

Transformative cultural change depends on integrating nine organizational systems that address the complexity of the required adaptations and build the foundation necessary for future success.

Leading Cultural Transformation

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The cries for cultural change can be heard from Wall Street to street police, from company boardrooms to classrooms, and from service organizations to government service agencies. When glaring systemic performance outages occur, the present culture may indeed not match the strategy required to move forward.

Culture change is challenging. In error, it is often viewed as an initiative. The top leader may be replaced or a new company policy coupled with training introduced. Then, before long the unwanted cultures reappear.

Features of Cultural Transformation

The trouble with shallow culture initiatives is the lack of real transformative change. There are three underlying features of cultural transformation—the nine organizational systems, the complexity of culture, and the building blocks of culture as described in the following sections. If these features are not taken into consideration, superficial attempts at culture transformation fail.

The Nine Organizational Systems

Culture is but one of nine major systems of an organization. Culture is far from embodying all of an organization. Other factors can prohibit the desired change.

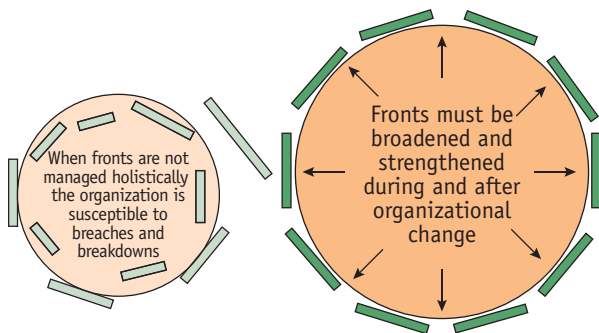
Nine organizational systems, or fronts, need to be led to accomplish performance transformation and growth. Leadership must understand which organizational front to leverage at which time to achieve success in guiding performance improvement efforts within the organization. When culture is singled out as a major weakness, take into account the impact of the other fronts. For instance, failure to measure culture (measurement front) can have feel-good culture initiatives produce little long-term benefits. On the other hand, utilizing only extrinsic motivation versus doing the hard lifting of highlighting intrinsic motivation (motivation front) will have any desired culture transformation to be short lived or worse, misdirected. The fronts require a holistic leadership approach as shown in Figure 1.

Consider the interdependencies of the following fronts in the design of an organizational culture transformation:

- *Planning.* This includes all strategic planning systems: strategic, performance improvement, business, marketing, operations, human resources, and daily planning. Are these planning systems in place and operational, efficient, and effective?
- *Measurement.* The system for sharing multiple levels of performance,



Figure 1: Managing Fronts



including systematic identification of information to support performance improvement.

- **Culture.** The shared values, beliefs, and norms identifying the organization. The espoused culture may be quite different than the culture in practice.
- **Motivation.** The organizational system including inducements, recognition, and rewards. It also includes the process for bringing intrinsic motivation to the surface—the consciousness of choice, creation, and contribution as it pertains to life’s purpose.
- **Education, training, and development.** The system of reaching the knowledge and skills to everyone in the organization so they can personally and professionally improve.
- **Infrastructure.** The system or internal structure by which the organization conducts business including organizational charts, position descriptions, functional responsibilities, and informal relationships.
- **Technology.** The system for managing “how we accomplish things,” including methods, procedures, protocol, hardware and software, and tools.
- **Politics.** This area involves the informal aspects of performance management including the proactive management of key stakeholders’ needs and expectations; anticipation of criticism and boundary spanning; internal communication; and working power bases. It takes into account the power systems surrounding the organization, and the realization that those systems can be either formal and informal, as well as internal or external. Getting something done in the organization depends in part on the navigation of these power systems.
- **Communication.** The system of sharing information among groups and individuals to facilitate coordination, understanding, and alignment.

The Complexity of Culture

Culture is complex and represents a wicked problem set. Tackling culture as a linear problem is rarely successful. This is because it is a complex (beyond complicated) problem with the characteristics of wicked problems. Consider the characteristics of wicked problems and how they are embedded in cultural change:

- Stakeholders have radically different world views and different frames. Organizational culture has individuals forming the foundation. How similar are the individual cultures?
- Constraints and resources change over time. As performance requirements shift, how resilient is the culture?
- The problem is never solved definitively. The problem has no stopping rule. Solutions are not right or wrong; think better or worse. Developing culture must be an ongoing endeavor.
- Every problem is essentially novel and unique. Duplicating a benchmarked culture is not straightforward.
- It requires many to change mindsets and behaviors. This is the essence of a culture change.
- The problem is not fully understood until after a change has been successfully employed. Full problem definition is lacking. Describing the base issues with the current culture is difficult.
- Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem. Demonstrated culture is connected to other fronts.

Viewed as a wicked problem, the futility of imposing a few behavioral mandates on the organization becomes clear. No wonder culture change can be frustrating! This is not to say, however, that cultural transformation is unattainable. It takes deep conversation in the planning and constant adjustments along the road.

The Building Blocks of Culture

Culture has several building blocks. Culture has a composition, and rarely does a blow at unwanted behaviors shift the underlying issues grounding the existing culture. View the model shown in Figure 2 and identify the base, mindsets, and paradigms. How individuals think, view the world, and their beliefs form the base. To make culture change even more daunting, many people are partially conscious at best of these behavioral sources inside of themselves.

