

# Key Findings - In Great Company Research UnLocking the Secrets of Cultural Transformation



Your nearly foolproof guide to changing  
cultural norms in groups, organizations  
and corporations.

## **The Power of Constructive Cultures**

The more constructive the culture, the greater the financial integrity and other performance measures.

- The leader and the leadership team have the greatest impact on culture.
- Constructive cultures are directly proportional to the constructive attitudes and behaviours from leadership.
- The more constructive the leader, the more constructive the culture.
- The more constructive the culture, the fewer fears exist within it. A “fearless” organization ignites and unleashes greater innovation, creativity, collaboration and productivity.
- A constructive culture is directly proportional to the ability of an organization to keep its promises, financial integrity, brand, loyalty, quality, employees and customer satisfaction.
- Highly constructive cultures transcend typical organizations to a level we identify as “inspiring.”

## **Why Transform?**

Leaders who understand that the journey of personal transformation is an evolutionary process are most comfortable with this commitment and have the “stick-ability” when the resolve is needed. We believe in order to be successful, organizations have no choice but to change. The world is moving and shifting fast and executives know it. Increasingly, CEOs are questioning the incessant reorganizing, reengineering, and restructuring in the name of efficiency.

Conventional wisdom says that the right business structures will provide organizations what they need to succeed and sustain. Strategies and plans that should work instead fall apart, yielding less-than expected results. Worse, many top managers and teams struggle to agree on outcomes, or even common ground for moving forward. Skilled individual leaders with impressive track records fail to collaborate. Instead, they continue to be constrained, operating in silos and defaulting to traditional boundaries and turf battles.

In short, many organizations are stuck. Frustrated executives work harder and longer. People at every level are overwhelmed, guarded and cynical.

*"Organizational culture change is not for the faint of heart or the quick change artist. Serious change demands a coordinated plan and a serious commitment from all."*

## Lessons From Our Experience

We are living in a time when more change is occurring and it's moving faster than at any other time in human history. If you think you can stay locked into the status quo, within the conventions of today's current realities, look again. In so many places in our society and in our organizations, change is needed and the nudge and impetus for change is now coming from so many different directions. Being present, attuned and connected to the realities of the future and how to set yourself up for success is easier when the people are align with cultural norms that support "thinking and behaving" constructively. Being locked into the defensive norms and strategies of the past causes too much stress, anxiety and grief.

Change, after all, means doing something differently and it's a lot easier to embrace proactive and self-lead change than to have it thrust upon you. But let's be honest - change is, and can be a very exciting and inspirational proposition when you are motivated to help evolve a lasting change in cultural norms.

We are grateful for our long-term partnership with Human Synergetics International that has allowed us to tap into their 45 year history of being a global leader on culture change. Below are twelve lessons from our local experience of over 25 years of embracing successful culture change processes right here at home. Together, we feel there is a really positive invitation in the air. Let's change now.



### 1. Slow Down to Collectively Engage

If a more collaborative, engaged and interdependent culture is required, how does the senior leadership team start to change culture? In a counterintuitive move, they need to slow down. Slowing down for collective engagement is a key principle for leading change. By giving time and attention to the attitudes, values and beliefs that underlie behaviour and decisions, senior and middle managers help the organization to be efficient and more flexible in the future.

Everyone involved is able to reflect on assumptions, understand problems more clearly, and integrate the perspectives of others. This creates a more accurate, focused and valuable decisions for strategy creation.

Time lost on the front end translates into speed further along in the process later on.

### What to do:

Slow down, engage the people around you and find a change process that works for you. (we happen to know where you can find one.) Slowing down is also a cultural stance embedded within the mindset and leadership style of self-actualization. It is a behaviour that is, in itself, a big change, and, at the same time, it fosters a desired culture change process where everyone can all get aligned around a unified approach that has clear and transparent goals and priorities you can all have confidence in.

## 2. Culture Follows the Leader

Organizational change requires leaders to personally transform and change. They need to role model the change process. Individuals must understand the focus of energy, clarity of a vision and the core values required for the future cultural state. This supports the interplay between individual development of personal mastery and the development of organizational mastery; deepening the sense of identity that is helpful in the new culture.

This is why successful change starts with an aligned and an all-in-senior leadership team. This commitment is critical for front line employees (where the culture impacts really sits) to live the new culture as it sends a message of trust, commitment and renewal.



