

Introduction:

Culture – do it, do it now, do it fast

Everyone's talking about culture at the moment. You hear politicians taking swipes at the culture of another political party, you hear football managers talking about the importance of getting their culture right, you hear about the toxic culture in such and such public service, or some parts of social media, and you hear lots and lots about the importance of an organization's culture. Most of them have a broad view of what this means, but when it comes to doing something about it, most haven't a clue what they're talking about. But at least they're talking about it.

I help organizations to change their cultures and I've been doing it for nearly 30 years. For the first 15 years of that, it was quite a slog to convince my clients that getting their culture right would change everything. Or anything. They thought it was a soft and fluffy subject. They thought it was about putting bean bags in the meeting rooms. They thought it was the same thing as 'staff engagement'. They thought it was what HR does – because they're the ones who know about people.

More recently, organizations have started to realize that their culture will directly impact their ability to achieve their business goals. You might be one of those who still doesn't believe that. Read on.

However, despite the fact that there's greater enlightenment about the behavioural contribution that people make to

performance, there's still a lack of understanding about how to change the culture. Which is fine. That's how I make a living. But that's where this book comes in: it will tell you what culture is, how it affects business performance and will give you a step-by-step instruction manual for how to define what changes you need to make to your culture, how to make those changes *and* how to change your culture rapidly.

Rapidly? Really? Yes. I know all the textbooks tell you it takes years to change your culture. I know that most leaders you speak to will proclaim confidently that it will take years. But what about my clients whose performance is plummeting and don't have years to change? What about my clients who have amazing ambitions and want to, or need to, achieve them far, far, sooner than far, far later? The answer is that culture can be changed rapidly. It's true, there is a direct correlation between the size of the organization and how long it takes to change the culture. The bigger you are, the longer it will take to reach the fingers and toes of the whole organization. But it does *not* need to take years. Nor should it. I'm going to describe a step-by-step process for rapid culture change. All of the steps need to be followed rigorously. You can't skimp or skip. You wouldn't skip from step two to step ten in your self-assembly furniture instructions.

In this book, I'll pull no punches in telling you what works and what doesn't. I know how to blow a huge amount of your organization's money on all kinds of complete waste-of-time activities. I know how you can spend years trying to change the culture... and fail at it. I know how you can get a reputation for being the person who puts posters of your organization's values round the walls, giving everyone a nice new mug with the brand

spanking new values printed on them... and who delivers the square root of absolutely nothing.

I also know how to massively reduce your spend, deliver huge culture shifts in short periods of time and how to get a whacking great slap on the back for doing it.

I've been delivering culture change in private and public sector organizations all over the world for the best part of 30 years. I speak the truth. Which might feel painful. Particularly if you've just done something like blown 25% of your budget on a complicated culture assessment tool that no one understands; or sheep-dipped 500 people through a one-day training course, designed and run by trainers who have never actually run any part of an organization; or spent ten months with expensive consultants to define the exact wording and font size for the values that now adorn the walls of your office that everyone ignores... perhaps tutting in exasperated fashion as they pass by.

In this book, I'm going to cut through the dunghills of bullshit about culture. I'm going to help you differentiate between the really good ideas and the cowboy charlatanism. I'm going to eliminate the crap and show you what you need to do.

In other words, you might actually *like* to hear the truth. By telling you the truth, I'm going to save you time, save you money and most importantly of all, I'll show you how to actually change your organization's culture, both significantly and rapidly.

This book doesn't extend to hundreds of pages. Why? Because culture change is *not* hard. Or at least the method is simple. Changing people's individual and collective behaviour *is* hard. But that will happen if you use the right method.

There are also other reasons for keeping this short and sweet. Choose the reason(s) that apply to you:

- **You've never actually read a management textbook to the end.** Because, let's be honest, a lot of them are pretty dry and dusty. And once you've got the gist, you stick a post-it note into the page that has a quote or a graph that you're definitely going to use in a presentation at some point in the future. Which probably doesn't happen; but the faithful post-it note adheres to its task. In five years, you retrieve the book from the shelf and the post-it note has faded and it's a bit battered at the edges. But it commands you to find the line on that page that you really liked when you read it five years ago. But you can't find that line and wonder why you wasted a good post-it note on it. Poor post-it note.
- **We live in a Twitter world.** Our attention spans are shrinking faster than your bank balance during eleven-hour Christmas eve shopping. We have so many things vying for the attention of our over-loaded brains: 150 emails a day; meetings... endless bloody meetings; presentations to the Executive Team; team cascade comms; customers; staff; the bloke who sits near you who won't stop chatting/flirting/sniffing/asking your opinion; printer jams; the school calling to say your kid is ill and needs to come home; more emails; more meetings in which you swear you can actually see your soul leaving your body.

No wonder our health is taking a turn towards the emergency room. And while I'm on the vitally important subject of mental health, why, oh why, oh why, are organizations all talking about 'resilience'? 'We must help

our people be more resilient.' Er, hang on, instead of getting all het up about your staff's well-being in the face of the mountains of rubbish you tip in their direction every day, how about talking about changing the effing things that cause their health problems in the first place? It's a bit like approaching a man who is slowly sinking into quicksand and asking him if he'd like a nice quinoa and kale salad.

Fix the culture, fix the mountains of rubbish. Fix the culture, fix the time spent in meetings where people neither contribute value nor derive value.

- **You have a life.** I realize that the number of you reading this, who could reasonably and accurately say that you have a life to call your own, is diminishing. See point two above.

But for those of you who have fashioned a small corner of your waking hours to be with the people you love, doing the things you love, this book is for you. I'm reminded of my favourite apocryphal quote by Winston Churchill: 'Say what you need to say, shut up, sit down.' A good rule for life, I think. Who cares whether he said it or not. And next time you're having dinner at a team building event and you've been sat next to the person who only stops talking about themselves long enough to ask you to pass the water, feel free to use this quote on them. Both barrels.

This book says what it needs to say. And then shuts up.