conducting key action-learning workshops at crucial, crunch-points in your change process.

In fact, when we think about it, all of our clinics on *Emotional Intelligence*, *Conversational Coaching* and *Working Better Together*, have always centred on helping leaders build the emotional, conversational, relational and team-work skills they need to create constructive work cultures.



This diagram shows how senior management needs to plan business performance strategy in parallel with developing a culture change plan to support it.

When culture and strategy align, you can do great things. When they don't, every day's a challenge and leaders in your organisation struggle.

In the centre row, we've highlighted 3 major areas where we can help with strategic culture change and revitalisation.

**1. Leading Culture Change.** Often the first thing you need to do is raise awareness amongst your leadership of how crucial culture change is to strategy, performance and productivity – then give them some tools to help them handle it better.

**“Most efforts to change run directly into cultural issues that resist change. Deep changes in how people think can never be achieved by creating new rules and demanding compliance. If individuals can't learn, if the culture of the company isn't a learning culture, no amount of effort will deliver lasting change.” Peter Senge**

That’s what our Leading Culture Change clinic does and you can read more about it in part 6 of this service profile.

**2. Scanning your culture.** Another place to start is to work out what your current culture’s like. We also conduct Culture Scans in-house as well as structured dialogues and facilitated culture-probe groups. Read more on this in Part 8.

**3. Culture-Building Clinics.** If you look over Part 9, you find we also run a set of culture-building clinics under the banner of *Working Better Together*.

These clinics come into play usefully when it comes time in your culture change plan to start trying to change thinking and behaviour by giving people new skills, tools and ideas. There’s 10 different clinics to choose from:

- Working in Teams** - create a culture of teamwork
- Team Vision** - agree a shared vision to unify teams
- Talking in Teams** - encourage constructive conversation
- Thinking in Teams** - team tools to think better together
- EI in Teams** – find out how emotions impact team culture
- Team Difficulties** - deal with difficult team moments
- Designing Teams** - getting the team architecture right,
- Respect-Building** – enhance relationships with respect
- Leading in Teams** – empower teams to share leadership
- Cohesive Teams** – build team spirit, identity, cohesion

We can also work with you on a consulting basis to support culture change. Typical activities we often assist with include:

- Plan and design culture change processes: Whether it’s with executive teams, projects groups, change teams or intact work units, we can help you scope your culture change, develop specifications, design processes and jointly plan strategies and learning programs to support it
- We facilitate a range of strategic change, vision-setting and action-planning workshops to help you systematically think through all the steps in your culture change process
- Challenging Change Resistance*. “*What do we do with the resistors?*” is often at the forefront of our minds when it comes to culture change. While resistance is natural, left unchecked it can spread and infect others and become a big block to progress. We run a 1-day clinic on *Challenging Change Resistance* for leaders, who need to learn how handle these difficult change moments better

**You can also download our [Change Services Profile](#) for useful models, insights and a snapshot of other ways we help with change.**

## 6. Leading Culture Change



**Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin – and you can’t understand one without the other. We often even define a great leader as someone who turns around a poor culture and manages to create a constructive one....**

**Leaders may not always create the culture, but they certainly play a big role in changing it. While there’s no magic bullets or quick-fixes, if you can understand the deeper patterns that underpin a culture, learn some lessons about what seems to work and equip yourself with some practical tools, then you have a chance of changing it for the better...**

And that’s what **Leading Culture Change** is designed to do.

It’s for leaders at any level who are concerned about creating constructive work cultures and serious about improving their approach to the way they work with culture.

*Leading Culture Change* complements Module 3: **Learning to Lead Change** in our *Learning-to-Lead* series. It looks behind-the-scenes at deeper patterns that underpin culture and what leaders can do to change or revitalise theirs.

Whether it’s a team, division or a whole organisation, it aims to help leaders get started in earnest on culture change and we explore areas instrumental in doing it like understanding the dimensions of constructive cultures, recognising danger signals and working out the best place to start with a culture change effort.