### What to do:

Be present, be attuned, listen and be a solid witness. You can't change what you can not see. Being highly attentive to the behaviours and norms that need to change will allow leaders a deeper and more meaningful way to understand the story of how the current culture is playing out and their own personal impact on the culture.

Investing in leadership assessments that helps make things more transparent allows leaders to have the necessary feedback to feel grounded, accepted and safe while securing a more accurate perspective on their leadership style and contribution. This gives them clarity, healthy humility and the ability to muster up the courage to look at themselves and role model the change required in the new (ideal) culture.



## 3. New Mindsets; a New-Shared Language

Understanding the attitudes, values and beliefs of individual and organizational effectiveness is essential to ensuring the understanding and alignment of how people need to behave. By embedding a shared language and vocabulary into your day-to-day experiences, the required change in behaviour becomes more transparent and individuals are in a better position to provide feedback and support. This shared leadership approach throughout the organization advances both individual behaviour and collective leadership mindsets.

### What to do:

Ensure all leaders / managers understand the framework within the suite of tools used for culture change from Human Synergistic International. The OCI cultural assessment, the GSI group styles and the LSI leadership styles frameworks allow people to find new and refreshing ways to use a common language helpful to changing culture in practical ways.

## 4. Creating Safe Space

Feeling safe is transformative. Our nervous system is always on a quest for safety. Safety turns off the defences of our autonomic nervous system allowing people to engage constructively with others. The removal of existential threat is not sufficient to feel safe. Removal of threat is good, but not sufficient. Safety means that we are not in a chronic state of evaluation, nor are we overwhelmed with feelings of shame, blame and not meeting expectations. People need to feel safe to be in a constructive culture.



### What to do:

Understand the science of the polyvagal theory and how to apply practical ways to foster safety, trust and openness in the workplace. Safety start with leaders being more constructive and minimizing their own defensive styles.

Most people are comfortable talking about change when the following three vagal states and conditions are in place:

### 1. Social-Engagement

When we feel safe, the social engagement system unites the neural regulation of the face and voice with the heart and the breath, bringing people into functional calm and connection. This allows us to wear our hearts on our faces and in our voices where we can form reciprocal bonds required to collaborate on and within the change process.

### 2. Play

Most people love to play. Human beings have always enjoyed playing with ideas, concepts and new ways of doing things. When invited, people are way more open to be engaged, allowing them to be more social, mobilized and constructive. If it withdraws, play devolves to competition (win / lose) and unresolved conflicts. We view play as an essential ingredient in creating safe and trusting space.

### 3. Intimacy

Yes, get intimate. The right kind of workplace intimacy\* where people can be vulnerable, mediate their experiences, show compassion by truly connecting, so it is without fear: this gives rise to stillness, softens edges, and allows people to conform to new solutions together.

\* *intellectual intimacy (closeness in the world of ideas), creative intimacy (creating together), work intimacy (sharing common tasks), crisis intimacy (coping with problems) and spiritual intimacy (life ultimate concerns)*

## 5. Examine Assumptions

Hidden assumptions regarding the attitudes, values and beliefs of the old and new culture must be examined and talked about. Understanding the deeply ingrained assumptions and beliefs that underscore how we view the world and act within it need to be examined to create meaningful change. Results can only be achieved through team action and by understanding how behavioural norms exist within thinking styles, old hierarchy, status, and authority and control mechanisms.

### What to do:

Hold focus groups and get people talking, sharing and reflecting on the assumptions behind the current culture, explore pain points and options for moving forward.

## 6. Engage a Culture Change Committee - Share the Leadership

To understand how to transform organizational culture, it is vital to know how culture is formed in the first place, and how it evolves over time. Our own view is that corporate culture cannot be mandated from the top of organizations, but rather emerges from the shared experiences of those involved in the unfolding drama of organizational life.

In our experience, most in-depth and effective culture change processes take two to seven years pending on the size of the organization and the depth of the change and commitment required.

Empowering a coalition of change agents is needed to keep pace with rapidly changing realities. Empowering a culture change committee to align the leadership development and culture change initiatives ensures consistent and transparent communications and accountability. This creates a safe space for asking the hard questions and having constructive dialogue that is essential for helping transform culture.

It takes a disciplined and coordinated effort, too many leaders abandon along the way. This committee strengthen the resolve for all involved.



