



Positive and healthy workplace cultures guide

Queensland public sector




The Queensland public sector (the sector) is facing unprecedented technological change, increased transparency, complexity and unpredictability, and shifting expectations of customers, community and employees.

The sector's 10 year human capital outlook reshapes thinking and ensures our workforce is ready for the major shifts on the horizon as they relate to human capital investment.

Our workforce will be required to think and act in new ways to respond to such radical change, create simple and responsive services, and change the way we work.

For these reasons, cultural transformation is an important strategic imperative.

Culture brings strategy to fruition, shapes employee experiences, and enables the best outcomes for the people of Queensland.



Our culture builds capability for new ways of working

To keep pace and adapt to change, we need positive and healthy workplace cultures. This guide provides an overview of the:

1. principles for cultural transformation
2. case for change and data insights
3. culture challenges and opportunities to disrupt traditional approaches
4. five steps to cultural transformation
5. enablers that work together
6. values that support positive and healthy attributes
7. ideas to trigger cultural change
8. measurements for progress

1. Principles

Our approach to cultural transformation acknowledges:

- behaviours aligned with values are the most powerful determinant of real change
- leadership at all levels is critical to driving organisational change
- readiness, receptiveness and approaches to change will vary in each agency
- change happens when people are engaged in conversations that spark new and more effective ways of working
- systemic and sustainable change occurs over a number of years.

2. The case for change

News about workplace cultures can travel fast and can impact employment brand, talent attraction, and retention. Our challenge is to create positive and healthy workplace cultures that:

- support and reward people to think and behave in new ways
- better position the sector and agencies to respond to the changing environment.

Our ability to be agile, relevant and respected by customers and the community will be hindered if people feel their organisation is disconnected, stifling, old fashioned, stagnant and reactive.¹

Research indicates there are **six attributes** of workforce and workplaces essential to positive and healthy cultures:

1. **inclusive:** people feel empowered and supported, enabling them to speak up and contribute to their full potential
2. **adaptable and agile:** people welcome and seek to introduce change and innovation
3. **purpose-driven:** people understand their contribution and how their work contributes to the bigger picture
4. **trustful:** people are trusted and empowered to do good work
5. **wellness-oriented:** people's health, safety and wellbeing is advanced in the workplace
6. **creative:** innovation is enhanced through people's creative thoughts and proactive behaviours.

Attributes

The table below can help agencies illustrate the potential dividend for organisations that focus on these **six attributes**.

Attributes	Why	Research	Current Indicators*	Insights
Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connectedness, collaboration, openness, and harnessing diversity of thinking and ideas are critical for creativity and innovative solutions. • Engagement is strengthened when people make decisions and take actions that are fair and transparent, and treat each other with respect independent of their status or disagreement. 	<p>Inclusive cultures are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • six times more likely to be innovative • six times more likely to anticipate change and respond effectively • twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets.² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% feel there is an inclusive culture where diversity is valued and respected.³ • 52% feel they are treated fairly and consistently.³ • 35% feel performance is assessed and rewarded fairly.³ • 40% feel recruitment and promotion decisions are fair.³ 	<p>Inclusion and diversity are both important for developing positive workplace cultures.</p> <p>If the way people treat each other and make decisions is perceived as unfair it promotes disengaged teams.</p>
Adaptable and agile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The skills we need and the way we work are rapidly changing. • Being able to manoeuvre, grow, and meet changing customer and community expectations using design, digitisation and storytelling will be a critical factor in our future success. • Resilience, foresight, simplified decision making, openness to failure, valuing feedback and contribution, and smart risk taking are essential in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer insights indicate personalised, proactive and predictive approaches to customer experience are increasing.⁵ • Digital innovation will grow five new jobs for every two jobs that disappear over the next five years.⁶ • When organisations embrace a growth mindset, employees report feeling far more empowered and committed.⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48% feel there is too much red tape in their work.³ • Common theme of employee experience is onerous chain of approvals that delay decision making.¹ • Employees feel we are not keeping up with changing customer and community expectations.¹ • Leaders at all levels rate between 3 and 4 out of a score of 6 at implementing change with agility.⁸ 	<p>Removing hierarchies and high levels of red tape will improve agility.</p> <p>Improving our ability to adapt quickly in a changing environment will improve outcomes.</p> <p>The sector's capability for change affects adaptability.</p>
Purpose-driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding why a job matters brings meaning and enjoyment. • Purpose orients every decision, creating greater clarity and alignment with an organisation's direction. • A cooperative, purpose-driven environment promotes open communication and collaboration across work boundaries to accomplish results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83% of people in organisations seek meaning in day-to-day work.⁹ • 60% of millennials say a sense of purpose is a key reason they chose to work at their current employer.¹⁰ • Uncertainty about direction leads to chronic stress and undermines teamwork.⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 92% feel they understand how their work contributes to their organisation's objectives.³ • 90% feel they understand what is expected of them to do well in their job.³ • Making a difference is the number one reason they work for Queensland public sector.¹¹ 	<p>Clarity of your role in an organisation and contribution to something bigger gives a sense of purpose and drives positive culture.</p>

