Change the Culture, Change the Game

The Breakthrough Strategy for Energizing Your Organization and Creating Accountability for Results

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In Change the Culture, Change the Game, Roger Connors and Tom Smith, the recognized experts on creating a culture of enterprise-wide accountability, apply their practical and powerful strategy to helping leaders accelerate culture change, energize their organizations and create greater accountability for results.

In this landmark guide to organizational culture change, the authors introduce the Results Pyramid model, a simple and memorable methodology for efficiently and effectively changing the way people think and act throughout an organization to ensure that they achieve their desired results.

Mastering the ability to accelerate culture change is an essential core competency for every leader who wants to keep his or her organization competitive and focused. Change the Culture, Change the Game offers the definitive guide for developing this leadership competency and is based upon a methodology that is used by some of the most successful and admired companies in the world.

Tapping into more than two decades of expertise in assisting clients in creating a Culture of Accountability, the authors present a refreshingly clear and simple methodology that leads to rapid, results-oriented culture change.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

• How to accelerate the change in culture you need to achieve your goals.
• How to generate the potent impact that greater accountability has on accelerating change in people and teams.
• How some of the most successful organizations in the world have applied these proven best practices.
• How to transform your entire organization through each level of the Results Pyramid: Experiences, Beliefs, Actions and Results.

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**THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: CHANGE THE CULTURE, CHANGE THE GAME**

**by Roger Connors and Tom Smith**

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### Introduction

Creating an organizational culture where people embrace their accountability toward one another and toward the organization should occupy center stage in any effort to create successful organizational change. Without accountability, the change process breaks down quickly. When it does, people externalize the need to change, resist initiatives designed to move them forward and even sabotage efforts to transform the organization. With accountability, people at every level of the organization embrace their role in facilitating the change and demonstrate the ownership needed for making true progress, both for themselves and their organization.

Accountability, done the right way, produces greater transparency and openness, enhanced teamwork and trust, effective communication and dialogue, thorough execution and follow-through, sharper clarity and a tighter focus on results. Accountability should be the strongest thread that runs through the complex fabric of any organization. It is the single biggest issue confronting organizations today, particularly those engaged in enterprise-wide change efforts. At the end of the day, greater accountability produces greater results. And when you build a Culture of Accountability, you create an organization filled with people who can and will get game-changing results.

Culture has an impact on results, and the right approach to culture change accelerates that impact in a way that brings *game-changing* results.

When you base culture change on accountability and adopt a process designed to produce your desired results, you not only create a competitive advantage, you gain the tools you need to sustain that advantage far into the future.

Let the journey begin!

### PART ONE: IMPLEMENT THE RESULTS PYRAMID TO CHANGE THE CULTURE

Either you will manage your culture, or it will manage you. Simply stated, 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.

Managing the organizational culture so that leaders, managers, team members and employees think and act in the manner necessary to achieve desired results has never mattered more. Doing it well is not an option; it’s a necessity. Optimizing the culture should command your attention every bit as much as your effort to achieve performance improvements in manufacturing, R&D, sales and every other organizational discipline.

Experienced leaders know that changing the culture can mean changing the game by growing faster than your rivals, beating a bad economy, revolutionizing the value proposition of your organization or a host of other competition-beating achievements. Managing the culture so that it produces the results you are looking for has become an essential role of leadership and a core management competency. Neglect it at your peril.

### The Results Pyramid

The Results Pyramid presents how the three essential components of organizational culture — experiences, beliefs and actions — work in harmony with each other to achieve results. Experiences foster beliefs, beliefs influence actions and actions produce results.

A clear line separates accountable and non-accountable behavior and thinking. Above the line are the Steps to Accountability, to See It, Own It, Solve It and Do It.
Below the line is the all-too-familiar blame game and victim cycle. The Steps to Accountability lead to Above the Line actions and thinking. The blame game, however, results in Below the Line actions and thinking. As you might imagine, 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.