### Tools and ideas this clinic covers can assist leaders to:

- Unpack the complex of components that make up culture
- Scope the challenges of leading culture change efforts
- Drill down on culture by unearthing its tacit assumptions
- Recognise signs of constructive or dislocated cultures
- Explore the 7 dimensions crucial for cultural revitalisation
- Learn about traps and tips to counter cultural resistance
- Diagnose their current culture and find ways to revitalise it
- Develop a culture change plan and how to get started

### Here’s an outline of key topics we touch on in this clinic...

- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Why bother with culture?     | ■ Working out where to start   |
| ■ Unpacking what culture is    | ■ Tools for culture change     |
| ■ Unearthing cultural patterns | ■ Systems thinking & culture   |
| ■ Impact of tacit assumptions  | ■ Culture change tips & traps  |
| ■ Signs of good/poor cultures  | ■ Creating a cultural vision   |
| ■ Constructive or cultures     | ■ Culture conversations        |
| ■ The 7 Cultural Dimensions    | ■ Handling cultural resistance |
| ■ Culture scans and surveys    | ■ Cultural habits & behaviour  |
| ■ 8 Phases of culture change   | ■ Culture change plans         |

**“There is now abundant evidence that culture makes a difference to performance; we know that leaders increasingly need concepts and tools for working with culture in varied and subtle ways” Schein Corporate Culture Survival Guide**

Stating the obvious, but for culture change to work, senior leaders have to be committed to it and play an active, role in constructively supporting it and talking it up...

We build into *Leading Culture Change* key features like:

- ❑ **Taking a ‘tool-kit’ approach’.** There’s a 100-page self-coaching guide with lots of tools for culture change work
- ❑ **Leaders bring real culture change cases** to work on
- ❑ **Culture Conversations.** Plenty of time to talk over culture change challenges and exchange ideas with others.
- ❑ **Tool Try-Outs.** The clinic revolves around practice not just theory. Leaders try-out tools on their culture change cases
- ❑ **Culture Change Strategy Maps.** Get access to maps that help you navigate and strategically plan culture change
- ❑ **Culture Change Plans.** Opportunity to plan steps and processes to start on culture change or take it further.
- ❑ **After the clinic,** leaders work on a more detailed plan and personal strategies to build change leadership capacity.

We run *Leading Culture Change* as part of our schedule of public leadership learning programs in Queensland and NSW. **We also conduct this clinic in-house** and can customise the clinic to your organisation change context or leadership group.

- ❑ It can be run in 1 or 2-day formats. The difference is one of depth and allowing additional time for strategic planning and conversations for your specific culture change.
- ❑ As a general awareness-raising activity for a leadership group, one day is probably sufficient. If you want to look at organisation-specific approaches and deal with strategic culture change, two days is a recommended minimum.

“If we want to make organisations more efficient and effective, we must understand the role that culture plays in organisational life. If we want leadership to be more effective, we have to make leaders aware of their unique role as culture creators, evolvers, managers.” Ed Schein *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*

While our formal clinics may form the structured part of the program, **developing support scaffolding back-at-work to bed down learning is critical to success.** For example:

- ❑ *Culture Change Executive Teams* to plan global strategy
- ❑ *Planning or Focus Groups* to help with implementation
- ❑ *Learning practice groups or reflective partners* so leaders can discuss ideas, workplace applications and actions.
- ❑ *Inter-session team meetings* where leaders discuss culture issues and directions with their own people or their peers

Let’s look next at what people say about our *Leading Culture Change* clinic...

## 7. Leading Culture Change – what they say...



Since the launch of our *Leading Culture Change* clinic in 2009, hundreds have attended our public program and many more organisations have opted to run the clinic in-house as part of preparing their leaders to contribute constructively to their culture change plans.

Senior leaders have been frequent participants at the clinic, which has received lots of favourable feedback...

Like all of our clinics, *Leading Culture Change* has lots of take-away tools to help people get started on culture change...and we explore areas instrumental in doing it like gaining a good understanding of the dimensions of culture and working out the best place to start a culture change effort.

### What do people say about Leading Culture Change?

*“The clinic emphasised how understanding organisational culture can’t be underestimated and that changing it is complex and difficult but by no means impossible”,* observes Ian Church, CEO of Tablelands Regional Council. *“The guide is an excellent resource and all my senior managers learned a lot.”*

Jenni Dillon from Cairns Regional Council said she enjoyed the clinic, saying that it provided *“a very interesting eye-opener with fantastic tools and an excellent guidebook to be utilised back at work”*. As with all of our clinics, people seem to really appreciate our comprehensive toolkit-style guides.

