The Results Pyramid: Experiences + Beliefs + Actions + Results = Culture

Leaders create experiences every day. Experiences foster beliefs. Beliefs, in turn, drive the actions people take. Collectively, their actions, with few exceptions, produce their results.

Source: Change the Culture, Change the Game, Connors and Smith, 2011
Key Ideas from *Change the Culture, Change the Game*

**Culture building is a leadership imperative.**
Organizational culture is the way people think and act. Every organization has a culture, which either works for you or against you – and it can make the difference between success and failure. Either you will manage your culture, or it will manage you. The experiences, beliefs, and actions of the people in your organization constitute your culture and your culture produces your results. Leaders must ask themselves one all-important question: If everyone in the organization continues to think and act in the same manner as they do today, can you expect to achieve the results you need to achieve?

**The most effective culture is a culture of accountability.**
A clear line separates accountable and non-accountable behavior and thinking. Above the line are the steps to accountability: See It, Own It, Solve It and Do It. Below the line is the all-too-familiar blame game or victim cycle. When individuals consistently engage in these two very different modes of thinking and acting, they create different organizational cultures, which perform at strikingly different levels.

It is not wrong to go Below the Line. We all do. It’s human nature. In fact, we can all occasionally benefit from venting our frustrations about the obstacles that block our paths. However, if we remain stuck Below the Line, we become more focused on what we cannot do rather than on what we can do. We set our sights on the obstacles we face, not the actions we can take to get past those obstacles and achieve the results we want. People who are habitually Below the Line do not get results. Instead, they grow increasingly frustrated and paralyzed.

People who live Above the Line, accept the fact that they are, and must be, part of the solution. They focus on what they can do rather than on what they cannot do to get results. They view obstacles as opportunities to make great things happen rather than as excuses for failure. The more time you, and your organization, spend Above the Line, the greater will be your results.

A culture of accountability exists when people in every corner of the organization make the personal choice to take the steps to accountability.

- **See It:** When you See It, you relentlessly obtain the perspective of others, communicate openly and candidly, ask for and offer feedback, and hear the hard things that allow you to courageously acknowledge reality.
- **Own It:** When you Own It, you are personally invested, learning from both successes and failures, aligning your work with desired organizational results, and acting on the feedback you receive. You align yourself with the mission and priorities of the organization and accept them as your own.
- **Solve It:** When you Solve It, you constantly ask, “What else can I do to achieve results, overcome obstacles, and make progress?”
- **Do It:** When you Do It, you do what you say you will do, staying focused on top priorities. You do not blame others. You sustain an environment of trust.
If everyone takes the steps to accountability, the entire organization moves away from the mistaken idea that accountability means “getting caught failing” and toward a more positive approach that empowers people to begin “starring in the solution.”

**The old culture will not produce new results.**

Remember, by definition, the culture produces your results. You can expect your current culture to produce new results. It simply won’t work. In most cases, the current culture is not a bad culture. It’s simply a culture that won’t produce new results. The new culture always builds on the strengths of the old culture. However, to achieve new results, some shifts in the culture will be required.

You can’t expect the old culture to magically abandon its powerful, persistent, existing attributes and produce new results. That just won’t happen. To achieve new results, you must create a new culture that will produce those results. You do this by defining the needed shifts in the way people think (beliefs) and act, which will then produce the new experiences that will help them adopt those desired beliefs and actions. Too often, leaders attempt to change the way people act without changing the way they think (i.e. their beliefs). As a result, they get compliance, but not commitment; involvement, but not investment; and progress, but not lasting performance.
Step One: Define R²
Building a new culture of accountability begins at the top of the Results Pyramid. The first step is to clearly state the new results (R²) you want to achieve. Confusion about results is all too common in most organizations. Confusion licenses people to maintain the status quo and to dismiss their accountability to internalize the need for change. Confusion kills the momentum of any change effort because no one feels confident about which direction to move. Describing the shift from old results (R¹) to R² helps everyone grasp the nature of the undertaking. Charting the necessary shift in results always reveals the need to shift the way people think and act in order to achieve R²: Use worksheet #1: Identifying Your Results Shift for this purpose.

