



BUILDING A VIABLE CULTURE CHANGE STRATEGY

**Ten Key Elements
For Successful Culture Change**

by

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The State of Culture Change Today

Many progressive organizational leaders are aware that attention to culture is important. Many want their cultures to be empowered, ethical, trusting, accountable, open, innovative, and motivating of high performance. Many more similar values could also describe qualities of these aspired cultures. However, naming and celebrating desired values is not adequate to changing current cultures or embedded behaviors.

Even those leaders who have undertaken one of the myriad culture surveys to discover the state of their current cultures do not automatically guarantee that their data will drive meaningful action. Changing culture, and sustaining that change, requires committed leadership and an overall culture change strategy that is supported fully and modeled by leaders until sustained action is achieved throughout the organization.

Building Your Overall Culture Change Strategy


The ten elements outlined in this eBook are all key to an overall culture change strategy. While culture change can be led as a concerted initiative, it is most effective when embedded into everything that is changing in the organization—structure, business processes, systems, technology, and so on. It therefore requires an over-arching strategy that ensures careful integration, governance and coordination with all other changes, led from the top.

Leaders who recognize culture change is required to support the future success of their enterprises need to generate full commitment among the leadership ranks to support that change from start to finish. This commitment must go beyond the usual head-nod agreement to fully aligning behind modelling the new cultural mindsets, behaviors and norms. The leaders then need to build an overall culture change strategy. While this is a clear deliverable, it should not be set up as a one-off initiative. It needs to be an official, integral part of the organization's overall transformation strategy.

A New Approach: Comprehensive and Proven

After forty years of supporting visionary leaders to transform culture, we have clearly seen what works and what doesn't. This eBook describes the ten most strategic elements for changing culture. These ten elements are the keys to successful culture change. They are not for the faint of heart, or those leaders only somewhat agreeable to change their culture or confused about what is required of them and their leadership team to support it.

Culture change cannot be delegated. It requires an "all-in" commitment from leaders, managers and your internal change support resources. Everyone has something to contribute and needs to pay attention and engage. You cannot incrementally baby-step or announce your way to a new culture. Posters, talking-head presentations, and employee sur-



An overall culture change strategy outlines guidelines and high-level actions to move the culture along.

veys, while helpful, are not sufficient. The elements we describe address all of what is needed for success. The key is how you deliver on each of them within your

overall culture change strategy and how well you can design these elements to be models of your desired culture.



The 10 Elements of a Culture Change Strategy

Before we get to the first element, ask yourself: “Who is going to lead this effort? Who will be its sponsor and champion? Who will devise your integrated culture change strategy tailored for your organization...someone who has the strategic thinking, authority and access to set up this effort for success and see it through?”

With that in mind, consider how to take on this essential work. If your transformation is

already underway, think about how to advance your current strategy by integrating your culture change work. Also, note that while we describe these elements in order, they are not meant to be rigidly sequential or linear. Several will likely be in motion simultaneously. It is important to understand them in their entirety to be able to create an integrated and viable culture change strategy.

1. Develop Conscious Change Leadership Capability

Leaders' misconception about culture and what it takes to change it is the #1 reason why culture change efforts do not effectively get off the ground. Your success will be based on your leaders' understanding of the dimensions of culture and the ability to see, design and navigate a transformational path to achieving your desired culture. The leaders themselves must change!

This element names the importance of leadership development that is unique to leading

transformational change successfully. This development supports them to expand their mindsets, develop their self-awareness so they can alter their habitual behavior, learn and use a strategic navigation system for designing and leading the transformation, and embrace a more inclusive and co-creative leadership style beyond command and control. This is deep personal change and embodies the goals of Conscious Change Leadership. [Learn more about the power and focus of Conscious Change Leadership.](#)



Supporting this process of personal development is necessary to get leaders' full attention, change how they see the organization and each other, and up-level their leadership style and strategies to reinforce the aspired culture. Developing Conscious Change Leadership capability is a process that will positively affect leaders' teamwork, performance, and oversight of all other change efforts and

operational priorities, guaranteed. As Einstein so brilliantly said, "You cannot solve a problem from the same level of consciousness that created it." Developing Conscious Change Leadership capability super-charges all change strategies by raising the thinking and increasing the perspective of leaders. This is foundational.