### What to do:

Get the right people on board. Invite approximately 10-12 people and secure members from the following:

1. A number of leaders from the management team.
2. A number of staff from across the organization.
3. Human resources and/or learning and development.
4. External third party consultation support.

(Peak Experiences)

## 7. Focus on Quick Wins by Listening, Engaging and Storytelling

### Celebrate Success

Support the change process with a collaborative team-based approach by getting early wins helps secure buy-in and strengthen internal motivations for others to get involved. By engaging and collaborating with people at all levels of the organization you can ensure you are getting the change down to the front lines - where it most often has the biggest impact on the customers' experience.

### What to do:

By remembering that everyone handles change a little differently, ensure high levels of inclusive by engaging people in setting and working on shared goals and priorities. By including the people most impacted by the change, they'll be more motivated to co-designing solutions and invest in securing quick wins that work for everyone.

## 8. Tapping the Wisdom of the Crowd - Collaboratively Exploring Systems Change.

The opportunities to release more productivity, innovation and successful change multiply when we begin to address and explore the culture from a systems framework.



Targeting change that will make the most difference can be best uncovered by listening and working closely with those who work within these systems everyday. Too often, the opinions of frontline people are put aside or dismissed, never to be seen again. Inclusive leaders, consider their employees feedback, look for consistent and key messages on how to make things better.

### What to do:

Listen in the hallways, in the parking lot, to the quieter members, or conduct short surveys... but in the end, simply engage with your co-workers. They will be keen to help. Ask people how they would tackle some of the most critical challenges facing the organization. Ask, really listen, repeat.

Their responses come from the world of the current culture and their special wisdom and ideas will make your strategies more robust. By listening and securing their feedback and implementing some of their ideas helps a great deal when you are looking for their buy-in and support for change.

## 9. Make Your Leaders Great

We don't believe in the mantra that people were born leaders. Too many leaders lead unconscious from old attitudes, values and belief systems that get in the way of their success and performance. Due to these insecurities, people often try too hard to "look good" (aggressive cultural norms) or to simply "be good" (passive cultural norms) even when they know highly engaging and successful cultures need their leaders to focus on "doing good." Old coping mechanisms and defensive behaviours cause way too much stress and anxiety and with the right support, most leaders want to drop these old thinking styles and move forward with a more constructive styles of leadership.

By providing peer and subordinate feedback through LSI 360's leadership assessment, you are providing leaders with the insight and enhanced self awareness to see what they are doing right and where they can make adjustments to align their leadership styles with the new culture. When skill gaps are identified, it is much easier to connect them up with the internal or external support to help them deepen the skills and motivations required to be highly effective as a leader.

### What to do:

Invest in LSI 360 Leadership Assessment and provide peer or third party coaching support where required. Then equip them with the insights, support and tools to understand the culture change roadmap - it's strategies, goals, and the desired impact and outcomes. Leading research on culture change reinforces that 360's leadership assessment tools are often the game changer in getting leaders to change behaviour and for the culture change process to take root.

## 10. Pull Influential Levers for Change

Too often leaders try pulling too many levers for change without linking the lever to the right gap in the cultural assessment. Key Levers:

A: Organizational Foundations (philosophies, vision, mission, core values and customer service orientation)

B: Job Design (organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, autonomy, significance, feedback and interdependence)

C: Goal Focus (strategic plan, operational goals, goal prioritization and key accountability measures)

D: Communications (meeting effectiveness, sharing ideas, opinions and information; overall communications)

E: Human Resource Management (training and development, selection / placement and empowerment opportunities)

F: Appraisal and Reinforcement (daily feedback, performance appraisals and the use of rewards / discipline)



### What to do:

Review your OCI culture assessment and decide how your organization could and should work to be more effective and then quantify the organization's ideal culture and pull the right levers for change to help bridge the gap. Once you pull the level, ensure you do the work in a timely manner. Then lock the change in place and support your people towards successful implementation.