*“The workbook is brilliant!”* remarked Kerry Russo, Campus Manager at Townsville’s Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE. *“Leading Culture Change was an excellent day of learning and insight - a relaxed format with a well-organised structure.”*

Our toolkit hit the mark with Julie Pike too: *“It has so much valuable information – it’s absolutely marvellous”,* she said. And in the same vein, Judy Gayler from Justice said: *“I’m sure I’ll benefit from the toolkit - I’ll be taking my team through some of them at staff meetings.”*

A number of senior managers said coming along to our culture change clinic was time well-spent. William Custance from Project Services said it *“was excellent - very useful and well presented, well worth the time and expense in order to learn about culture change processes and ways to enact it effectively - and the tools in the guide were very helpful and relevant.”*

Darren Campbell, capability consultant with Justice, though it was *“well worth the time to get my management team on board with leading cultural change”*. But we’ll leave Sally Hooper to have the last word:

*“I enjoyed your presentation on Leading Culture Change more than I have any presentation in the last few years. Extremely interesting and informative. I’ve told colleagues that the program was very good, you knew your subject and the two days really kept my interest.”*

**“The clinic emphasised how understanding organisational culture can’t be underestimated and that changing it is complex and difficult but by no means impossible”**  
Ian Church, CEO of Tablelands Regional Council.

## 8. Our Culture-Building Clinics



From very early on in a culture change process, you know you need people to act differently and think differently. The old culture has conditioned them to behave one way. The revitalised culture you're trying to graft on calls on them to behave in a different way.

Behaviour change is where the rubber hits the road. Our Culture-Building Clinics can equip your people with the conversational, emotional and positive interaction skills they need to help you build the vibrant, healthy and constructive work cultures you want...

Culture change works at many levels from personal, to the team, to organisational - and through many different mechanisms ranging from formal codes, structures or operating principles to less tangible, but no less important things, like the habitual ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that prevail in a team...

### To change culture, change thinking and behaviour...

When you boil it down, changing culture means getting people to think and behave differently. You have to make the new thinking and new ways of working you want to see in your new culture an intrinsic, habitual part of the way people do things around here.

Old habits die hard so they say and it's the biggest obstacle to culture change. People learn from the current culture plus their own personal experience to act one way and you want them to act in another. A mistake we often make is assuming they even *know* how to act any differently, even if they could.

In any culture change plan, you'll want to include actions that help people learn new ways of interacting. That's where our **Team Culture-Building Clinics** come in. We customise clinic content and cover much-needed culture change arenas such as:

- Conversations:** having more open, constructive team-talk
- Relationships:** enhancing respect, trust and collaboration
- Climate:** creating positive, safe, supportive work climates
- Emotional intelligence: self-control,** empathy, connectivity
- Dealing with dysfunctions:** tacking old team norms and habits that have become obstacles
- Difficult-moments management:** to handle conflict better
- Team Improvement:** changing processes and operating principles to do the work better or work better together on it
- Responsibility:** learning to hold each other to account

“It’s a testament to our naïveté about culture that we think we can change it by simply declaring new values. Such declarations usually produce only cynicism.” Peter Senge in The 5<sup>th</sup> Discipline Fieldbook

To make it easier to choose the right clinics to fit your culture change plans, we've created a menu of self-contained 'sessions' based on team culture-building topics and themes we find people commonly gravitate toward. **There's 10 different ones to select from,** or mix and match them, to suit your needs:

Each of our clinics helps in various ways to build a positive, team-working culture, where people find ways to discuss issues constructively, resolve conflict without resorting to argument, create more emotionally safe and supportive work climates and identify new ways to work better together...

