

Cultural Insanity

And the roadmap to
GREAT ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE



ROSS JUDD

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Introduction

The power of culture

Institutional culture has been making the headlines in recent years. It has been raised in scandals involving international business, sport, non-profit organisations and even religion. The reports into scandals such as Volkswagen ‘Dieselgate’, the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the Royal Commission into Banking in Australia, and the ‘ball tampering’ scandal in Australian cricket have all talked about how a ‘culture was allowed to develop’ that tolerated, supported, and even encouraged the decisions of the individuals involved.

It’s worth noting that organisational culture is being cited as a contributing factor in illegal and scandalous activity. And the reports often take it one step further and suggest that culture can drive an individual to make decisions and take actions *contrary to their own values and beliefs*. It’s a strong statement about the influence of culture, and the responsibility of leaders to create the *right* culture.

What other part of organisational life has that much power?

Leaders must take note. And they must know how to respond.

The driving force in any organisation

Imagine this. You walk into a store. You walk past staff who are engaged in a deep personal conversation. At the back of the store

you find product on the floor and shelves in a mess. It's one of a chain of stores that has a reputation for being well managed. The staff have received training, instruction from their manager, and other incentives to keep the store tidy. And yet, it's a mess.

Why?

The training and systems are in place. People have the resources they need.

So, *why does this happen?*

It's because a culture has been allowed to develop that tolerates, supports, and even encourages the decisions of these individuals. In this simple example they have decided to ignore their responsibilities and 'have a chat'. They are being influenced by the culture.

Culture is the driving force in any organisation, including yours. It has more influence than you, your leadership team, systems, training programs, or anything else.

If the culture throughout the business is simply to 'let things go' then that's what will happen. A strong leader will correct such behaviour, but if that leader is not around, people will revert to the cultural expectations of the people around them. A strong company will create systems to try to drive the right behaviour, but systems won't solve these issues if they are not supported by the culture.

A scary thought

To get the best out of your organisation and achieve great outcomes, you need to create a culture where people expect and demand the right behaviour *from each other*.

You need to create a strong *cultural expectation*.

For most leaders that's a scary thought, mainly because culture is something they don't understand, can't define, and have no idea how to 'create' or 'change' – even though it's often a topic of conversation.

To make matters worse, the industry, consultants and products that have sprung up to help *aren't* actually helping. They are confusing and complicating the issue. They're asking leaders to navigate

complex surveys, remember unwieldy definitions and terms, implement complicated processes, and meet unrealistic expectations.

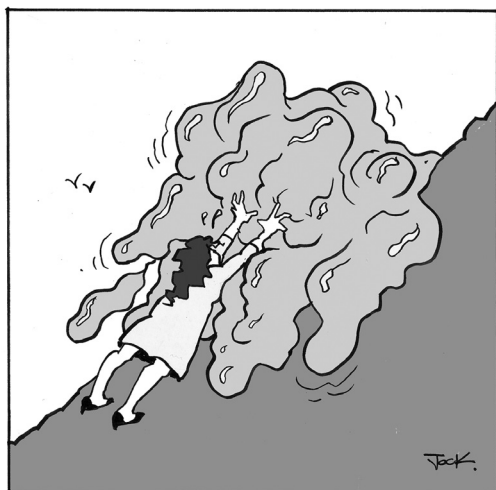
It's cultural insanity.

Developing a strong culture should be a simple and natural process that connects and engages people in healthy and profitable discussions, but instead it has become a poison chalice full of complications that most leaders have no idea how to 'manage'. It's made even harder if you talk about 'culture change' because that will make people defensive. They will hear the message as either, 'your culture is bad and needs to change', or, 'we're implementing another change program'.

Add to that complex surveys, apps that monitor behaviour, and processes people struggle to understand, and you will have suspicious and cynical people.

Sound familiar?

Trying to 'change' culture, or using a 'change management approach' to culture, is like trying to push a big blob of jelly up a hill. The bit you are pushing on will appear to move but other parts of the blob will fold back around you, and if you get lopsided it will all slide out of your control and blob its way back down the hill.



Can't we just try harder?

When it's not working, most people just push harder on the blob. That's like speaking more slowly or yelling more loudly when someone who speaks another language doesn't understand you.

Instead of simplifying the process and making it something that's easy to achieve and that creates a fantastic bond between a leader and their team, we're making it more complicated, and people are becoming more disillusioned. In the words of Albert Einstein, people are doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Which is insane.

Good culture is something everyone wants

You should be having the opposite experience in your organisation.

A good culture is something everyone wants, so creating it should be natural, simple, and engaging. Even your most jaded, cynical, negative employee wants to be part of a great culture.

If you need to be convinced, think about what happens if you talk about improving the culture in your business and don't follow through. If you've never had that experience, just imagine how people would react. You'll end up in a worse situation because people initially get excited, and then become angry and disillusioned when they are let down.