By definition, a result is an R² result when the current culture, C¹, will not produce the thoughts and actions throughout the organization critical to achieving it. Achieving R² will, by definition, require a culture change to C². That makes it essential that you determine in advance if your desired results really are R². We suggest using the four criteria below:

1. Difficulty: Will the desired result take more effort to achieve than past results?
2. Direction: Will the desired result signal a significant change in direction for the organization?
3. Deployment: Will the desired results require a large-scale deployment or redeployment of people or other resources?
4. Development: Will the desired result demand that the organization develop a new capability or core competencies?

Use worksheet #2: Evaluating Your Results for this purpose.

Step Two: Introduce R² Throughout the Organization
Culture changes one person at a time, and that process begins with getting each and every person in the culture aligned with R². Only when everyone understands a clearly communicated R² can they align the way the need to think (B²) and act (A²) to produce the desired result. Getting everyone aligned around R² requires dialogue, engagement, debate, and leadership.

Step Three: Create Accountability to Achieve R²
To often people define their job by a job title. That way of thinking places more emphasis on doing the job rather than on what is needed to achieve results. When you create accountability to achieve R², people define their jobs in terms of the results they need to achieve.
Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “Never mistake motion for action.” Mere motion accomplishes nothing and can prove more exhausting than action. Energy expended without achieving the result can wear you out, emotionally and physically. Below is a list of common practices that often fail to have the intended impact of shifting the culture and getting people to act differently.

- Distribute the organization values statement.
- Restructure or reorganize.
- Hire or fire someone.
- Change the reward system.
- Form a team and isolate it from the culture.
- Promote someone.
- Rewrite policy.

Used in isolation, these practices often fail to produce the desired result of shifting the culture and getting people to act differently. Flailing about with low-impact efforts misdirects energy, wastes time, misses the mark, and breeds frustration.

Accelerating a shift in the way people act requires a clear understanding of what you need to stop doing, what you need to start doing, and what you need to keep doing to achieve your R². Use worksheet #3: Stop/Start/Continue Analysis.

1. List the A¹ actions that get in the way of achieving R². These are actions people should stop doing. Be as honest as you can about what doesn’t work. Honestly evaluating what is and is not working will help you answer the question “What actions should our people stop because they just don’t get R² results?”

2. Then think of the A² actions people don't take but should. What do they need to start doing in order to achieve the R² you listed?

3. Finally, determine what key A¹ actions you want people to continue doing. These are the strengths of C¹ that will continue to help you achieve R². They provide the foundation upon which you will build C².

IDENTIFYING THE BELIEFS THAT GENERATE THE RIGHT ACTIONS
If you want to understand why someone is doing something, you must discover their beliefs about what they think will occur as a result of either taking or not taking a particular action. There is a simple yet powerful relationship between the beliefs people within the organization hold and the actions they take. If you change people’s beliefs about how they should do their daily work ($B_1$) and help them adopt the new beliefs ($B_2$) you want them to hold, you will produce the actions ($A_2$) you want them to take. When leaders work with this deeper, more lasting aspect of behavior, they tap into the most fundamental accelerator of effective cultural change.

Not all beliefs are equal in terms of strength and conviction.

- A Category 1 belief does not reflect a high degree of belief bias and does not influence people’s actions in a dramatic way. When presented with new information, people fairly easily abandon this kind of belief.
- A Category 2 belief is strongly held and generally created by repeated experience over time. These beliefs are not easily changed and require significant experience to shift.
- A Category 3 belief resides at the very foundation of a person’s values concerning moral, ethical, principled, right and wrong behavior. People hold such beliefs so deeply that they will abandon them only under extreme pressure and often not even then.

