



By Dr Jaclyn Lee

8 STEPS TO CULTURE CHANGE

A TOOLKIT FOR SUCCESS

Culture Change is a complex process of transiting employees to a future desired culture that is aligned with organisational goals. How do you ensure that in a change project, everyone in the organisation subscribes to the new culture that you are setting and aligns with it? While not rocket science, there are some simple steps for those wanting to change culture. This is described in the 8 step method below.



Step 1:

Period of Assessment of current state: - First, a period of assessment is required, to identify which aspects of the organisation will need modification. An initial step toward cultural transformation is to define “what it means” and “what it doesn’t mean” for the organisation’s culture to change. Methods include using culture surveys to identify the current values and desired cultures. Other methods involve directly observing the material cultural objects and espoused values within the workplace, and inferring how these objects and espoused values reflect the basic underlying values and culture of the company.

Step 2:

The second step is to identify some (at least one or two) positive stories (anecdotes) that reflect the desired culture. These stories, for instance, may highlight a recent example of excellent customer service in a company that desires to become more “customer-centric.” Such stories may be motivating and clarify what is to be accomplished by the change. One of the the best ways to identify stories is through a process of “inquiry, engagement, and review,” This should incorporate surveys, interviews, debates, and posting results in a common forum.

Step 3:

Thirdly, the organisation must then determine strategic initiatives, outlining which activities will be initiated, terminated, or modified. As a group, the stakeholders identify these strategies through brainstorming, reviewing the current processes and policies for improvement, and ultimately discussing and agreeing on the action plan before moving on to step 4.

Step 4:

Fourth, the organisation should identify “small wins,” that is quick and easy and can be successfully implemented. This strategy will create momentum, reduce resistance (as small, incremental changes are unlikely to generate much opposition), recruit additional supporters, and create “a sense of progress and advancement” that will help build the momentum for the larger change projects ahead. Some small wins can be as simple as hanging a new highly visible sign to promote certain values that the company is trying to embrace.

Step 5:

The fifth step entails crafting metrics, measures, and milestones. The organisation must determine the key indicators of success, what to measure, how to measure it, and when certain levels of progress will be noted as a crucial part of the change process. Change requires the identification of indicators of success in culture change as well as interim progress indicators. A data gathering system needs to be designed as does a time frame for assessing the results. What gets measured gets attention, so the key initiatives and outcomes must have associated with them metrics and measuring processes. Of course, overloading systems with multiple measures is a sure way to kill change initiatives, so the key to good metrics, measures, and milestones is to identify few enough to be helpful, attach them to decisions and resource allocations, attach them to the key levers and indicators of change, and ensure that they are understood by those involved in the culture change process. This should form part of the change document where we capture key outcomes to be achieved and track the milestones of the identified culture change projects.

Step 6:

Sixth, “communicating the culture change process....is a critical tool in helping to overcome resistance and generate commitment. Explaining why the culture change is necessary and beneficial is probably the most vital step in generating commitment. This will be achieved through using clear communication channels and group decision support systems. Communications would be shared with as much information as possible; and be disseminated broadly on a regular basis; and would highlight the positive aspects of the environment; and describe the parts of the past that will not be carried forward while avoiding their criticism. Visual symbols of change, e.g. new logos or structures, can be helpful in this regard. This should also constitute the broader project of change through regular management forums, key management meetings,and employee communication sessions.

Step 7:

Seventh, it is important to create a sense of urgency to drive culture change. Although rather risky, in some cases, this could mean that organisational leaders sometimes “stage” or identify a crisis. Public reports of customer dissatisfaction and financial losses are often effective catalysts for change, even when purposefully manufactured by company leadership.

Step 8:

Lastly, form a “powerful guiding coalition”. Building coalitions of supporters among key opinion leaders, involving individuals most affected by the changes, and empowering individuals to implement aspects of the change process are also ways to help reduce resistance. If possible, appoint innovation champions in each division that can be representatives to help drive changes within their work groups. In addition, leaders of the organisation must champion the culture change, and future leadership should be cultivated with training in the competencies necessary in the new environment.

Culture change is a key competency in this digital economy where things are moving at a lightning speed. These simple steps have helped me in my journey to be a change champion in my organisation. I hope it will help in yours too.