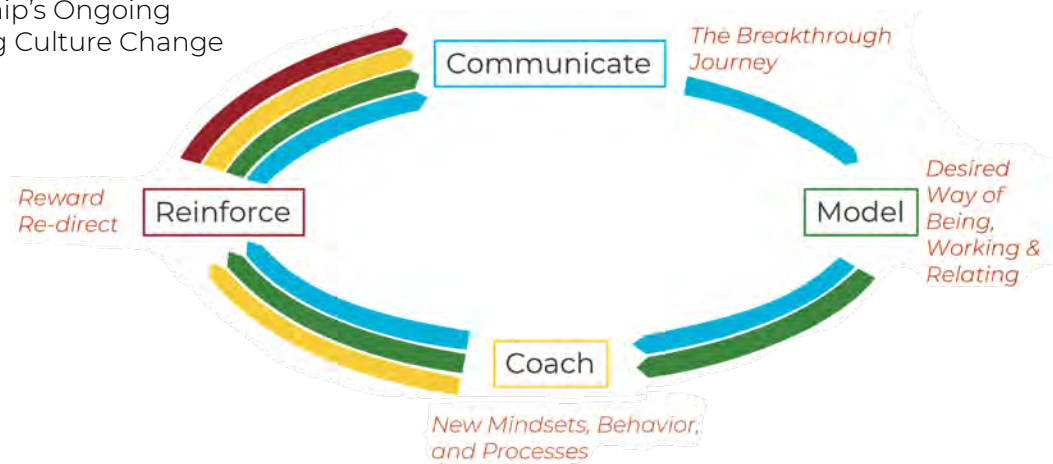
One aspect of Conscious Change Leadership is the role leaders play in orchestrating culture change. Figure 1 shows a graphic of the transformational role leaders need to take on.

Leaders will likely need to be developed to understand and become comfortable with their Communicate-Model-Coach-Reinforce responsibilities. Think of the power of your senior leaders modelling and coaching others to embody the new cultural ways of thinking, communicating and working. This has a

high-leverage impact on the credibility of the effort and the leaders!

How do you do this? It requires an ongoing development process; it is not a one-time training event. The process includes personal reflection and self-awareness, training, facilitation, coaching, and agreements on how the leaders will operate and lead differently. It requires sustained support by trained facilitators that have the level of expertise leaders will respond to without hesitation

Fig.1. Leadership's Ongoing Role in Driving Culture Change



2. Clarify the Story of Your Breakthrough Journey

No doubt, culture change is a journey, and it typically means significant change. For this reason, we call changing it a Breakthrough Journey. Determining your Breakthrough Journey is perhaps the most time intensive and critical element for shaping the culture you want and the process for achieving it. Your overall culture change strategy will lay out the process—the HOW—you will undertake to clarify the three elements of your Breakthrough Journey. The three key pieces of work are:

- The Vision of your desired culture, which portrays in compelling terms what you intend to create for the organization to thrive in its new reality
- Your case for change, which is your clear reasoning why changing culture is so es-

sential to the future success of the organization and what makes it transformational

- Your overall culture change strategy—how—you will accomplish changing your culture. This eBook outlines what goes into this overall strategy.

This story of your Breakthrough Journey—the what, why and how—provides the strategic direction and guidance for everyone in your organization. When you officially launch the effort, you will communicate this story and the process for achieving it, hopefully in a style that captures your people’s attention, hearts and minds. This is your leaders’ first visible opportunity to model what they are asking of the organization.

Generating your aspired culture is perhaps the most influential aspect of this story. Mak-

