Leaders create experiences every day. Experiences foster beliefs. Beliefs, in turn, drive the actions people take. Collectively, their actions, with few exceptions, produce their results.

Source: Change the Culture, Change the Game, Connors and Smith, 2011
Key Ideas from *Change the Culture, Change the Game*

**Culture building is a leadership imperative.**
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. Either you will manage your culture, or it will manage you. The experiences, beliefs, and actions of the people in your organization constitute your culture and your culture produces your results. Leaders must ask themselves one all-important question: If everyone in the district/school/department continues to think and act in the same manner as they do today, can you expect to achieve the results you need to achieve?

From long years of experience, we know that the leadership team (at the district or at the school level) must shoulder the responsibility of shifting culture. Developing the leadership competency to accelerate the change effectively and then sustain the culture over time is the never-ending role of leadership. You can exclude no one. Culture building will and must involve every single leader in your organization.

**The old culture will not produce new results.**
Remember, by definition, the culture produces your results. You can not expect your current culture to produce new results. It simply won’t work. In most cases, the current culture is not a bad culture. It’s simply a culture that won’t produce the new desired results. The new culture always builds on the strengths of the old culture. However, to achieve new results, some shifts in the culture will be required.

You can’t expect the old culture to magically abandon its powerful, persistent, existing actions and beliefs. That just won’t happen. To achieve new results, you must create a new culture that will produce those results. You do this by defining the needed shifts in the way people think (beliefs) and act and then involving them in new experiences that will help them adopt those desired beliefs and actions. Too often, leaders attempt to change the way people act without changing the way they think (i.e. their beliefs). As a result, they get compliance, but not commitment; involvement, but not investment; and progress, but not lasting performance.
Step One: Define R^2

Building a new culture of accountability begins at the top of the Results Pyramid. The first step is to clearly state the new results - R^2 - you want to achieve. Confusion about results is all too common in most organizations. Confusion licenses people to maintain the status quo. Confusion kills the momentum of any change effort because no one feels confident about which direction to move. Describing the shift from old results (R^1) to the desired new results (R^2) helps everyone grasp the nature of the undertaking. Charting the necessary shift in results consistently reveals the need to shift the way people think and act in order to achieve R^2.

Use worksheet #1: Identifying Your Results Shift for this purpose.

By definition, a result is an R^2 result when the current culture, C^1, will not produce the thoughts and actions throughout the organization critical to achieving it. Achieving R^2 will, by definition, require a culture change to C^2. That makes it essential that you determine in advance if your desired results really are R^2. We suggest using the four criteria below:

1. **Difficulty**: Will the desired result take more effort to achieve than past results? The increased difficulty may result from tougher objectives reflecting higher standards. Or the objectives may be similar to those of the past but will need to be accomplished in a tougher environment where maintaining results, let alone improving them, is more difficult.

2. **Direction**: Will the desired result signal a significant change in direction for the organization? Changing direction could include new definitions of what students need to know and be able to do, shifts in professional practice required to meet new expectations, required responses to changing demographics, etc.

3. **Deployment**: Will the desired results require a large-scale deployment or redeployment of people or other resources? A redeployment of resources from one part of the organization to another or from one area of focus to another often requires a new way of thinking about how to get things done.

4. **Development**: Will the desired result demand that the organization develop a new capability or core competencies? Developing new competencies either on the people side, with the capability of leaders or the expertise of personnel, or on the organizational side, with systems and structure, requires a significant change in mindset that justifies a major culture shift.

Use worksheet #2: Evaluating Your Results for this purpose.
Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “Never mistake motion for action.” Mere motion accomplishes nothing and can prove more exhausting than action. Energy expended without achieving the result can wear you out, emotionally and physically. Below is a list of common practices that often fail to have the intended impact of shifting the culture and getting people to act differently.

- Distribute the organization values statement.
- Restructure or reorganize.
- Hire or fire someone.
- Change the reward system.
- Form a team and isolate it from the culture.
- Promote someone.
- Rewrite policy.

