



RYP Quarterly

Culture is Something You Experience, Not Score

David Stewart, Principal RYP International

Every Workplace Culture is reflected in the lived experience of staff and customers. Culture guides performance whilst strategy drives performance. Culture fuels the behaviours, attitudes, decision making, and problem-solving ability of staff. In essence it is the way things are done. So how can it be measured? What follows are some approaches to assess and observe the culture of your team.

Cultural Alignment is at The Heart of Performance

An organisation's culture forms the epicentre of how it performs. Cultures must be outward looking, and outcomes focused, not internal. Hence any meaningful evaluation of an organisations culture needs to reflect the alignment between the organisations Mission – Its Stated Competitive Points of Difference – The Upfront Promises made to the Market – What Staff fundamentally believe and how they feel. **This will fuel the Lived Experiences of Customers**

For any stated Competitive Advantage or Point of Difference to be achieved it requires the following cultural attributes

- Reliability & Consistency of Delivery (Teamwork)
- Fundamental belief and commitment from the staff (Passion)
- Unique and Unrivalled Customer Experiences (Front Line Staff Execution)
- Ease of Client Interaction (Inter Department Alignment – No Silo's)
- Continuity of Experience by all stakeholders (Authenticity)

Culture is Not Compliance but Commitment

Culture is not something that can be audited. It is something that is observed and demonstrated. Some easily observed commitment symptoms include:

- **How staff feel** and whether they feel they are valued and supported by their managers
- Their **desire to go above and beyond** to assist customers and colleagues.



- If staff are confident in their **autonomous approach** to decision making and problem solving – and when they need to seek permission from a higher authority.
- The way the staff goes about their day-to-day actions and tasks and **how they believe it links and aligns** with the mission and values of the Organisation.

Measuring Culture

It is impossible to isolate a single measure or score for culture. It is like measuring the Pastoral Care of a School with its Academic Performance. Both are important, but one can be measured whilst the other is a lived experience. **Culture should focus on two areas:**

1. **The dynamics of how Staff Work Together**
2. **The Lived Experience of Customers**

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is not a measure of culture, but merely a rating of the last service experiences a customer has had. Likewise, staff engagement or happiness is not a robust measure of culture as it is too self-absorbed and disregards alignment with competitive advantage.

The Best Measures of Culture is via a combined formative approach. Linking the sum parts of the following will give you a clearer and richer insight into any organisational culture.

Eight Ways to Measure Culture

1. **The Stories of Lived Experiences:** How Staff, clients and suppliers describe their lived experiences and how they have been made to feel will reveal how the staff are acting and behaving.

People will forget what you said to them but will never forget how you made them feel. – Maya Angelou

2. **Balance Between Customer Outcomes and Internal Metrics:** Delivering sales targets and delivering customer outcomes reveals where the culture is centred. Many work cultures are self-absorbed with internal metrics such as sales targets – audit and compliance standards – fees charged or product targets without due regard for customer outcomes.

Ultimately it is how a customer describes their lived experience which will reveal the identity of any culture.

3. **A Relentless Focus on Behaviours:** The key is for staff to be making good judgement calls day in day out. Staff behaviours fuel good decision making and actions. The evidence for this will be revealed in how staff act and behave under pressure, what is



rewarded and recognised by senior managers in the heat of the moment, what is discussed at team meetings, how performance is measured, and what is ignored.

The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.

- 4. The Narrative of Front-Line Leaders:** Front Line Leaders are the glue which links business strategy with the day-to-day performance of the business. How they talk to, coach, manage and supervise their staff will reveal how they are being managed and lead by their executive team. Liaising with Front-Line Leaders is a great way to see what has been cascaded down and role modelled by their senior managers. This is perhaps the most revealing of all cultural measures.

Front-Line Leaders will always role model and mirror image what is valued by their more senior managers.

- 5. Rewards and Recognition:** What is rewarded, recognised, and celebrated by both the Executive Team and locally with small teams will showcase what is deemed important and valued within the organisation. This must be much more than annual awards, or celebrations of longevity, but how a team has performed together and impacted others on a weekly or monthly basis, in both good and challenging times.

People are motivated by achievement – and the recognition for it.

- 6. The Customer Promise to Lived Experience Ratio:** All businesses will have the normal “Bell Curve” of customers. Those who are advocates, those who are neutral, and those who are more challenging. The key is whether teams (all the way along the value chain) receive or indeed are aware of and care about customer feedback.

It takes a big cultural commitment to ensure the upfront promise to any customer is indeed the lived experience and shared via effective feedback loops.

- 7. Consequences for Team Achievements and Breaches:** It is pointless promoting a positive team culture if ambassadors who role model the right behaviours and team dynamics are not recognised and acknowledged, whilst breaches of team behaviours and team dynamics are ignored or not acted on. Like parenting, as and when the right and wrong behaviours occur, they need to be coached and acted on there and then, by managers, colleagues, and peers.

It is the unwritten rules which fuel team culture.

- 8. Staff Mission and Value Alignment:** Quite simply do the staff get it? Are they passionate and committed to the organisations purpose, do they live, and role model the behaviours and share their stories of performance and impact. The best way to see and feel this is hearing and observing them at work.



Managing by walking around, listening posts and staff story telling will reveal cultural alignment or not.

Culture forms the epicentre of any organisation's performance, point of difference, and competitive advantage. Team dynamics and their ability to fulfil the upfront promises made to customers forms the real evidence of an authentic team culture.

Finally:

It is impossible to measure culture by a single engagement survey or other instrument. As much as everyone loves a score, the culture of any organisation reveals itself through a range of linked and aligned characteristics and qualities. The key is belief, commitment, and alignment.

David Stewart Principal RYP International

Facta Non Verba – Deeds Not Words

David Stewart (B Ed, Grad Dip Sports Science, master's Business Leadership) David is the Founder & Principle of RYP International – A Coaching & Advisory Practice. He has worked globally with organisations, their leaders, and teams to develop their capability and culture to maximise performance.