**The Steps to Accountability**

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 perspectives of others, communicate openly and candidly, ask for and offer feedback and hear the hard things that allow you to see reality.
- **Own It.** When you Own It, you align yourself with the mission and priorities of the organization and accept them as your own.
- **Solve It.** When you take this step, you constantly ask the question “What else can I do?” to achieve results, overcome obstacles and make progress.
- **Do It.** This means doing what you say you will do, focusing on top priorities, staying Above the Line by not blaming others and sustaining an environment of trust.

**Defining the Results that Guide the Change**

Building a Culture of Accountability begins at the top of the Results Pyramid. That’s why the first step involves clearly stating the R² results you want to achieve. Frankly, it makes no sense to initiate any culture building activity or process unless you intend to increase the capability of the organization to deliver results.

The most compelling reason to work on your culture? Culture produces results.

“Optometrics,” a respected optical retailer, provides convincing evidence that this assertion is true. Following several years of solid business results, a serious downturn in the economy posed a challenge to Optometrics. Although the company had put initiatives in place to improve results, the numbers were not where Optometrics wanted them to be. Early in the process, Optometrics brought in two leaders known for their outstanding field management, both of whom believed that in order to improve the results, they needed to go to work on the culture.

That effort started with the Brand Leadership Team getting aligned around R² in several areas of operational performance. The current business model, R¹, was not delivering the desired business results needed to change. Testing the premise that culture produces results, Optometrics conducted a pilot in 5 percent of its stores.

There were plenty of skeptics whom the team needed to convince that changing culture would indeed change results. Everyone agreed to a pilot test with a clear definition of success that would make the conclusions perfectly clear. Bottom line, the pilot would need to show a significant impact on the business before the company could make a go-forward decision to launch the culture change effort worldwide in all of its retail stores.

The team agreed that anything less than a 2 percent improvement in the pilot stores would trigger a no-go decision. Improvement that fell in the 2-to-5 point range would indicate the need for further evaluation. But improvement of 5 percent or more would support an automatic go and full-scale launch of the change effort. With the success criteria firmly established, they spelled out precisely how they would evaluate any performance improvements. They were not going to take any chance on investing their time and resources on culture unless the pilot met these standards of success.

After the first two months, results were well above 5 percent. The outcome was unequivocal: Changing the culture significantly increased the retail brand’s ability to get the desired R² results. At Optometrics, the culture began to change quickly as people began thinking and acting differently about how to do their daily work in the pilot stores. Not surprisingly, based on the results of
Taking Action that Produces Results

When it comes to changing your culture, you must determine to get everyone in the organization acting differently and taking A2 actions each and every day. Clearly, you need to do more than just get people acting differently; you need to get them doing the right thing at the right time in a way that produces R2 results. You cannot accomplish a successful cultural transition without that sort of targeted, directed and focused change.

The single most important change in actions that needs to occur during a time of cultural transition is the shift to greater accountability.

Accountability, done effectively, is a skill you can develop just like any other skill, and while it is not a difficult skill to acquire and hone, it does require a high degree of conscious effort. When you do it right, you’ll also find it the fastest way to improve morale.

Building the Pyramid

Understanding what needs to shift in the actions people take is an important first step toward accelerating culture change. Once you determine the shifts in behavior from A1 to A2, you can begin traveling a clear path to where your organization needs to go. Creating a clear picture of what C2 looks like in terms of what people need to do differently is a key to accelerating change. Doing this collaboratively in an environment of heightened personal accountability speeds up the process and provides the foundation that will ensure a successful journey. Abandoning the sole reliance on traditional and ineffective change practices, focusing instead on approaches that truly engage the work force in embracing personal change, greatly enhances the prospects for success.