For more on our approach to team-building, what it is and how it fits in with your culture change plans, download our [Working Better Together Prospectus](#). It has lots of useful pointers to help plan your next team culture-building session

<p><b>Clinic 1: Working in Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The 5 Team Foundations</li> <li>■ True teams vs. Token teams</li> <li>■ Success &amp; failure factors</li> <li>■ Leadership and followership</li> <li>■ Expectations &amp; groundrules</li> <li>■ Ways to work better together</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clinic 2: Team Visions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Team change challenges</li> <li>■ Visions &amp; values themes</li> <li>■ Shaping shared visions</li> <li>■ Values – what we stand for</li> <li>■ Values to behaviours</li> <li>■ Team goals and actions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clinic 3: Talking in Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Constructive conversations</li> <li>■ From debate to dialogue</li> <li>■ Balancing your say &amp; theirs</li> <li>■ Listening &amp; questioning</li> <li>■ Different speaking positions</li> <li>■ Skillful discussion 5-P model</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clinic 4: Thinking in Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing ideas in teams</li> <li>■ Group problem-solving tools</li> <li>■ Systems Thinking Maps</li> <li>■ Situation analysis tools</li> <li>■ How to make team decisions</li> <li>■ Sharing decision-making</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clinic 5: EI in Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Emotionally intelligent teams</li> <li>■ What is EI &amp; why it matters</li> <li>■ Handling emotional hijacks</li> <li>■ Finding your feelings</li> <li>■ Managing your moods</li> <li>■ Empathy &amp; connectivity</li> <li>■ Elements of EI teams - quiz</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clinic 6: Team Difficulties</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Difficult discussion dynamics</li> <li>■ Blocks, errors &amp; mistakes</li> <li>■ Starting difficult discussions</li> <li>■ Steps for difficult discussions</li> <li>■ Blame or contribution</li> <li>■ Defusing difficult moments</li> <li>■ Asserting yourself positively</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clinic 7: Designing your Team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Team redesign – what &amp; why</li> <li>■ Types of team designs</li> <li>■ 7 Team Design Dimensions</li> <li>■ Steps in redesigning teams</li> <li>■ Work analysis process maps</li> <li>■ Team Design Specifications</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clinic 8: Respect-building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dissecting respect: what is it</li> <li>■ Signals of disrespect</li> <li>■ Disrespect: emotional hijack</li> <li>■ 7 practices or respect</li> <li>■ Giving respectful feedback</li> <li>■ Respect-building action plan</li> </ul>
<p><b>Clinic 9: Leading in Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Leadership choices in teams</li> <li>■ Entrusting teams to lead</li> <li>■ Empowering yourself</li> <li>■ Shared leadership strategies</li> <li>■ Self-managing behaviour</li> <li>■ Team accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Clinic 10: Cohesive Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cohesion – sticking together</li> <li>■ Team identity &amp; rapport</li> <li>■ Collective working concepts</li> <li>■ Obstacles to cohesiveness</li> <li>■ Contribution &amp; support</li> <li>■ Self-interest v. commitment</li> </ul>

## 9. Culture-Scans & Surveys



People often feel culture scans lend a degree of objective measurement to justify putting culture on the business improvement agenda.

Whatever form a scan takes, from focus group to formal survey, they're impressionistic. But they do help some to see the need to do something about culture and answer the question *“Why do we need to change the culture?”*

One thing culture scans all have in common, no matter what the method, is that they provide a way of involving everyone in seeing both good aspects of the culture you want to keep and the not-so-good parts of the culture you most need to work on...

### What is a culture scan?

Culture scan is a broad term we use for any imprint you take of your current culture. It doesn't have to be a big, formal survey. A scan can be as simple as running a series of sessions with groups of people to collect their impressions of features and patterns in the culture.

The aim of any culture scan is to:

- Find out what the current culture is like – to identify its constructive or dysfunctional characteristics
- Assess the difference between actual and desired characteristics – what we call “culture-gaps”.
- Set direction-markers to culture-building actions and strategies you might take.

Scans can give you a foundation not-so-much-of facts (since you're dealing with peoples' impressions) but of shared perspectives. They can help you:

- Stop leaping ahead into changing bits of the culture before you know what's really going on with it.
- See how well positioned your culture is to support achieving your organisation business objectives
- Stimulate ongoing dialogue about the kind of culture you want and what to do to revitalise culture

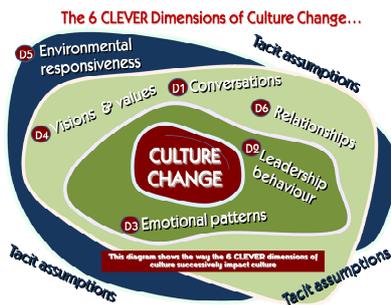
Over-surveyed staff often cynically say management's doing *“another one of those culture surveys”*, muttering that nothing ever seems to come from them.