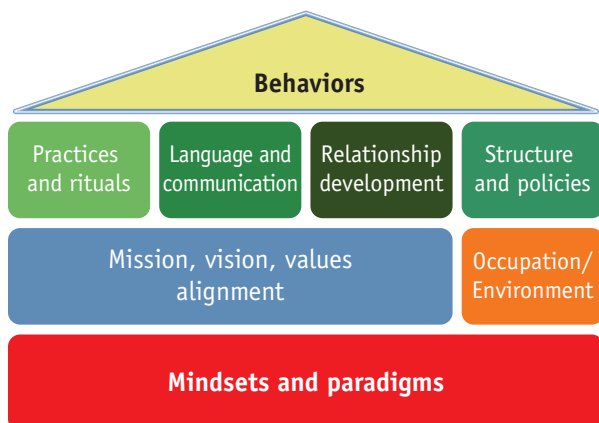
Working the base, therefore, calls for a different approach than changing policies and procedures or structure. When you view the foundation as composed of individual mindsets and beliefs, instructional training aimed at indoctrination is ineffective. Encouraging people to reflect upon their thinking and the nature of their spirits is essential, however. When people become conscious, their ability to change increases dramatically.

It is important to note that it isn't about changing everything. In the article "Cultural Change That Sticks," the authors speak to the need to honor the strengths of the existing culture and leveraging the employees who are already aligned with the strategy and desired culture. Absolutely acknowledge the great portion of the existing culture that is working—or you may lose those aspects in the midst of the change.

From the base, the next layer includes the block of expressed mission, vision, and values and the level of both personal alignment (within the individual) and structural alignment (within the organization). In short, ask if the expressed mission, vision, and values align with the actual behaviors.

Also found at this layer are occupational or environmental culture influences. An occupational culture example is law enforcement. Authors Stephen Mastrofski and James Willis outline the peculiarities of a police culture. Character traits of suspicion and isolation are common, resulting from constant possibility of physical danger when interacting with the public and the need to maintain their authority. This occupational overlay, therefore, impacts police organizations. Likewise, nursing has a particular cultural occupational overlay. In addition, the environment brings a cultural overlay.

Figure 2: Cultural Building Blocks



Caring for vulnerable patients daily and the desire to remove physical pain can have a marked impact on organizational expectations and the type of healthcare leadership sought.

The third layer is composed of organizational influencers; powerful tools of change if the base is addressed. Finally, behaviors emerge from the whole speaking to the cultural reality.

From Theory to Practice

Located in the southern African region, the Republic of Botswana is a marvelous place, with a population of around 2 million in a country the size of France. Botswana has produced some of the best public service organizations on the continent, benchmarked by other countries, but problems with the country's prison system needed to be addressed. In short, the organization needed to step up its game as measures demonstrated (escapes, recidivism, and officer performance). The Botswana Prison Service (BPS) has 21 prisons and custody units incarcerating under 4,500 people, two detention centers for illegal immigrants, and just over 2,000 staff.

Much work had been accomplished along many fronts such as vocational skills training (top-notch prison college established), extrinsic motivation (pay issues addressed), and measurement system improvement (performance evaluation created across all government ministries). Unfortunately, the leap in performance needed was not forthcoming. Colonel Silas Motlalekgoosi, commissioner of prisons and rehabilitation, requested help in making a transformational change. He and other executive leaders had participated in the reforms work, leadership development, benchmarking, and performance coaching conducted by my organization.

After a situation appraisal and analysis of the whole system, the inhibiting factor was found to be leadership culture. Beginning in 2012 we embarked upon a focused cultural change. It was directed at the executive and senior leadership levels. The desired change was to rid the service of a victim-like mental stance and instead have leadership see causal relationships to the current performance, then aggressively initiate improvement projects. Key leadership issues included the low causal mental stance, low initiative, and resentment of believing to be less of value than two sister organizations, Botswana Defense Force and Botswana Police Service. Also, a lack of inventiveness and sustained drive in accomplishing substantial improvements was noted.



With a focus on the foundation level of cultural building block, mindset, and paradigms, we engaged in a learning dialogue with leaders. From week-long workshops to individual coaching sessions, the sources of individual demonstrated behaviors were uncovered. Guided discovery areas included:

- The reason for initially choosing and remaining in prison leadership.
- Individual life planning including purpose/vision/value/objectives.
- Level of alignment of expressed life direction and that of the BPS.
- The reality of higher performance requirements.
- Productive mindsets.
- Transformational leadership characteristics and assessment.
- Occupational culture of prison work.

Especially effective were sessions with senior superintendents and superintendents resulting in

conscious behavioral changes. A sustained performance increase at this level was verified by executive leadership post interventions. The photo at left shows officers of the Botswana Prison System who were affected by this transformative cultural change.

Research conducted by team member Marvin Washington of the University of Alberta revealed a shift in leaders' positive feelings about change, their ability to make change happen, higher confidence in accomplishing significant change, and a better understanding of themselves. An increase in how to make change was also noted.

Botswana Prison Service's challenges demonstrated effective cultural transformation with an appreciation of its complexity, acknowledgment of the interactions with other fronts, and a focus at the source of cultural behaviors, mindsets, and paradigms.



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Stephen Hacker is a founding partner and CEO of Transformation Systems International, LLC. Previously he served as a senior leader with Procter & Gamble and later executive director of the Performance Center (a multi-university organizational research center). Hacker currently serves as past chair of ASQ and is an ASQ Fellow. The author of nine books, he consults with organizations across the globe. Contact him at hackers@performancecenter.org.