But we need to make one point perfectly clear: Nothing, absolutely nothing, gets people to change the way they act faster than getting them to change the way they think. When you work only with the top of the pyramid, Results and Actions, you limit your ability to accelerate the shift to C2 and minimize the chances that A2 will become part of the way people do things in the organization. Beliefs, more than anything else, will motivate necessary behavioral shifts, so you must help people adopt the beliefs that will yield the actions needed to produce R2.

Identifying the Beliefs that Generate the Right Actions

During times of change, managers and leaders often focus their efforts exclusively on the top two levels of the Results Pyramid. Our clients quickly learn, however, that they can greatly enhance their success at accelerating a change in culture when they expand their focus to work with the seemingly less tangible Beliefs level at the bottom of the pyramid. There is a simple yet powerful relationship between the beliefs people within the organization hold and the actions they take. Their beliefs about how work should get done directly affects what they do. If you change people’s beliefs about how they should do their daily work (B1) and help them adopt the new beliefs (B2) you want them to hold, you will produce the actions (A2) 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 culture change.

The need to change culture often arises whether we are ready for it or not. Consider the profound change that occurred in the wireless communications industry when the business model changed almost overnight with the introduction of the innovative iPhone by Apple. Apple founder Steve Jobs had tasked 200 top Apple engineers to create the iPhone. Stressful deadlines resulted in screaming matches between co-workers and among exhausted engineers, who, according to a Wired magazine article, “frazzled from all-night coding sessions, quit, only to rejoin days later after catching up on their sleep.” In one case, “a product manager slammed the door to her office so hard that the handle bent and locked her in; it took colleagues more than an hour and some well-placed whacks with an aluminum bat to free her.”

The new product required a monumental effort, but a little over a year after its introduction, the iPhone accounted for 39 percent of Apple’s revenues and was the single largest contributor to Apple’s bottom line. Steve Jobs changed the game by getting the big players in the staid wireless industry to agree to a new business model, one that shifted beliefs about handsets. Until then, the industry had defined them as “cheap, disposable lures, massively subsidized to snare subscribers and lock them into using the carriers’ proprietary services,” as Wired put it. After making this strategic shift in beliefs, major players began using smartphones to differentiate their offerings and win customers. As this new business model moves forward and continues to morph, wireless providers will need to help the people in their organizations make corresponding shifts in their beliefs about
how they conduct their daily business. Those who make these operational shifts happen quickly and effectively will create competitive advantage.

Building the Pyramid

Effective leaders understand that beliefs drive people’s actions. Culture change involves getting people to adopt B² beliefs about “how things are done around here.” An organization’s Cultural Beliefs statement describes its Culture of Accountability. A Culture of Accountability is a culture (C²) 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 Cultural Beliefs that need to shift will help accelerate the transition to a new culture and increase the likelihood of delivering desired results.

Providing Experiences that Instill the Right Beliefs

The Experiences that form the foundation of the Results Pyramid drive accelerated culture change. 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.

Many leaders find that early in their change efforts, the experiences they create fail to influence prevailing beliefs in the way they had hoped they would. To avoid that happening to you, take these four principles to heart:

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.

Principle 4: Because the beliefs people hold do not readily change, the best indicator of future behavior is past behavior.

In some cases, experiences can actually backfire, inspiring beliefs exactly opposite of those you sought to instill. Accelerating the transition to a Culture of Accountability will occur only when you learn the importance of interpreting the experiences you create. In fact, everything depends on it.

The Four Steps to Providing E² Experiences

There are four important steps you can take to ensure that you provide experiences that will create B² beliefs. Skip a step, and you will likely find yourself, at some point, creating experiences that reinforce the old C1 culture you want to change. These steps will help you create the right experience the first time and help you correct your approach whenever you discover that your effort is not influencing people’s thinking the way you hoped it would.

Step One: Plan It. While you will find plenty of opportunities to create experiences spontaneously, you must also, and more importantly, learn to plan E² experiences in advance, both as a team and by yourself.

Step Two: Provide It. Follow your plan and provide the experience. Your efforts must be sincere attempts to provide genuine experiences that signal real change.

