

# Cultures Can Be Transformed

**Today's companies have no choice but to change. The world is moving and shifting fast, and executives know it.**

Organisations looking to adapt during turbulent times - like now - can't force change through purely technical approaches such as restructuring and reengineering. They need a new kind of leadership capability to reframe dilemmas, reinterpret options, and reform operations — and to do so continuously.

But organisational culture change isn't for the faint of heart or the quick-change artist. The history of change management teaches us that a simple recipe does not work. Transforming your organisation is still very difficult, and serious change demands serious people.

Our experience with clients has helped us develop themes and patterns, tools and models that help leaders and organisations to transform their cultures. But the fact remains: anyone touting a quick-fix transformation formula doesn't know what they're up against.

## **Transforming your organisation isn't simple, but It's Important**

Considerable research has been conducted about changing cultures, and it is a well-known fact that leading organisational change or transforming your organisation isn't easy because:

### **Bigger minds are needed to keep pace with rapidly changing reality**

- reality is leaping ahead of our collective development. We need new thinking and new ways of working together to keep up. Most organisations are behind in developing what they need to move up the hierarchy of culture. It takes an even greater stretch to thrive in the face of change.

### **Transforming your organisation requires new mindsets, not just new skills**

- organisations have become savvy developers of individual leader competencies. In doing so, they have over-relied on the human resource function to manage change through individual skill development. Executives may not have considered the need to advance both individual and collective leadership mindsets. Vertical development can help build skills for individual leaders and elevate the organisation's culture.

**Hidden assumptions and beliefs must be unearthed** - unexamined beliefs control an organisation and prevent any meaningful change. Years of valuing hierarchy, status, authority, and control - even if unstated - can lead to assumptions and behaviours that are out of

date, unnecessary, unhelpful, and at odds with stated goals and strategic direction. Organisations must unlearn to transform and change workplace culture.

**Organisational change requires leaders to change** – to transform your organisation and its culture, you must also change yourself. That’s the new reality. Senior executives who move the needle toward organisational transformation also experience significant personal transformation. That commitment to personal change is a fundamental part of their readiness to take on the leadership and management challenges of change for a sustainable future.

**Transforming your organisation takes hard work, so don’t call what’s required merely “soft” skills** - developing new beliefs and mindsets isn’t easy, and the leadership practices they generate will permanently alter the way leadership is experienced and accomplished. Soft skill development and developing a new mindset is much more difficult than managing spreadsheets and planning the next restructuring. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it.

Senior leadership teams can and do evolve new mindsets. Individuals, teams, and entire organisations adapt, grow, and prepare for future challenges. They learn to change what they do and how they do it. As a result, they have grown “bigger minds for solving bigger problems.”

Choosing the right leadership culture is the difference between success or failure in transforming your organisation.

As companies face change, they need to invest intentionally in a leadership culture that will match the unfolding challenge. The beliefs that drive leadership behaviours need to align with the operational business strategy.

## **Transforming Company Culture? Start By Growing Bigger Minds**

We start by describing an order of leadership culture. Organisations, like people, tend to evolve in maturity, along a path from hierarchy to specialist to shared. Each of the 3 levels of leadership culture is characterised by a set of beliefs, behaviours, and practices.

By choosing the right level of leadership culture that your organisation requires for its future, your leadership talent as a collective can start transforming your organisation and advancing to new levels of capability that secures success. When the level of leadership culture aligns with your business strategy, your performance will be stellar.

More and more executives tell us they need increasingly collaborative leadership for working effectively across boundaries inside their organisations and across their value chains.

Of course, culture change isn’t a short-term process - it will take a few years. An organisation doesn’t become a more collaborative culture, for example, just because it’s desired or when new competencies are named.

Here are 6 strategies to help you and your team rise above current beliefs and practices, grow bigger minds, and build capacity for new ways of working while transforming your organisation:

**Discover your culture and capabilities** - get a deep and clear-eyed view of your current culture. Is your organisation primarily dependent or independent? Does it have elements of successful interdependence from which you can expand? Even more important - what’s the culture of your executive leadership team?

**Craft a leadership strategy** - a leadership strategy is an organisation's implicit and explicit choices about leadership, its beliefs and practices, and its people systems. It's the blueprint for building the leadership capacity to meet operational objectives. Learn more about how to craft a leadership strategy.

**Transform the executive team** - when transforming company culture, you must transform the executive team first. The days of delegating change are over. To change the culture - start with changing yourself. Are you getting the best from your executive team? Jump-start the change work behind closed doors with just the senior team. Coach senior team members (both individually and as a group) to develop their readiness for leading culture change. Focus on topics of control, time, and engagement.

**Take time out for learning** - allow for routine breaks or in-the-moment discussions to stop and learn. Slow down and take a deeper look at the situation. Reflect on assumptions, understand problems more clearly, and integrate multiple perspectives.

**Establish action-development teams** - teams of senior and high-potential leaders tackle mission-critical, complex challenges identified by the business strategy. They learn to work while spanning boundaries, with explicit sponsorship and coaching, while developing new and better ways of working together.

**Align talent processes** - hire for the organisation you want to become, not for the one you used to be. Look for people who want to be part of something larger than themselves, have strong collaborative mindsets, and can have conversations about culture and leaders.

## Final Words...

Do you have the leadership capacity and culture needed to succeed while transforming your organisation? Where are the individual and collective gaps? Again, vertical development can help you build the culture you need for the strategy you've set.

Whatever you do, don't pawn the culture work off on someone else. Don't give it to HR, either. No one else can create change for the executive team. No proxy can carry the senior team's responsibility.

Rather than dismissing culture work as "soft stuff," many executives now view it as the high-priority, hard stuff - changing whole belief systems so that organisations can survive. Are you ready for the new hard work?

If you and the rest of the senior leadership team are ready to start transforming your organisation, partner with us to assess the effectiveness of the executive team, evaluate your current and needed future leadership culture, and ensure it supports your business strategy and priorities.

Learn more about our approach to organisational culture transformation.