

# BirdsEye - Culture Leaders Network Transformational Success Stories Guest # 1

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White Paper Topic:

Cutting Through the Fog - Understanding 'What is Culture' and How Culture Works

## Cutting through the fog: What is Culture? | [Whitepaper](#)



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### **Question # 1: Let's help our audience "clear the fog." In your words what is Culture?**

Simply put, culture is the combined attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours of a group of people that share a common experience. Organizational Culture, therefore are the common expectations of members of the organization in order to "fit in". These expectations become norms that shape our attitudes and behaviour at work. They can cover everything from: "What do I do at break time?" to "What do I do if I see something wrong and have an opinion on how to fix it?"

### **Question # 2: Why does culture matter? What is the link between leadership, culture and performance?**

Culture matters because it is linked to important outcomes such as employee engagement (employee satisfaction, loyalty, and sense of ownership) and service and product quality. Leadership is linked to culture as one of the key Causal Factors of culture: Leadership drives and shapes culture.

### **Question # 3: How can leaders best identify their organizational culture? In your view what value does the OCI cultural assessment from Human Synergistics bring for assisting leaders that are striving to strengthen their organizational culture?**

It is very difficult for leaders – even those extremely knowledgeable about what culture is – to objectively examine their organization and accurately describe its culture. The only effective way to identify an organization's culture is to measure it, using a valid and reliable assessment. The Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) is so valuable in assisting leaders not only because it has been tested and retested many times for its validity and reliability; but also, because the Human Synergistics database is so large and statistically representative of all organizations, that leaders can compare their culture to all other organizations. Therefore, the OCI informs the members of the organization exactly what their culture is like – the good and the bad – and how effective or ineffective it actually is.

### **Question # 4: Can culture be change and sustained? What are the most important components of the change process that allows behavioural change towards the ideal cultural? Con't**

Trust:  
Improving culture always involves empowering all the members of the organization to take more ownership in the decision-making process. To accomplish this, leaders must trust their staff to perform without them. And, all members of the organization must learn to trust their leaders: Trust them to do the right thing and to always "have their backs".

Buy-in:  
Everyone must "buy-in" to the results, as well as the process. That is why it is so important to use an organizational assessment that has proven validity and reliability: especially "Criterion Validity" that demonstrates that the assessment results are linked to important organizational outcomes – such as employee engagement and service/product quality.

Leadership Change:  
The key Causal Factor in organizational culture is the Leadership Team – their attitudes, values and behaviours towards other members of the organization and towards the goals of the organization.

Acceptance of the OCI Results:

This is more difficult than it seems. One of the important aspects of the OCI is that it informs the members of the organization the effective or Constructive cultural norms, as well as the ineffective or counter-productive, Defensive culture norms. Many people don't want to believe that their organization has problems. (It's like telling a mother their baby is ugly.)

**Question # 5: Often people use the phrase “culture follows a leader.” What does that mean for you? What is the role of leadership in changing organizational culture?**

There are four key Causal Factors of Culture. They are the philosophy & values of the organization; the leadership styles; the Human Resource Management systems; and, the organizational structure & job design. The attitudes and behaviours of the leadership team has a major role in developing and maintaining all four Causal Factors. Therefore, their role is vital in changing organizational culture.

**Question # 6: Organizations often struggle with trying to change culture, what makes it so hard to change culture and is it worth the journey?**

Definitely, YES! Culture is linked to very important organizational outcomes – mainly employee engagement and service/product quality. Therefore, changing culture can help maintain the long-term viability of the organization.

**Question # 7: In your 40+ years of experience of supporting leadership development and cultural change, for organizational leaders looking to successfully change their cultures - what are a number of ingredients / approaches for them to get the process right?**

I used to think that this was a simple, straight forward answer, but it isn't. In order to get the process right, organizations need to:

- a. Investigate and possibly change many of their Human Resource Management systems and practices. Not only do the systems need to be reviewed, but also how leaders are applying those systems.
- b. Examine their organizational structure and job designs. This could be a major and costly change.
- c. As mentioned several times here, leadership training and development are key. The Training has to not only focus on leadership styles and behaviours, but also leadership attitudes and thinking styles. Effective leadership training takes time and money.
- d. Many organizations overlook the importance of training and developing the non-management team. While some do provide job skills training, very few provide members with “leader from within” training – teaching people organizational values, and how to think about others, their job, and themselves.

**Closing Comments by Allan:**

It has been my experience that many organizational and leadership change initiatives fail because the organization executives are unwilling to invest the time and money into making it happen.