Step Three: Ask About It. If you don’t check in, you will not know if you have hit the mark. Don’t get defensive. Be curious and listen to what people really think. Get as much input as you can from as many people as you can. Don’t ask leading questions that bias what people say.

Step Four: Interpret It. Act on the feedback that you received and take the extra steps necessary to interpret the experience you provided in such a way that people form the desired B² beliefs.

Building the Pyramid

Taking accountability to live the Cultural Beliefs and creating the E² experiences needed to foster and promote them does more than anything else to accelerate culture change.

PART TWO: INTEGRATE THE C² BEST PRACTICES TO ACCELERATE THE CULTURE CHANGE

Success in speeding up the culture change will only come when everyone’s actions, beliefs and experiences are aligned from person to person and across the various functions of the company. The more completely aligned the culture, the more everyone will concentrate on achieving R² results. Effective leaders of culture change manage in ways that get a culture aligned with results, and then they work to keep it aligned.

Getting Aligned Around Alignment

Using the Results Pyramid as a reference point, here is
a definition of alignment that applies to every effort to change culture: *Alignment is common beliefs and concerted action in collective pursuit of a clear result.*

This definition refers to lining up the parts of the Results Pyramid (Results, Actions, Beliefs, Experiences) so that all of the parts are positioned in relation to the $R^2$ results you want to achieve. When all the parts are aligned and everyone is moving in the same direction, you get accelerated culture change; everyone stays on the same page, people feel less stressed, decision making occurs more efficiently and almost everything speeds up.

During the Culture of Accountability Process, the speed of the culture change will directly correspond to the level of alignment you create and maintain around $R^2$ and the Cultural Beliefs.

**The Case for Change**

A critical mass of people who take ownership for the change process will produce enough alignment and positive momentum to keep the change effort energized and moving forward. Because the early adopters are important to the success of the overall effort, you should concentrate on cultivating and nurturing them.

To initiate this cultural chain reaction, you must make a compelling Case for Change. Everyone wants to understand the basic rationale for $R^2$. The Case for Change addresses the why behind $R^2$, providing the context for why we need to change the culture and why we need to do it now. The more compelling the Case for Change, the more likely you will forge the ownership and buy-in you need. The most compelling Case for Change always incorporates these best practices:

1. Make it real.
2. Make it applicable to your audience.
3. Make it simple and repeatable.
4. Make it convincing.
5. Make it a dialogue.

**The Leadership Alignment Process**

The Leadership Alignment Process consists of six key elements that help ensure that real alignment is achieved:

**Step One:** Participation — Get the appropriate people involved.

**Step Two:** Accountability — Identify who will make the decision.

**Step Three:** Discussion — Ensure that people speak up and are heard.

**Step Four:** Ownership — Promote the decision as your own.

**Step Five:** Communication — Be consistent with the message.

**Step Six:** Follow-Up — Check in and test for alignment.

Alignment is a process, not an event. It is something you must constantly work to achieve.

**Applying the Three Culture Management Tools**

Now that you understand how to create alignment for using the Results Pyramid to build a game-changing culture, you can start applying the three essential Culture Management Tools that will accelerate the change effort: Focused Feedback, Focused Storytelling and Focused Recognition. These tools will help you integrate the Cultural Beliefs into your organization’s culture and speed it toward $C^2$ and your desired $R^2$ results. These tools are designed to help you deal with a $C^1$ culture’s strong resistance to change.

- **The Focused Feedback Tool.** Constructive Focused Feedback offers positive and candid suggestions and guidance on what else people can do to demonstrate the $B^1$ beliefs more fully. This type of feedback is critical to helping people succeed in the new $C^2$ culture because it helps them know what they can improve in a timely way. A lack of constructive Focused Feedback will cause every culture-change effort to stall and eventually die out.