Used in isolation, these practices often fail to produce the desired result of shifting the culture and getting people to act differently. Flailing about with low-impact efforts misdirects energy, wastes time, misses the mark, and breeds frustration.

Accelerating a shift in the way people act requires a clear understanding of what you need to stop doing, what you need to start doing, and what you need to keep doing to achieve your $R^2$.

Use worksheet #3: Stop/Start/Continue Analysis.

1. List the $A^1$ actions that get in the way of achieving $R^2$. These are actions people should stop doing. Be as honest as you can about what doesn’t work. Honestly evaluating what is and is not working will help you answer the question “What actions should our people stop because they just don’t get $R^2$ results?”

2. Then think of the $A^2$ actions people don’t take but should. What do they need to start doing in order to achieve the $R^2$ you listed?

3. Finally, determine what key $A^1$ actions you want people to continue doing. These are the strengths of $C^1$ that will continue to help you achieve $R^2$. They provide the foundation upon which you will build $C^2$. 
If you want to understand why someone is doing something, you must discover their beliefs about what they think will occur as a result of either taking or not taking a particular action.

There is a simple yet powerful relationship between the beliefs people within the organization hold and the actions they take. If you change people’s beliefs about how they should do their daily work ($B^1$) and help them adopt the new beliefs ($B^2$) you want them to hold, you will produce the actions ($A^2$) 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 cultural change.

Not all beliefs are equal in terms of strength and conviction.

- A Category 1 belief does not influence people’s actions in a dramatic way. When presented with new information, people fairly easily abandon this kind of belief.
- A Category 2 belief, steeped in experience, is strongly held and not easily abandoned. This belief, developed over time, reflects a strong opinion based upon powerful personal experiences.
- A Category 3 belief resides at the very foundation of a person’s values concerning moral, ethical, principled, right and wrong behavior. People hold such beliefs so deeply that they will abandon them only under extreme pressure and often not even then.

Creating a new professional culture does not require we focus on changing every kind of belief. When we talk about shifting beliefs to change the culture, we are usually talking about working with Category 1 and Category 2 beliefs that reflect “how we do things around here.”

Use worksheet #4: Identifying Your Beliefs Shift to support your planning.

1. Begin by asking the question, “What current beliefs will prevent us from achieving $R^2$?” This step involves deconstructing $C^1$. Understanding the components of the current culture, including the existing broadly held beliefs, is essential to knowing what you need to shift in order to achieve $R^2$. Let us stress that while certain $B^1$ beliefs are undesirable, they are not necessarily inaccurate. People may be entirely justified in holding certain beliefs. **It’s not a question of right or wrong; it’s a question of effectiveness. Will the existing belief produce the $A^2$ actions needed to achieve the result?**

2. The second question, “What beliefs will propel us toward achieving $R^2$?” spotlights missing beliefs that, if adopted, will help people achieve results. These beliefs motivate people to take $A^2$ actions.
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 $B^2$ beliefs. Quite simply, the experiences you provide create the beliefs people hold. The right experiences create the desired $B^2$ beliefs. To accelerate culture change, you should ask yourself this key question: “What experiences do I need to provide in order to create the $B^2$ beliefs we need to achieve our $R^2$ results?” Keep in mind that, for good or bad, you are already creating experiences. You will continue to do so, whether you do it consciously or not.

Not all experiences are created equal. Experiences leaders provide in an attempt to create $B^2$ beliefs fall into one of four experience types.

- **Type 1 experiences** communicate a clear, meaningful event leading to an immediate insight. It will foster the desired belief without any interpretation by the leader. The odds are great that everyone will interpret the experience in the say way. Type 1 experiences are difficult to find, but they will powerfully influence people to adopt the targeted $B^2$ beliefs.

- **Type 2 experiences** require careful interpretation before people will adopt the intended $B^2$ belief. Frequently it is only through repetition of the Type 2 experience that the shift of belief occurs. Congruency of actions and words, consistency of the leader’s behaviors to stated expectations, transparency of decisions, sincere requests for and consideration of feedback, authentic involvement of others….all are important to the interpretation of Type 2 experiences.