Conducting a culture scan means committing yourself to action of some kind. Not following through on them dashes expectations, increases anxiety and resistance and confirms the view of cynics that you're not serious about culture change. So unless you're committed to action – better not to start.

*Let's take a look at our approach to culture scans next.*

**“No survey will cover all the relevant areas...You don't know what to ask, what questions to put in the survey, because you don't know at the outset what issues/dimensions are the important ones.”**  
Ed Schein in *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*

## 10. Scanning your Culture



As well as our range of culture-building clinics for leaders and teams, we conduct culture scans in-house. We use the call-sign CLEVER to articulate the 6 major dimensions our culture scan covers - and we can customise them to your cultural concerns and context.

A constructive culture is well-adapted. It fosters behaviour patterns that are ethical, healthy and emotionally positive and work climates that are uplifting and inspiring. There's a good fit between the aspirations of leaders, staff and the organisation visions, values and operating principles...that gives people latitude to learn, innovate and develop strategies that are successful...

Before deciding to run a culture scan, you need to be clear on what the purpose is, what you hope to gain and whether you even need to do it.

The next questions that arise include “Do I use a formal written survey or more conversational means like focus groups?” and “What do I want to measure or find out about in a Scan?”

### What’s the best approach?

Culture Scans, as we’ve said, can take different forms and go into different levels of depth and detail. You can run a full scan that covers everyone in your workplace or work with selected samples or cross-sections. Main methods include:

- Culture change focus-groups**, facilitated face-to-face, using a simple, standard set of probe questions
- An informal survey**, giving people a scaled-back set of written questions can be used as follow-up
- A full scale written survey** administered either online and/or in paper format.

Full-scale surveys can collect more information in a more structured way and lead to more detailed analysis. More depth though, still may not guarantee you’ll detect every important cultural pattern. Often, face-to-face, group-based methods uncover things full-scale survey miss.

We recommend combining a formal scan with face-to-face culture scan groups. This yields more information than a conventional survey. It also provides a way to cross-check data for accuracy, reliability and frequency.

Culture Scans we run use 6 key dimensions to measure characteristics of constructive or dislocated cultures, which we sum up under the call-sign CLEVER:

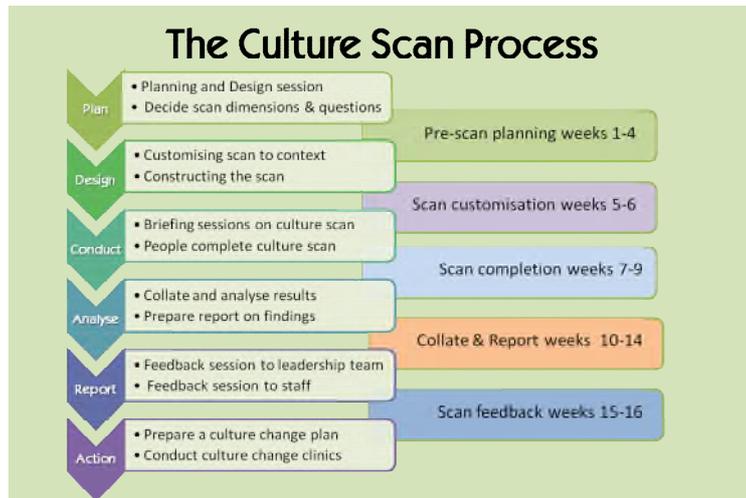
- C**onversations and collaboration
- L**eadership behaviour, style and fit
- E**moional climate, types of emotions and patterns
- V**isions, values, directions: clarity and alignment
- E**nvironmental responsiveness and adaptiveness
- R**elationships – quality, nature and degree of rapport

While we use the CLEVER dimensions, organisations can adapt, modify, delete or add to these to suit their own culture context. As part of customisation, we:

**A dislocated culture struggles to adapt. It promotes unhealthy behaviour patterns that are emotionally disruptive, oppressive and demotivating. There is a lack of alignment between the aspirations of staff, leaders and organisation visions, values and operating principles and conformity, stagnation, lack of learning and coercive leadership disempowers, stunts strategy and threatens organisational survival...**