- **The Focused Storytelling Tool.** While Focused Feedback accelerates change, organizations can pick up the pace of the transition even more when they add Focused Storytelling to the mix of Culture Management Tools. People tell stories every day throughout the organization. These stories simply describe people’s experiences and convey their beliefs about what is important and how work should be done in the organization.

Do you know what stories people in your organization tell each other? What beliefs do those stories drive? What stories do you tell to others?

These stories move the organization either toward $C^2$ or back to $C^1$. If you want to speed up the journey to a $C^2$ culture, then you must identify and tell $C^2$ stories.

- **The Focused Recognition Tool.** We all know that people sometimes “fall down” while learning to live the Cultural Beliefs. Acknowledging the step forward with recognition, in spite of the fall, will speed up the culture change effort. Focused Recognition, like storytelling and feedback, must center on the Cultural Beliefs.
Mastering the Three Culture Change Leadership Skills

Culture change always requires leaders to become proficient in the skills needed to lead the transition effort. Without a concerted effort at the top of the organization to develop greater proficiency with the skills needed to lead the culture change, leaders frequently slow down the process and make the change effort less efficient and less successful. Developing these skills will accelerate the cultural transition while enhancing leadership capability in every other endeavor. The three culture change leadership skills every leader will need if they want to move the culture from C1 to C2 are: the skill to Lead the Change, the skill to Respond to Feedback and the skill to Be Facilitative.

These three leadership skills are essential to ensuring that the culture change effort stays on track and achieves R2.

1. The Skill to Lead the Change. Culture change must be led. You cannot delegate the initiative to Human Resources, Organizational Development or anyone else. While these and other organizational functions play important roles, the senior leadership team simply must maintain ownership of the process and lead the culture change at every level of the organization, ensuring that the change effort is prioritized correctly at the top of every management team agenda.

To bring about the C2 culture and R2 results, leaders must take personal ownership of the implementation of cultural transition best practices throughout the organization.

2. The Skill to Respond to Feedback. When people see leaders reinforcing B2 beliefs, everyone gets the message that “I ought to be doing that too.”

When you receive feedback that you have created an experience that is inconsistent with the Cultural Beliefs, you can use the Methodology for Changing Beliefs to get people looking for evidence of your true alignment and your deep desire to embody the new culture. Here are the methodology’s five steps:

Step One: Identify the belief you need to change.
Step Two: Tell them the belief you want them to hold.
Step Three: Describe the experience you’re going to create for them.
Step Four: Ask them for feedback on the planned experience.
Step Five: Enroll them in giving you feedback on your progress.

3. The Skill to Be Facilitative. It usually takes some effort to become thoroughly facilitative in your communication style — an important culture change leadership skill. Getting everyone to engage in a meaningful dialogue about what needs to change and making sure that conversation occurs at every level of the organization is essential to accelerating culture change.

Lasting culture change always requires collaboration, teamwork and dialogue. Your ability as an organizational leader to ask questions, seek input, create dialogue and get people talking about the right topics will speed up the adoption of C2 beliefs.

Integrating the Culture Change

Leading culture change means working ceaselessly to implement and integrate. Each activity enhances and then mutually reinforces the other. Implementation sets up integration and integration sustains implementation. They go hand in hand.

Integration is not about convening additional meetings, creating a longer list of things to do or lengthening the workday. On the contrary, when you integrate the Culture Management Tools into the organization, you insert them into carefully selected, already existing meetings and activities. It bears repeating: Integration means integrating the tools into the current organizational processes, procedures and systems. When done correctly, integration weaves the Cultural Transition Process seamlessly into the way things are done in the organization. If you do it poorly, people end up feeling that you have just added another burdensome program to the many they already need to implement.

The Three Steps to Effective Integration

Successful integration of the C2 best practices into the culture change process depends on effectively applying each of the following three distinct steps.

Taking these steps sequentially will allow you to spot the best opportunities for making integration happen in a way that optimizes your effort and minimizes distractions.