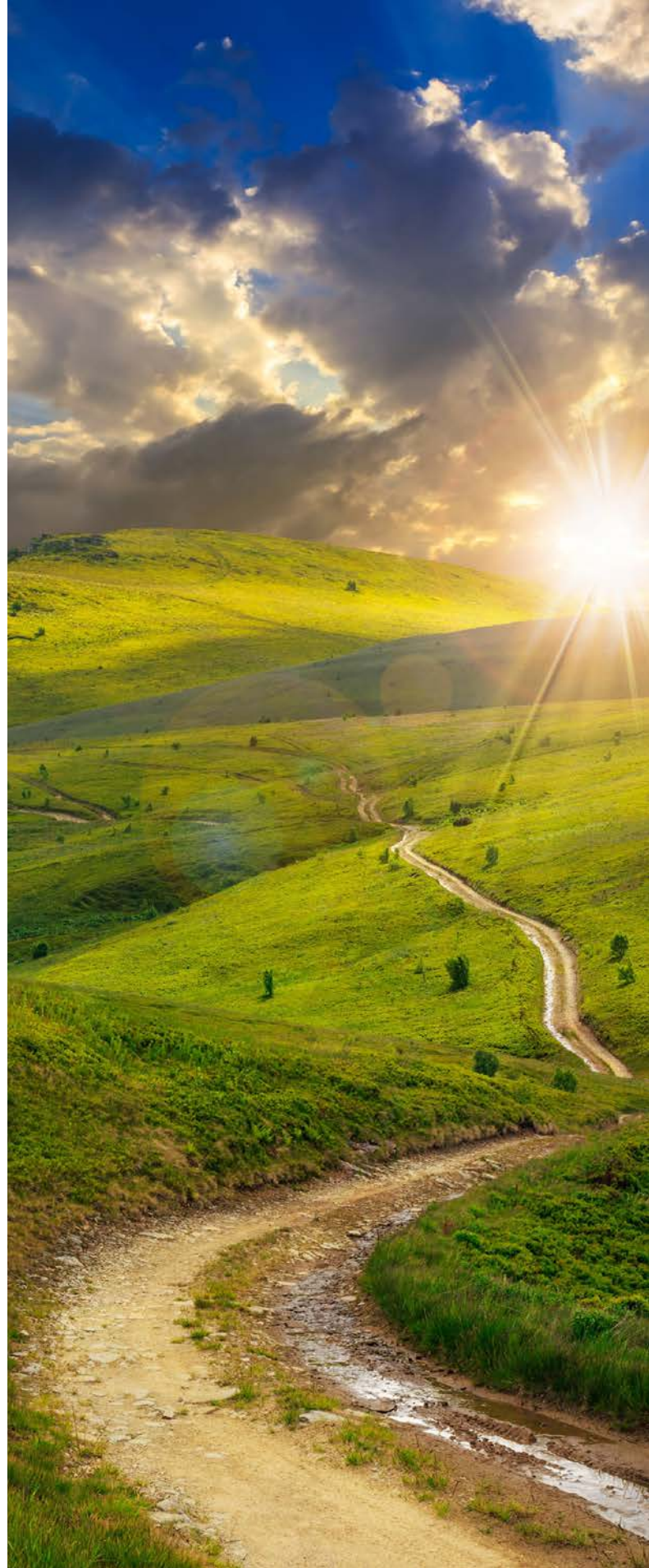
ing it clearly relevant to the future strength of the organization is essential. You will be using your vision throughout your change process. At this early stage, if you do not have your vision for the new culture clarified yet, you will communicate the process you will use for generating it, and then describe a clear strategy for how to promote your new vision when it is ready.

3. Align Leaders and Commit to the Journey

Culture change requires the alignment and commitment of leaders, from top to bottom. Ideally, you need a relentless sponsor and an executive team that holds themselves and other leaders accountable to communicate, model, coach and reinforce the new ways of being, relating and working. You might think it is easy to get agreement—the proverbial head-nod—but that is not alignment nor commitment. Commitment shows up when direct action is required, coaching is given or taken, and a course correction toward the desired norms is made visible and celebrated.

If you undertake the first element to develop Conscious Change Leadership outlined above, alignment and commitment will be generated and sustained through the development process, as it is one of the keystones of Conscious Change Leadership. And, because the organization's reality is dynamic and complex, sustaining alignment and commitment to changing culture over time is imperative, no matter what.

This is not to say that leaders cannot voice concerns, hesitation, or desire for a different direction along the way. As long as these voices are heard, collectively given due consideration, and dealt with in a constructive fashion, you can then re-align and re-commit to whatever new directions are decided. When it becomes time to review existing change initiatives for their impact on the desired culture, having real leadership alignment and understanding is imperative. In many cases, you will be adjusting scope and approach to support the culture change work required.



4. Ensure Leaders Model and Walk the Talk

Organizational change—especially culture change—requires personal change. We highlighted this in the first element about developing Conscious Change Leadership. Leaders must understand, agree with, and model the new way of being, working and relating as directed by your desired culture. This likely requires them to shift their mindsets and behavior.

When you are clear about the desired culture you envision, you will automatically begin to assess your current culture for what needs to change, which is the next element. It is imperative to give each leader the opportuni-

ty to reflect on how they personally need to think, talk and act differently, not just to represent the new culture in words, but to be the visible example of the new ways of being and new work practices. The earlier this happens in the process, the better, as actions are far more impactful than words.

This requirement and capability to model and walk the talk of your desired culture must be cascaded throughout your organization over time. Leaving pockets of old leadership styles where the old culture is communicated and reinforced will undermine your success. These pockets of old culture can be identified in the next element.



5. Assess Current Culture

When clarifying your Breakthrough Journey, you generated your case for change for your culture—why change. This part of your story points to what needs to change about your current culture. Now it is time to get specific and tangible about what actually needs to change.