When we talk about shifting beliefs to change the culture, we are usually talking about working with Category 1 and Category 2 beliefs that reflect “how we do things around here.” While Category 1 beliefs can shift fairly easily, particularly when people are presented with better information, shifting a Category 2 belief requires greater skill and thought. Leaders must appreciate how deeply and strongly people may hold a certain belief, because that will dictate how much effort, energy, and attention it will take to shift it.

Use worksheet #4: Identifying Your Beliefs Shift to support your planning.

1. Begin by asking the question, “What current beliefs will prevent us from achieving $R^2$?” This step involves deconstructing $C^1$. Understanding the components of the current culture, including the existing broadly held beliefs, is essential to knowing what you need to shift in order to achieve $R^2$. Let us stress that while certain $B_1$ beliefs are undesirable, they are not necessarily inaccurate. People may be entirely justified in holding certain beliefs. It’s not a question of right or wrong; it’s a question of effectiveness. Will the existing belief produce the $A^2$ actions needed to achieve the result?
2. The second question, “What beliefs will propel us toward achieving R²?” spotlights missing beliefs that, if adopted, will help people achieve results. These beliefs motivate people to take A² actions.

The B² shifts you select will form the basis of your Cultural Beliefs statement. Prioritizing the most important shifts and capturing them in your statement is an essential step in creating a successful cultural transition. It probably goes without saying that no one person should write a Cultural Beliefs statement. This pivotal statement should be the product of group interactions in which a broadly defined leadership team describes the key B² beliefs that the organization needs to create.

The culture being created, C², is a culture in which people take accountability to think and act (B² and A²) in the manner necessary to achieve the needed result (R²). Creating clarity around the key beliefs that need to shift will help accelerate the transition to a new culture and increase the likelihood of delivering desired results.
Whether you realize it or not, you provide experiences for everyone around you every day. Each interaction you have with others in the organization creates an experience that either fosters or undermines desired B² beliefs. Quite simply, the experiences you provide create the beliefs people hold. The right experiences create the desired B² beliefs. To accelerate culture change, you should ask yourself this key question: “What experiences do I need to provide in order to create the B² beliefs we need to achieve our R² results?” Keep in mind that, for good or bad, you are already creating experiences. You will continue to do so, whether you do it consciously or not.

Becoming conscious of the experiences you are creating and the impact those experiences have on what people believe is a competency every leader must develop. Understanding the impact of experiences is absolutely imperative to any successful effort to change the culture. Sometimes the experiences we create fail to influence prevailing beliefs in the way we had hoped they would. These three principles help us understand the challenge of influencing beliefs:

- Principle 1: People work to validate rather than invalidate their current beliefs by filtering new experiences through the lens of their current beliefs. We call this selective interpretation.
- Principle 2: People often cling to old beliefs and only reluctantly surrender them, falling prey to what we refer to as belief bias. As with selective interpretation, people are generally unaware that they are doing this.
- Principle 3: People frequently fail to take accountability for the beliefs they form, choosing instead to see those beliefs as natural and logical conclusions based upon their experiences.

These principles of human behavior cause people to view experiences with different sets of eyes. Very few experiences will “stand on their own two feet.” You will need to prop them up with the right interpretation. Otherwise, you cannot expect people to understand precisely what you intended.

Not all experiences are created equal. Experiences leaders provide in an attempt to create B² beliefs fall into one of four experience types.

- Type 1 experiences communicate a clear, meaningful event leading to an immediate insight. It will foster the desired belief without any interpretation by the leader. The
odds are great that everyone will interpret the experience in the same way. Type 1 experiences are difficult to find, but they will powerfully influence people to adopt the targeted B\textsuperscript{2} beliefs.