Early in my career I had the opportunity to work with a small engineering division in a large company. They employed 300 people and created signalling solutions for railway crossings.

The GM realised the culture was poor and was causing people to leave. He had lost 50 people in one year and was struggling to recruit good-quality engineers. They were even going to the expense of advertising and bringing candidates in from overseas. He knew he needed help.

He wanted to start with a review of the culture. I advised him to make sure he had the full backing of his Executive General Manager for the budget that would follow. There was no doubt a development program would be needed once the assessment was finished, and I knew what would happen if we didn't follow through.

I was assured we had the full backing of his EGM.

We did the assessment, went around Australia letting people know what we had uncovered, built a development plan with input from each area of the business, and presented that plan to the EGM.

It was rejected.

So, we strengthened the financial analysis and demonstrated the significant return on investment that would be achieved.

It was rejected again.

The EGM disagreed with our estimate that addressing the culture and stemming the flow of people leaving the business would save him *millions*.

The next year they lost roughly 100 employees. The following year they were unable to deliver projects, and the division was shut down.

People left because, despite the problems, they had become excited about improving the culture, and then became angry when they were told it wasn't going to happen.



The challenge is belief

Everyone wants to be part of a great culture, but the challenge is they don't *believe* it can happen; in fact, they believe it *won't* happen. They will say things like 'we've heard all this before and nothing changed'.

It doesn't mean they don't want to be part of a great culture; it means they don't believe their leaders are genuine, committed, and humble enough to engage them and create a great culture. Their cynicism is confirmed when their leaders start throwing complex surveys, complicated definitions and 'culture change' programs at them.

How to convince people

The way to convince people that this is not simply a box-ticking exercise and that you are *genuine* about culture, *committed* to greatness, and *humble* enough to listen to their feedback is by *engaging them in the process*.

The simple act of starting a conversation and listening to them will help them *believe* things are different. They will then contribute to the process in a way that will take you well past any benchmark you set for yourself.

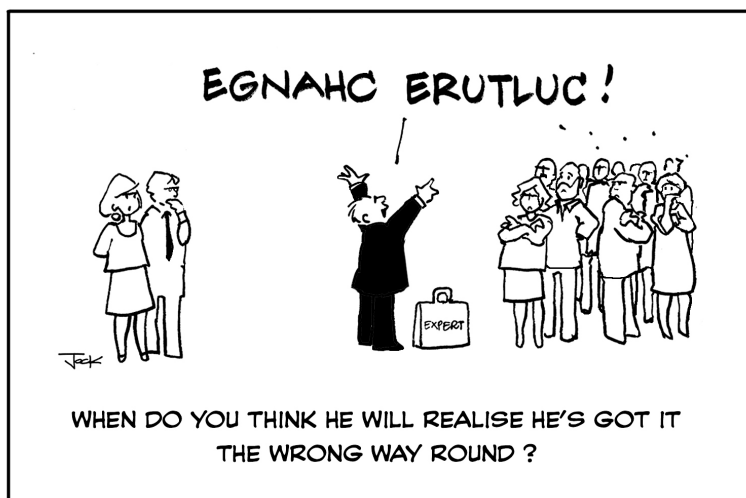
The cure

The popular ‘culture change’ process is back to front.

‘Culture change’ is based on the idea the person implementing the change is the expert. But you need a process that acknowledges *your people* as the experts. If you let them, *they* will create a great culture. You just need to give them the right information and the opportunity, and get out of the way.

You don’t need to run culture change programs *for your people* – you need to engage with them and let them run culture change programs *for you*.

You will achieve much more if you engage with your people and *facilitate* conversations to create the ideal culture.



Challenging the usual thinking

As you will see from the definition of culture, creating a healthy culture is as simple as having the right conversations.

Creating a *great* culture needs a specific sequence of conversations, which I've called 'A.D.A.P.T.' It's a handy acronym to help you remember the five simple steps that can lead to an amazing culture, which are explained in this book.

It's not a 'culture change' program; it's simply a 'culture program'. It's a series of conversations that engages your people to create a great culture.

It follows sound principles and is based on the idea that a great culture is purposeful. You are not imposing language, definitions, complex assessments or any of the other challenges associated with 'culture change'. You are talking about the purpose of your organisation and the culture needed to deliver that purpose, and planning a program to bridge the gap from your current to your target culture.

Simple.