**Step One: Identify the Opportunities for Integration into Meetings.** Integration is most effectively accomplished within intact teams. While the opportunities for integration will differ from team to team, your initial list of opportunities should include all of the different meetings the team currently holds, including one-on-ones.

**Step Two: Identify Opportunities for Integration into Systems.** Integrating change into the organizational systems includes evaluating the policies and procedures of the organization, as well as both the formal and informal application of those systems.

**Step Three: Make Your Integration Plan.** This plan
should specifically capture what you are going to do to integrate the best practices into the activities you have selected.

A good example of how to do this comes from “Eastside Health Plans.” After the Eastside management team evaluated steps one and two in the integration process, they arrived at a plan. The team took early steps to align the organizational systems as well. As a result, they unleashed organizational thinking and began to make changes on a variety of fronts. Lean process teams were formed to address the waste, inefficiencies and administrative costs within the organization. For the first time in 25 years, leaders began to create significant experiences that suggested the company would not tolerate waste. These teams ultimately achieved line-item cost savings of over $200 million.

Enrolling the Entire Organization in the Change

In order to achieve transformational change, you will need to adopt the right process for enrolling everyone in the organization in the change effort. Five principles should guide you as you engineer and build full employee engagement in the change:

Principle 1: Start with accountability.
Accountability for R² should always begin with clearly defined results. Without it you will not move the organization forward and enroll people in providing the effort needed to change your culture.

Principle 2: Get people ready for the change.
Your culture will not change unless you get everyone in the organization enrolled in making the change happen. You should expend every effort to get people ready for the change by persuading and convincing them of the merits of the change and by getting them involved in the process.

Principle 3: Begin with the relative top and intact teams.
Relative top means that regardless of where you initiate the culture change process — in a team, a division, a function, a subsidiary, a country affiliate or the entire organization — you must begin the process at the top of that organization to be most effective.

Culture change begins in the context of intact teams. Establishing peer-to-peer accountability within these teams is essential to building the right foundation for the culture change effort.

Principle 4: Establish a process control and keep it honest.
To be most effective, you should adopt agreed-upon process controls at both the individual and team level. Common process controls include: embedding the language of the tools and models, tracking progress toward R² results and establishing milestones for process implementation and integration.

The enrollment process must be designed to help everyone avoid the trap of just “going through the motions.” It should keep everyone honest in the way they apply the Culture Management Tools and C² best practices.

Principle 5: Design for maximum involvement and creativity.
Cultural change is a highly collaborative effort and requires the engagement of everyone at every level as co-creators of the culture.

Final Thoughts

Culture change can provide the differentiator that brings competitive advantage and game changing results to any business. In today’s competitive environment and challenging economy, performance improvements grow ever harder to achieve and game changers become more important every day.

True game changers don’t come easily. No matter how much time you spend optimizing performance with incremental improvements, they will take you only so far.

When the business model demands R² results, the game is no longer just about optimizing current performance; it’s about transforming organizational results. Game changing, transformational results can and do come from well-executed culture changing initiatives. When you change the culture, you change the game, and with that new game comes the desired results that shape and define success for your organization.

When you approach culture in the manner described here, culture change raises the spirit of the entire organization and energizes everyone involved to make the change successful. With the combination of accountability and the application of the C² best practices, you will accelerate the change in your culture and achieve the results you seek.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked Change the Culture, Change the Game, you’ll also like:
1. How Did That Happen by Roger Connors and Tom Smith. This title offers a proven way to eliminate nasty surprises and gain an unbeatable competitive advantage.
2. Tactical Transparency by John C. Havens and Shel Holtz. The authors provide a methodology that will help organizations create their own unique plans to bring greater authenticity to their companies and brands.
3. Turnaround Leadership by Shaun O’Callaghan. O’Callaghan pinpoints five areas of leadership expertise that need to be mastered to recover in the aftermath of a crisis.