- **Type 3 experiences** do not alter prevailing beliefs, because, for good or ill, people dismiss them as events that fit into the normal pattern of things. Putting vision statements on the wall, writing articles in the district newsletter, posting updates on the district Web-page, making announcements at meetings…..people do not take such experiences to heart and they will not convince people to adopt new $B^2$ beliefs. They may be helpful in promoting the change but can consume low payback investment of time and resources.

- **Type 4 experiences** will not, no matter how hard you try, be interpreted the way you intended. Type 4 experiences usually reinforce unwanted $C^1$ beliefs. You should make every effort to avoid providing such experiences.
Use worksheet #5: Providing Experiences that Instill $B^2$ Beliefs, to stimulate your thinking about the experiences you need to provide to influence $B^2$.

1. Identify a $B^2$ belief you need to establish for your organization or team. Make sure the $B^2$ belief will play a major role in achieving $R^2$ results.

2. Identify either a Type 1 or Type 2 experience that you think will foster that $B^2$ belief. Consider, specifically, what you could do to create each type of experience and support interpretation of the experience. The four steps to providing $E^2$ experiences listed below will be helpful at this point.

3. Also consider what experiences you do not want to provide. You will want to keep a watchful eye out for needless investment of time and/or resources in Type 3 experiences. Type 4 experiences should be avoided at all times. Sometimes you can avoid Type 4 experiences by seeking feedback from others before you create a planned experience. Ask and listen before you act.

The Four Steps to Providing $E^2$ Experiences

There are four important steps you can take to ensure that you provide experiences that will create $B^2$ beliefs.

1. Plan It: Learn to plan $E^2$ experiences in advance, both as a team and by yourself. Ask yourself these essential questions:
   - What $B^2$ belief do I need to reinforce?
   - Who is my intended audience for the experience? Whom will they talk to about it?
   - What specific experience will I provide? Is it a Type 1 or Type 2?
   - How will I provide the experience so that it reinforces the $B^2$ belief?
   - When is the best time to do this?
   - Who can give me input on my plan?

2. Provide It: Follow your plan and provide the experience. Keep in mind that your experiences cannot be manipulative in any way. Your efforts must be sincere attempts to provide genuine experiences that signal real change. It is a good idea to arrange for someone to observe how you go about providing the experience. You might want them to consider:
   - Did I do what I planned?
   - What type of experience do you think I provided? (1, 2, 3, 4) Why?
   - What feedback can you offer me on how I did?
   - How do you think people reacted?
   - Do you think the experience will have the intended effect on $B^2$ beliefs?

3. Ask About It: This is a critical step. If you don’t check in, you will not know if you have hit the mark. Remember the likelihood that people will interpret the experience differently than you might expect. Given this reality, feedback becomes critical to getting it right. Remember: Don’t believe everything you think! Ask people about the experience and the beliefs they are forming. When you ask, remember:
   - Don’t get defensive.
   - Do be curious and listen to what people really think.
- Don’t cut people off by asking a thousand questions.
- Do get as much input as you can from as many people as you can.
- Don’t ask leading questions that bias what people say.

Don’t forget that asking for feedback on the experiences you create becomes an experience in and of itself. If done well, it will help foster desired beliefs. If, on the other hand, the feedback indicates that things are not on track, take step four.

4. **Interpret It:** This step involves acting on the feedback you received and taking the extra steps necessary to interpret the experience you provided in such a way that people form the desired B² beliefs. Interpreting experiences for people involves:
   - Telling them the B² belief you want them to have
   - Explaining how the experience was intended to foster that belief
   - Clarifying any confusion or answering questions people may raise.

Remember, culture changes one person at a time, and the effort to change people’s beliefs is worth it. One last thought. Almost invariably when the leadership team at the top decides to shift the organizational culture, it must also shift its own team culture. It is true that we must be the change we want to see happen.