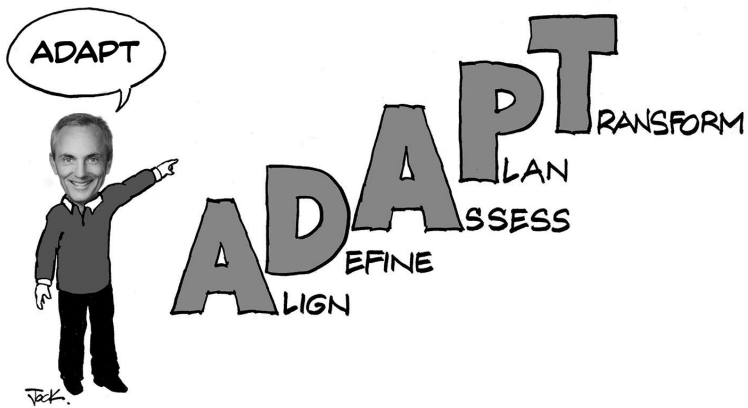
How to A.D.A.P.T.

The first step in the A.D.A.P.T. process is to ***A**lign with purpose*. You must align people with why your company, department, division, site, or team exists.

You then engage with your people to ***D**efine* the culture needed to deliver that purpose (that's step 2). You then ***A**ssess* your current culture (step 3), ***P**lan* (step 4) and ***T**ransform* (step 5).

Best of all, you or somebody in your organisation can be the facilitator for most of the process. The only step that *requires* an external perspective is *assessing current culture* (step 3). Engaging an external facilitator for the other steps in the A.D.A.P.T. process is optional. You would benefit from an external perspective but it's not *essential*.

The *essential* part is that you *have the conversations*.



Don't just take my word for it ...

I encourage you to question everything in this book and compare it to your experience. Keep asking yourself 'is that right?' and 'does it make sense?' If it doesn't make sense then you haven't lost much – a bit of time and the price of this book.

If it *does* make sense (which it does), you stand to make enormous gains because you will develop a new understanding of organisational culture and you will have a simple process designed to create a whole new experience.

Everything you need is in the following chapters. It's all here.

There is a practical and useful definition of culture that will help explain what we are talking about and what you need to do as a leader. We then explore the underlying principles and philosophies that should apply to any culture program.

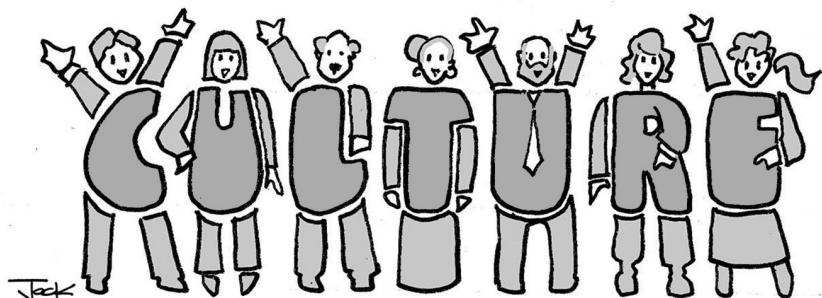
There is also a detailed explanation of each step in the A.D.A.P.T. process. Everything you need to know to implement the process yourself is in these pages.

A great experience

Creating a strong culture should be simple, easy, and a great experience. It's not rocket science, and you don't need a degree in statistics. It's just common sense that needs to become common practice.

It's also one of the most exciting and rewarding things you will ever do. You will enjoy new levels of success. Lives will dramatically improve as people communicate, connect, and create something amazing.

This will give you everything you need to create a *great* culture, and a great culture will give you everything you need to create *greatness*.



IS PEOPLE.

Are you working in a great organisational culture? Is your culture program achieving the results you were hoping for? Are you working with an inspired, highly motivated team who are all pulling in the same direction?

If not, you might be guilty of cultural insanity without realising it. Have you:

- initiated a "culture change" program because something was wrong, instead of including culture as part of your ongoing strategy?
- talked in vague terms about "improving" your workplace culture without identifying the culture needed to achieve your purpose?
- imposed a "culture change program" on your people without involving them in the decisions?
- spent days analysing the data from a "culture survey", only to end up more confused than when you started?

These mistakes are common, and almost guarantee a mediocre culture.

Author Ross Judd has the solution to this insanity. You can achieve a great culture by **A**ligning it with the purpose of your organisation, and then **D**efining the culture you need to achieve that purpose. It's part of the **A.D.A.P.T.** process that will engage your people in creating a culture that inspires the sort of motivation, commitment, and drive you have always craved, and that will lead to powerful business outcomes.

Everything you need to know is in this book. **A.D.A.P.T.** and you can create a great culture.

About the Author

Since completing his Masters in Communication Management over 30 years ago Ross has worked with groups from mining, manufacturing, construction, finance, banking, accounting, retail, wholesale, government departments, corrections, and even sporting organisations to create new, exciting, productive, and effective organisational cultures. He's learned from the debilitating mistakes inherent in the usual "culture change" programs, and has built the A.D.A.P.T. model to highlight how simple and effective the process should be. Ross is more passionate than ever about helping you create a great organisational culture that will deliver amazing results.



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