Type 2 experiences require careful interpretation before people will adopt the intended B\textsuperscript{2} belief. Frequently it is only through repetition of the Type 2 experience that the shift of belief occurs. Congruency of actions and words, consistency of the leader’s behaviors to stated expectations, transparency of decisions, sincere requests for and consideration of feedback, authentic involvement of others….all are important to the interpretation of Type 2 experiences.

Type 3 experiences do not alter prevailing beliefs, because, for good or ill, people dismiss them as events that fit into the normal pattern of things. Putting vision statements on the wall, writing articles in the district newsletter, posting updates on the district Web-page, making announcements at meetings…..people do not take such experiences to heart and they will not convince people to adopt new B\textsuperscript{2} beliefs. They may be helpful in promoting the change but can consume low payback investment of time and resources.

Type 4 experiences will not, no matter how hard you try, be interpreted the way you intended. Type 4 experiences usually reinforce unwanted C\textsuperscript{1} beliefs. You should make every effort to avoid providing such experiences.

Experiences create beliefs that drive actions that, in turn, produce results. Use worksheet #5: Providing Experiences that Instill B\textsuperscript{2} Beliefs to stimulate your thinking about the experiences you need to provide in your own organization.

1. Identify a B\textsuperscript{2} belief you need to establish for your organization or team. Make sure the B\textsuperscript{2} belief will play a major role in achieving R\textsuperscript{2} results.

2. Identify either a Type 1 or Type 2 experience that you think will foster that B\textsuperscript{2} belief. Consider, specifically, what you could do to create each type of experience and support interpretation of the experience. The four steps to providing E\textsuperscript{2} experiences listed below will be helpful at this point.

There are four important steps you can take to ensure that you provide experiences that will create B\textsuperscript{2} beliefs.

1. Plan It: Learn to plan E\textsuperscript{2} experiences in advance, both as a team and by yourself. Ask yourself these essential questions:
   a. What B\textsuperscript{2} belief do I need to reinforce?
   b. Who is my intended audience for the experience? Whom will they talk to about it?
   c. What specific experience will I provide? Is it a Type 1 or Type 2?
   d. How will I provide the experience so that it reinforces the B\textsuperscript{2} belief?
   e. When is the best time to do this?
   f. Who can give me input on my plan?

2. Provide It: Follow your plan and provide the experience. Keep in mind that your experiences cannot be manipulative in any way. Your efforts must be sincere attempts to provide genuine experiences that signal real change. It is a good idea to
arrange for someone to observe how you go about providing the experience. You might want them to consider:

- Did I do what I planned?
- What type of experience do you think I provided? (1, 2, 3, 4) Why?
- What feedback can you offer me on how I did?
- How do you think people reacted?
- Do you think the experience will have the intended effect on B² beliefs?

3. Ask About It: This is a critical step. If you don’t check in, you will not know if you have hit the mark. Remember the likelihood that people will interpret the experience differently than you might expect. Given this reality, feedback becomes critical to getting it right. Remember: Don’t believe everything you think! Ask people about the experience and the beliefs they are forming. When you ask, remember:

- Don't get defensive.
- Do be curious and listen to what people really think.
- Don’t cut people off by asking a thousand questions.
- Do get as much input as you can from as many people as you can.
- Don’t ask leading questions that bias what people say.

Don’t forget that asking for feedback on the experiences you create becomes an experience in and of itself. If done well, it will help foster desired beliefs. If, on the other hand, the feedback indicates that things are not on track, take step four.

4. Interpret It: This step involves acting on the feedback you received and taking the extra steps necessary to interpret the experience you provided in such a way that people form the desired B² beliefs. Interpreting experiences for people involves:

- Telling them the B² belief you want them to have
- Explaining how the experience was intended to foster that belief
- Clarifying any confusion or answering questions people may raise.

Remember, culture changes one person at a time, and the effort to change people’s beliefs is worth it. One last thought. Almost invariably when the leadership team at the top decides to shift the organizational culture, it must also shift its own team culture. It is true that we must be the change we want to see happen.