There are many different culture assessments to help you get more specific about what you need to change in your current reality. They range from assessing qualities of culture, norms, values, leadership styles, mindsets and behavior. We use Human Synergistics' Organizational Culture Inventory. We also use the Being First tool, Indicators of Culture, that helps to define many aspects

of what is creating the current or old culture to be the way it is. Sample indicators include work practices, how decisions are made, how rewards and punishments are used, who gets what office, who gets a voice in meetings, how mistakes are treated, the direction of communications, and how information is handled. The more specific you can be, the easier it will be for people throughout the organization to see what needs to be different, why it is relevant to the business strategy, and what they need to do about it.

Because you have a vision of your desired culture and its rationale, your current culture assessment must give you useful, actionable data about what already supports the

aspired culture, what blocks it and must be dismantled, and what needs to be generated anew. You do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. Ensure that you identify the good news about your current culture as well and what is inhibiting your future. Obtaining clear and objective data about your current culture is critical to getting your lead-

ers and the workforce aligned to what needs to change about your organization and their ability to transform it.

Be cautious that your culture assessment is not done with blame or judgement. Doing it in light of what you are trying to create is essential. This is a great opportunity to engage your employees in the process.

6. Identify Breakthrough Targets

Once your current culture assessment is complete, there may be myriad aspects of your culture needing to be changed. This can be overwhelming and stop the process. You can't do it all at once!

Through a clear vision of your desired culture and an understanding of your current culture, you can identify the highest-leveraged breakthroughs needed in both the enterprise and local business units, departments and teams. Your breakthroughs might include systems, structure, business processes, technology, relationships and norms to transform your culture. These breakthrough targets are critical focus points for change. They inform and become the targets of your culture change strategy and drive its scope.

We emphasize breakthrough targets because you can't take on everything, and people need something they can get behind and be excited about. Your breakthrough targets must be relevant to the part of the organization they serve and have a clear connection to the vision of your aspired culture. Identifying your most important breakthroughs is senior leadership work as it relates to the enterprise. Then, lower levels of leadership and management work these targets within their part or level of the organization. Again, relevance to the work and the change is key here. Three to seven targets is plenty as a focus. Some may become change efforts themselves, and others may be embedded into other change work underway or planned.





7. Re-Align Enterprise and Business Unit Systems

This element assesses the alignment of all aspects of your organization as relates to supporting the new culture in all its ways. This may include, for example:

- how decisions are made
- how various business processes are designed and led, organizational structure
- how incentives and performance reviews are run
- how meetings and committees are structured and populated
- human resource policies

If any aspect of the organization is currently designed to work against the new culture, decisions need to be made about altering it and perhaps making it into an additional initiative within the scope of your overall transformation strategy. A full review of the organization in terms of what underlies the old culture is essential to do this work well.

This element enables you to line up change work across the enterprise, and within segments and levels of it, to collectively reinforce and advance the culture change process you have initiated. Pay special attention to your breakthrough target areas in reviewing the scope and impact of new and ongoing change initiatives, as these are your leverage points for furthering the desired culture. Clarify how you will coordinate this work within your overall culture change strategy.

Also, keep in mind that this element will require leadership alignment to get the support you need to realign any existing parts of the organization or projects to support the change in culture. Some projects may be far along in their plans and resist adjusting their scope and strategy. Their sponsors, on behalf of their full commitment to the new culture, may need to assist this to take place so you are leveraging the whole system and every change project to support the aspired culture.

8. Ensure Your All Strategic Initiatives Address Cultural Imperatives and Model Your Desired Culture

Your breakthrough targets for culture and assessment of the whole system will likely influence your ongoing or upcoming strategic initiatives. The majority of these initiatives, although they may relate to tangible organizational or technical changes, impact culture, or are impacted by it. Some projects may not have any impact on the new culture, but many will, especially if they are reflections of the old culture. Their scope needs to include an assessment of cultural indicators and a change strategy and plan for addressing them. Your intention here is to use these initiatives to make conscious progress toward your breakthrough targets. Review, re-purpose or expand the scope of existing initiatives to support the culture change.

Sample cultural indicators are noted above. They become cultural imperatives if they are make or break factors in the adoption and sustainment of project outcomes. Ensure that your project teams diligently plan the specifics of how they will handle cultural imperatives as part of their project plans from the beginning, starting with an assessment of how the current culture, in all its forms, may block their ability to achieve and sustain their project outcomes.

Remember that culture work is not a “bolt-on” addition to project plans, particularly if attention to culture is delayed until after deployment. It needs to be embedded into the project strategy and plan from the start. Include metrics in your project reviews to ensure that real, observable progress is being made, and hold leaders accountable to staying on top of their culture priorities.