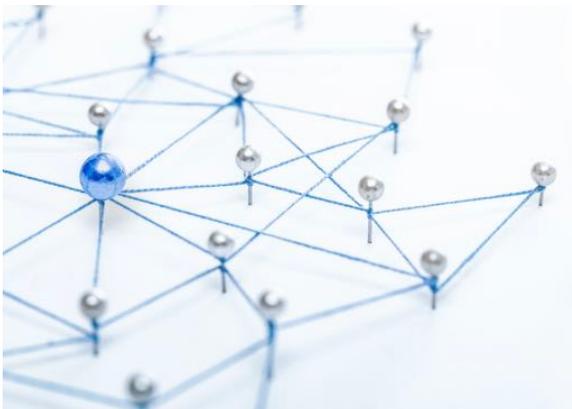
## 11. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

People get engaged in topics that are of interest to them and this is very true of workplace culture initiatives. When they are framed effectively, they can excite people to get on board and want to help the initiatives be successful. Purposefully use a shared vocabulary for talking about change, increase emotional involvement via stories, metaphors and images. Deepen understandings, generate excitement and momentum will all help bring the new culture to life.

### What to do:

Develop a consistent communications plan that will provide updates for leaders and their co-workers. Early on pull together clear explanations on the need for change, the type of results you're trying to achieve and why it's important. By reinforcing the links between the current and ideal culture and get the messages out there so people can have conversations that are open and transparent.

This approach does a lot for enhancing the trust process needed for successful culture change. Team learning and extraordinary results can only be achieved through team action, and the power of effective dialogue to make it happen.



## 12. Stay Cool in the Face of Resistance (Adaptability and Skickability)

Research has shown that 67% of all culture change initiatives falter. People know they need to work on ineffective cultural norms and behaviours but it's not an easy subject. They often stall because they just don't know what to do, where to begin or are afraid of resurfacing another change initiative.

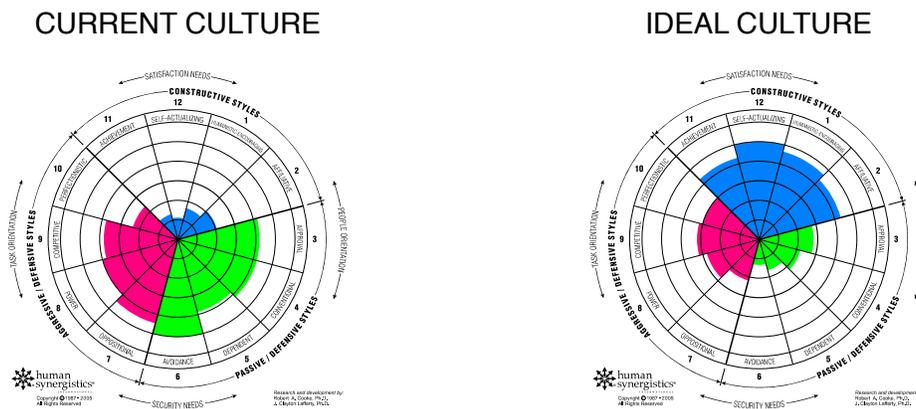
So if you want to minimize internal resistance to change, you need to demonstrate a calm, consistent and constructive approach and address challenges head on... and it's a lot easier when you have co-designed and invested in a united approach. Build in reality checks. Monitor what's working and adapt what is not so leaders don't get too tired and vulnerable and want to pulling the plug.

### What to do:

Culture change is hard and sometimes painful work. Don't hide in avoidance. Work together to solve common issues and pilot an area if that helps to move things along one step at a time. Leaders and managers can deepen their stickability by supporting their staff during the up's and down's of the change process by keeping their commitments public, listening and by making commitments they can uphold. Initially, it takes a lot more efforts before you start to see the real fruit of your labour. Remember change is often quick but it is the damn transition that's so hard. Showing a deep level of care, concern and active help through the hard times helps builds safety, trust and capacity for support in the change process. Remember to make time for a good ole' heart-to-heart conversation - it always goes a long way.

### Culture Can Be Changed

Culture need not be either 'airy fairy' or conceptual. It can be measured. It can be described. It can be quantified. It can be defined and it can be described. Here is an example of two cultures...



There is significant science behind the process of culture change. Don't ignore it and 'go it alone.' Find expertise and challenge assumptions. Remember that lack of acceptance of change is the single biggest reason that change programs fail. Research shows that more than 67% of major change initiatives fail to realize their intended gains, yet more than 95% of these had good solutions.

Remember culture is about the systems, structures and processes that have led people to believe they should behave in certain ways. Whilst it's seductive to focus on the behaviour, the focus in the early stages needs to be on the reinforcement systems that drive that behaviour. There is an invitation in the air, please drop us a line.