- ❑ Tailor questions and change wording of statements to reflect your organisation context
- ❑ Can work with a design group to create customised questions or dimension unique to your culture

A full-scale survey-style scan generally takes between 12 to 16 weeks, depending on the size of your organisation and scope of the scan we construct together. This diagram outlines the steps we usually work through:



- ❑ Culture Scan Design Meeting to discuss your needs
- ❑ Customisation of Scan in consultation with you
- ❑ Construction of the scan (sometimes piloting this with a sample group is recommended)
- ❑ Appoint your scan co-ordinator/administration team
- ❑ Develop a communications strategy for the scan
- ❑ Conduct culture scan briefings and distribute scan
- ❑ Collation, analysis and report-back on results
- ❑ Feedback - presentation of results and key findings
- ❑ Scan Feedback: open communication back to all staff post the culture survey is essential to build trust, openness and a commitment to change.

The most important ingredient for a successful culture scan is the ability to engage and involve people who live and work in the culture to tell you what they think is going on and get their perspectives and experiences of what it's like for them. This means making it safe to be candid.

There's an array of matrices and multi-dimensional cultural surveys, not to mention lots of impressively sexy, scientific-looking cultural reporting mechanisms to choose from – but will it really tell you much about the state of your culture? We think the answer is, cautiously ...yes – but with some conditions you should best be 'eyes-open' about...

**In the end, you can't just rely on your impressions of the culture, those of a senior executive team or a consultant any more than you would necessarily rely solely on the opinions of the people in the culture themselves.**

## 11. Culture Change Milestones



Although there's never one 'right-place' to start, any culture change effort needs a roadmap of steps and a process to follow.

We won't go into detail here but we've briefly listed a few broad milestones that a sound culture change process will probably pass through as you begin to make headway.

When you boil it down, culture change is about replacing old habits of being, doing, thinking and behaving - and it's sometimes easier to start with the behaving and work down to the thinking later...

### What are some of the milestones in changing a culture?

Different workplaces take different approaches, so the order of some milestones may vary. But we think the main ones are:

- ❑ **Get buy-in to the culture change agenda.** It starts with senior leaders being on-board, having strategic discussions about culture and staging awareness sessions to learn about and explore key culture concepts and impacts.
- ❑ **Create a shared vision.** Again, this begins with leaders working on a vision of the culture they want. But it can't stop there. To be truly shared, lots of others need to get behind it
- ❑ **Scan the current culture.** An obvious place to start is to find out what shape the current culture's in. Doing a scan or survey won't change anything though unless you act on it.
- ❑ **Unearth tacit assumptions.** The deep beliefs people hold are at the core of culture and the biggest influence on how they think and behave. Digging deep to unearth them is something you continue to do over the entire process.
- ❑ **Culture change specifications.** You can't re-jig the whole culture. You choose which bits to work on and specify more exactly the new behaviour and thinking you want to graft on
- ❑ **Culture change conversations.** Continuously conducting conversations and dialogue about vision, purpose, values, obstacles and perspectives is crucial for a good process
- ❑ **Culture Change Plans.** You've been doing this informally from the start, but at some stage you need to formalise your approach and say what actions and steps you plan to take
- ❑ **Distribute the load.** You or a small group initially carry the load but sooner-not-later you need to enlist others share it
- ❑ **Taking action.** You take action to get people behaving or thinking differently and trying new ways. To change culture long term, the new ways have to become the new habit

**"It is not enough to change strategies, structures, and systems, unless the thinking that produced those strategies, structures and systems also changes..."**  
Peter Senge in *The Dance of Change*

Finally, let's not forget cultural resistance. It's something that preoccupies leaders. You will encounter it and you do need a plan of action to move past it.

## 12. Taking on Culture Change



To change old habits you need to change thinking that perpetuate them. Don't underestimate how powerful learning can be in changing old ways and helping people learn new ones. Run a series of culture-building clinics to show people new skills...

Be the change you want to see in others. Consistent modelling of new behaviours potently signals things are changing. As the agent of change, you lead the way through example – and publicly recognise others who are breaking the old cultural mould too.

Culture change isn't for the faint-hearted. It takes courage, persistence, determination and a really thick-skin at times. The old culture-carriers will do almost anything to stop you – sabotage, personal attack, threats. The hope is tactics like these will wear you down - you'll see the error of your ways if things get punishing enough. That's when you need to step-up...