When you design each project’s process to address your cultural imperatives, be conscious of the style with which you set up and execute these actions. Your process must model the desired culture as much as possible.

Consciously or not, people watch how leaders lead and how strategic initiatives are managed to pick up cues of what is acceptable and not acceptable in the culture. Your project leads and team members may be going along as they habitually do on projects, and not pay attention to how what they are doing and communicating reflects the current versus the new culture. For instance, they may be making decisions without any input from stakeholders, and not thinking about the negative impact of that on their end-users to feel they have a valued contribution to make.

Being conscious of impacts is an essential part of this element! Make the process, style, out-bound communications and engagement events be conscious reflections of your aspired culture. Your highly visible, strategic initiatives must model – just like your leaders – your desired culture in how they are planned, launched, designed, implemented and continuously improved. Otherwise, people will not believe the culture change is real. As subtle as this sounds, it has great impact on the credibility of the culture change effort.



9. Re-Align How Teams and Departments Work throughout the Organization

People's moment-by-moment experience of culture occurs in how work is performed and how people relate with each other and their supervisor. With leaders modeling a new way of being, working and relating, operational teams must co-create required changes in their relationships, work systems, communications, meetings, processes and technology to align their daily experience to the desired culture.

While this element can be a part of assessing the alignment of the whole organization, it is a more detailed version and is best accomplished through mid-managers working in partnership with their teams and organizations. Once you have done your current state assessment against your aspired culture and communicated your breakthrough targets, managers can begin to work with their people to identify observable ways they can make adjustments in support of the new culture. Keep your breakthrough targets in

mind when supporting managers to do this work.

The targets can provide clear direction and minimize the danger of overwhelm and confusion about what to focus attention on. If the breakthrough targets are not relevant to a manager's team, the team should generate their own breakthrough targets that are relevant. Use of the cultural indicators would be helpful to support their selection.

Managers can set specific culture change goals with their teams and monitor them over time. They can plan discussions to generate creative solutions, and identify rewards and real examples to demonstrate progress and reinforce the new culture. It is critical that managers understand how important they are in achieving and sustaining the new culture. They are key to making the culture conversation ongoing, safe, open and positive.





10. Launch and Leverage a Culture Champion Network

So far, we have described most of the culture work being accomplished through projects and within operational teams. An additional element to keep the momentum and energy going is to create a network of influence leaders from every area and level of the organization to be Culture Champions. This is key to ensuring the whole system is engaged.

Culture Champions function as two-way communicators to and from the workforce, commitment-builders, advisers to work team leaders and project teams, supporters of adoption by the workforce, and celebrators of successes. They can also be keen observers of the subtle ways the old culture is hanging on and needs to be made visible so these ways can be changed to support the aspired culture. Champions can be the ones to identify and call out examples of “old” culture in contrast with “new” culture mechanisms and behaviors. They need to be able to do this with compassion, lightness, and a “no blame; no shame” style. They are culture champions, not culture “cops.”

This network is typically comprised of early adopters. Once identified, they must be developed and supported so they can communicate-model-coach-reinforce the Breakthrough Journey and your desired culture throughout the change process. Plan gatherings, communicate regularly, and keep them visible and energized.

In Summary

The elements described here are key to creating an overall culture change strategy. It is important for senior leaders to understand the big picture of all the elements so they can engage in those they feel are most critical to their overall transformation strategy.

Consider each one in light of its value to the overall change journey and in particular to identifying, supporting and ensuring a successful and sustainable culture change. Pay special attention to the leadership development piece.

Leaders need to understand how important they are to making culture change believable, achievable and sustainable.



About Being First

Being First is a Breakthrough company. Founded in the 1980's by Drs. Dean Anderson and Linda Ackerman Anderson, we provide advanced expertise in personal and organizational transformation.

We open leaders' minds, develop their self-mastery and equip them with the advanced Conscious Change Leadership skills to transform themselves, their organizations, communities and cultures.

For forty years, we've been pioneering a new field of study – Conscious Change Leadership – that develops “transformational superpowers:”

- **Conscious** – “Vertical” leadership development that produces greater mindfulness and self-mastery
- **Change** – Strategies and methodologies for designing and leading organization and culture transformation
- **Leadership** – Co-creative leadership styles that unleash human and organizational performance

We are Strategic Advisors to the C-Suite, and provide an integrated System of Transformation to your executives, change leaders and internal consultants that includes strategic advising and consulting, training and development, coaching, methodology, tools and assessments.

We partner with our clients, and customize everything to their exact needs to fit the scope and scale of their required transformation to Achieve Breakthrough.

For more information, please visit BeingFirst.com or call us at +1 970.385.5100.

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