

Demystifying our Culture Change Workshop

When people talk about "creating of culture of compliance", "a culture of quality", "a culture of continuous learning" or "a culture of continuous improvement", in truth they are talking about some kind of behavioral change, some kind of ideal outcome that works as an aspiration for a certain "future state." In so many cases the word after "a culture of" defines something - a criteria or a value - that we aspire to see more in the organization; ideally people will use "that something" in their work every day, without even the need for someone to ask for it. In the "future state" the aspiration for quality, efficiency, continuous improvement or collaboration will have become a cultural trait of the organization, lived every day and practiced normally.

However in culture change work, I know that I can't get there from here, I can only get here from there: meaning that when people take a mental leap into the future, and build a strong enough vision, that vision will drive their thinking, it will change how they think about the problem and its solution. **So how do we identify a vision for the future culture of an organization, beyond a single outcome?**

Furthermore, when it comes to culture change, what counts is what is done, not what is said. Culture change doesn't come when folks inside an organization know something new and different, or when they intend something different, or they think differently, or that they have a different managing philosophy. It only starts when folks inside an organization do something different, and it is sustained when they continue to do something different over time. **How do we make the leap from the present culture to the specific, ongoing actions that will create the new culture overtime?**

Our "Culture Change Workshop" starts with a baseline: the definition through stories, of what the current culture is like. Responding to some prompts through **a card-deck called "Mindset,"** we identify the line dividing "what and how we do things/what and how we don't do things around here" - my preferred definition of culture. With **six guided brainstorming activities** we make the local culture even more tangible and discussable for the team (beyond likely abstractions of beliefs, values and assumptions.) These activities elicit important cultural traits of the local organizational context, shared through simple stories, narratives or single events that start outlining what is like to work in the organization.

To avoid abstractions, unwanted complexities and fuzziness, we use an indirect activity, engaging people in a **large group conversation** about what the new culture will look like, defining it not so much as an outcome (more learning, more compliance, more efficiency) but as a story, as a description of the future (as a **skit** for the more daring groups.)

From that conversation normally **a larger commitment goal** begins to emerge (not as an outcome but as a commitment: not so much "I want my team to be more collaborative," but more like an answer to the question "what should we collectively become better at in order to become more collaborative?") This is the first step in the process called **Immunity to change**, used to uncover the competing commitments that might block the organization's ability to be, for example, more collaborative. (I.e.: efficiency. I want to be more collaborative, but my idea of efficiency comes in conflict with that.)

Rather than eating the whole elephant (changing the culture), this work accepts the inevitable tensions present in organizational life between competing commitments (efficiency vs. collaboration, High-touch vs High reach, Standards vs. Creativity...), nibbling at the elephant through small actions that have the greater potential for creating the new target culture the organization aspires to have. Through the **design of simple experiments** as ways to continue to understand/manage better those tensions, the work become operational: the insights from the workshop turn into a specific **action plan** to implement right away.

Bottom line: no one speaks the language of the future. As we tried to utter a few words for the sake of our generous purpose, we need the humility to be ok with not-knowing, the courage to deal with ambiguity and the stamina to deal with uncertainty as part of the journey. We need to stop seeing not-knowing, uncertainty and ambiguity as signs that we have failed, but as useful travel companions.

This is where the work of change turns from organizational to organizational AND personal - returning full circle - to our own courage to deploy our own leadership "in action." on behalf of something that we deeply care about.

Happy to talk how to bring this course to your organization.

