



ASSESS, ARTICULATE, ACTIVATE & ALIGN: THE CULTURE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

Culture is the heartbeat of an organization. [Gallup's research](#) shows just how powerful it can be: people who feel connected to their company's culture are four times as likely to be engaged at work, 4.5 times more likely to be high performers, 62% less likely to feel burned out, and 47% less likely to be actively looking for another job. That is not coincidence; that is culture at work.

Many organizations put real effort into defining and communicating culture, yet gaps still remain between the words and the daily experience. Even executive teams can describe culture in different ways, creating misalignment that leads to disengagement, confusion, and turnover.

When culture is carefully assessed, clearly articulated, consistently activated, and aligned with how work actually gets done, it becomes a powerful driver of connection, collaboration, and performance.

Culture also transcends location. Whether employees work in the office, hybrid, or fully virtual, research shows the percentage who feel connected to culture is nearly identical. This reinforces what we see in practice: culture does not come from four walls; it comes from intentional leadership.

Organizations thrive when they align culture with practice to create humanized environments. Done well, culture becomes the north star that guides people through uncertainty, grounds decision-making, and fuels sustainable success.

The Culture Transformation Process

Transforming culture is not a one-time project but an ongoing commitment that requires clarity, consistency, and accountability. The process begins with a deep understanding of where you are today and moves toward embedding culture into every system and practice across the organization.

This work must be **intentional** in its design, **inclusive** in how it engages everyone across the organization (not just a small group of leaders), **integrated** within all organizational systems, and **iterative** so it continues to evolve over time. Culture is meant to be both enduring and evolving.

This is something we're seeing many of our members focus on right now, especially as organizations navigate the complexities of five generations in the workforce, the rise of AI, and an increasingly dynamic global environment.

Assess

Start by understanding your current reality. Conduct a thorough audit of policies, practices, leadership behaviors, and employee experiences. This honest assessment provides the foundation for meaningful change and highlights both strengths to build on and gaps to address.

- What are the unspoken norms and behaviors in our organization today?
- How do our people describe our culture, and how does that compare to how leaders describe it?
- Where do we see gaps between what we say we value and what actually happens?
- What data (engagement, retention, turnover, feedback) can we use to identify strengths and challenges?

Articulate

Define the culture you aspire to create. Use DFA's Culture Core Matrix (see our Action Step, *Align and Cultivate: Building A Workplace Culture That Drives Engagement and Success*) as your guide to help establish shared language around mission, values, purpose, and vision.

A clearly articulated culture gives everyone a common foundation and sets the direction for the future.

Ask yourself and your teams:

- Who do we serve? Employees, clients, communities, and partners—and how do we balance their competing interests?
- Why do we exist? What mission, values, and purpose define who we are and why we matter?
- Where are we headed? What vision guides our long-term goals and the legacy we want to leave?
- What do we stand for? How do our values shape behaviors, decisions, and daily interactions?

To test alignment, invite employees to describe your culture in three words or phrases. Compare their input to your Culture Core Matrix. The gaps (or overlaps) reveal both strengths to build on and areas that need attention.

Activate

Bringing culture to life starts with connection. When people feel culture every day in the way they work, collaborate, and lead, it becomes a source of pride and clarity. By communicating definitions clearly and ensuring shared understanding across all levels, leaders set the stage for culture to guide decisions and strengthen performance. The more consistently culture is reinforced, the more naturally it becomes part of the organizational rhythm.

Stewardship is at the heart of this work. Culture is not held by a single department or leadership team; it is carried by everyone. Each individual has both the responsibility and the opportunity to embody values in their daily interactions. When people see themselves as culture carriers, accountability rises and culture becomes a shared commitment that shapes behaviors, performance, and relationships across the organization.

Activating accountability further reinforces culture. Organizations must walk the talk by recognizing behaviors that foster culture and holding people accountable for actions that hinder culture. For example, if a key element of your culture is mentorship, your compensation system should reward leaders serving as mentors and sponsors.

Celebration helps bring culture into focus. Recognizing and amplifying the stories of individuals and teams who model organizational values creates momentum for others to follow. Sharing these examples through meetings, newsletters, and informal conversations makes culture tangible, visible, and inspiring. Over time, these stories become part of the collective memory, strengthening pride, connection, and trust.

- How are we communicating culture consistently at every level of the organization?
- What role does each leader and employee play as a culture steward?
- How do we recognize and celebrate behaviors that align with our culture?
- How are we holding people accountable when actions do not align with stated values?

Align

Embedding culture into systems is what makes it last. When hiring, onboarding, performance management, recognition, and advancement are all aligned with cultural values, people experience culture as something they actively live every day. These touchpoints shape how employees feel connected, how leaders make decisions, and how organizations signal what truly matters. Embedding culture in this way builds consistency and trust, ensuring that people know what to expect and how to succeed.

When systems reflect culture, values become habits that sustain performance and belonging over time. New employees quickly understand what the organization stands for, leaders are guided by the same principles, and recognition reinforces the behaviors that matter most. Culture then becomes a thread that runs through every experience,

inspiring people, strengthening collaboration, and fueling both engagement and results.

- Do our systems (hiring, onboarding, performance reviews, advancement, recognition) reflect the culture we want to sustain?
- Are leaders modeling cultural expectations in the way they lead and make decisions?
- How are we reinforcing culture during key moments of change or uncertainty?
- Is culture embedded in strategy and operations, or treated as separate from “the business”?

Take Action

Culture transformation happens when clarity, consistency, and accountability guide the way people work every day. By assessing your current state, articulating your aspirations, activating culture through daily behaviors, and aligning systems with values, you create an environment where people and performance thrive together.

This month, choose one step to focus on. Gather honest feedback from employees, refine your Culture Core Matrix, highlight and celebrate culture carriers, or review systems for alignment.

Each action reinforces culture as a source of pride, connection, and resilience, helping your organization build momentum toward lasting success.

Want Support Putting This Into Practice?

DFA members have access to exclusive benefits that can help you design, strengthen, and embed your culture strategy:

Strategy Session – Members are eligible for an annual, hour-long strategy session. Use this time to explore opportunities for culture transformation at your organization.

Policy Review – Already have culture policies, guidelines, or frameworks drafted? Members are eligible for an annual policy review with written recommendations tailored to your goals.

Advisory Hours (Champion & Leader level members) – Spend up to 2 (Leader) or 4 (Champion) hours with DFA advisors diving deeper into your culture initiatives and identifying practical next steps.

Reach out to any member of the DFA team to learn more about our member-exclusive support.