Some tips in terms of taking on culture change....

- ❑ **Act fast, keep up the pace.** Traditional wisdom says culture change takes years. Don't be lulled into that timeframe.
- ❑ **Take actions that break with past ways** of doing change. You'll have difficulty creating a new culture if you do it in the comfortable ways of old. And **don't** allow the current culture to dictate how it should be done either. That's a bit like inviting your enemy to draw up your battle plans.
- ❑ **Don't waste time over-analysing current culture.** You're changing it so why bother. Focus on the culture you want.
- ❑ Make big impressions early. Meek little adjustments slow momentum and allow the current culture time to defuse the change. Do things that destabilise the current culture so it can't reconstitute and re-absorb your change.
- ❑ **Boldly deconstruct.** Sometimes, the only way to shake a culture out of complacency is to dismantle and reconstruct quite a lot of it – values, assumptions, systems or structures.
- ❑ **Don't shake too many things at once though.** Choose a few sacred cows, particular rituals, or structures and change them. Don't demolish everything. If you do, you may remove important foundations you need to build on later
- ❑ **Be persistent and expect flack.** People will question your motives, accuse you of being ego-driven, selfish, uncaring, insensitive or even stupid. Stick to your purpose.
- ❑ **Reward new behaviours.** Supporting the new culture needs rewarding. Sticking with the old needs to get painful. Change reward systems to recognise behaviours you want and consistently confront ones you don't.
- ❑ **Communicate** in all sorts of ways and don't rely on standard channels. Get conversations out of corridors and into public all-in-the-one-room forums. Keep dialogue going non-stop.
- ❑ **Involve everyone some way in taking action.** Empower those who are positively charged, sideline the negative.
- ❑ **Accept some casualties.** It's tough. Sometimes of course, you don't have to get rid of the people – just their behaviour.

## 13. Our Track Record



Bill also presents key-note talks and fast-track sessions on all kinds of topical themes. He's been a frequent speaker at the Brisbane Leadership Lounge. Download his lounge presentations key-notes – including one on *Leading Culture Change* - by clicking [here](#)

As a facilitator, Bill has a down-to-earth, out-going, relaxed style; personal mastery of a wide range of facilitation processes and works comfortably with people from all levels and backgrounds. He's also an experienced and prolific writer of process guides and toolkits to support workplace change and learning.

We've been helping senior leaders, project groups and workteams renovate their cultures since the 1990's. Our lead consultant, Bill Cropper, has a wealth of on-the-ground experience with organisational renewal, strategic change, leadership learning, team building, work process redesign, coaching and culture change in all sorts of work settings and cultural contexts.....

### We've helped with culture change in many different ways...

...in many different organisations ranging from roads, rail and revenue to health, police and construction. We've run *Culture-Building* clinics for hundreds of leaders from schools, hospitals, government departments and local councils. Some of our most recent activities include:

- ❑ Facilitating cultural revitalisation and a customised culture scan for an environment management authority
- ❑ Working with the senior management team of a state justice department on leading strategic culture change
- ❑ Culture change workshops and tailored design of culture change process guides and training of internal culture change facilitators for an engineering services group
- ❑ Assisting in developing a team behaviour charter as part of culture change for a large metropolitan hospital
- ❑ Strategic leadership and culture development in a major science-based research institute
- ❑ Commissioned to design and run a series of culture-building clinics for clinicians in a state health authority

We've been preferred providers of change, leadership and culture services for many public sector agencies, who have benefited from our versatile process consulting, facilitation, training and change design capabilities.

We're robust advocates of participative approaches to change, and our assignments consistently embrace coaching and skills transfer as a fundamental strategy in strengthening the learning capacity of organisations to be more self-reliant in managing their own change processes. We're keen believers in the benefits of conversational coaching, emotional intelligence, cultural renewal and the application of Peter Senge's 5 Learning Disciplines to strengthen leadership-learning and culture change capacity in organisations.

**Why not start a conversation with us about your culture change action plans.** Contact Bill Cropper on 07-4068 7591 Mob: 0429-687 513 Email: [BillC@thechangeforum.com](mailto:BillC@thechangeforum.com).