Attributes	Why	Research	Current Indicators*	Insights
Trustful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High trust cultures improve how people treat one another and result in greater work satisfaction. Trust has a powerful and lasting effect on talent retention, performance and risk taking. 	<p>People in high trust organisations report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 76% more engagement 50% more productivity 29% more satisfaction with their lives 40% less burn out 74% less stress 13% fewer sick days.¹² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 67% feel their senior manager demonstrates honesty and integrity.³ Lack of trust in the workplace is a key theme in employee experience.¹ 	Trust is critical for positive workplace cultures.
Wellness-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work impacts on wellbeing, and wellbeing impacts on work. Workplace culture plays an important part in the health and wellbeing of employees. High job demands, conflict in the workplace, low levels of autonomy and support, and poorly managed change can impact on people's physical and psychological health and wellbeing. Belief that the work environment is open, fair and cooperative promotes confidence and wellbeing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive workplace cultures have lower accident and injury rates and fewer injuries – resulting in lower compensation rates.¹³ 1 in 3 find mental health impacts on their life and requires time off from work.¹⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 62% feel supported to achieve work-life balance.³ 28% feel burned out by work.³ 26% feel work has a negative impact on their health.³ 	Achieving greater work-life balance and workload management will improve wellbeing.
Creative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The future workforce will be required to solve increasingly complex problems and do things differently through incremental and experimental development of policies, products and services. When curiosity, novel and design thinking, data literacy, user centricity, smart risk taking, and challenging the status quo are encouraged, customer experience is enhanced and responses to challenges are more agile. Creativity is central to the design thinking process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees value creativity highly at work.¹⁵ Being methodical, ordered and dutiful limits creativity and innovation.¹⁶ Creativity is key to generating possible solutions, a process for rapidly testing and incorporating feedback, and a customer-centric approach.¹⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are wide variations in people's perceptions of how innovative their agency is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 61% feel their agency is innovative (46% to 80%)³ 56% feel their agency is open to new ideas.³ Leaders rate between 3 and 4 out of 6 at driving continuous improvement, and championing innovative ideas and solutions.⁸ Employee experience shows people feel innovation and continuous improvement are not supported enough, and we are risk averse.¹ There needs to be more collaboration across teams and agencies.¹ 	<p>Uniformity of thought and risk aversion affects empowerment and innovation.</p> <p>Working in silos limits connectedness and cross fertilisation of ideas.</p>

*Refer to agency-specific results (such as the *Working for Queensland* survey) to better understand indicators relevant to your agency.

3. Challenges and opportunities

Disruptions to traditional approaches to work will make cultural transformation increasingly challenging. It will be important to tune into possible opportunities.

Disruption

Blended workforces (employees, contingent workforce and artificial/cognitive intelligence)

Teams assemble and disassemble more quickly

Increasingly complex problems

Greater transparency in relationships between organisations and their employees

Challenge

→ Reduces mutual trust and levels of commitment and ability to reinforce cultural norms

→ Interrupts established networks, increases inconsistency in how work gets done

→ Everything is connected – changes in one area impact on many others

→ Greater consequences for unhealthy cultural attributes

Opportunity

→ Attract and retain people with desirable behaviours and mindsets

→ Spread desirable cultures across sector more rapidly

→ Desirable culture consciously designed and dispersed organically

→ Compelling reason for values driven culture and creating change

4. Five steps to cultural transformation

Transforming cultures is complex – our cultural vision, values, attributes, behaviours and enablers must align. Agencies should focus on one or two attributes and behaviours at a time as part of their culture transformation.

To transform culture, the targeted behaviours must shift to new organisational habits. Habits are a choice that people deliberately make at some point and then stop thinking about, but continue doing, often daily. Change may not be fast and always easy, but with time and effort, almost any habit may reshape.

There is no one formula for cultural transformation. Research indicates it can come about through a five-step process:

1. Current culture state

- What is the organisation’s strategy or priority outcomes?
- What is the current state of culture?
- How positive and healthy is it?
- How does it enable or hinder bringing strategy to fruition?
- What is the case for change?
- What are the pressure points?

2. Cultural aspiration

Cultural transformation starts by identifying and describing an agency’s cultural aspiration – how people want their workplace to be.

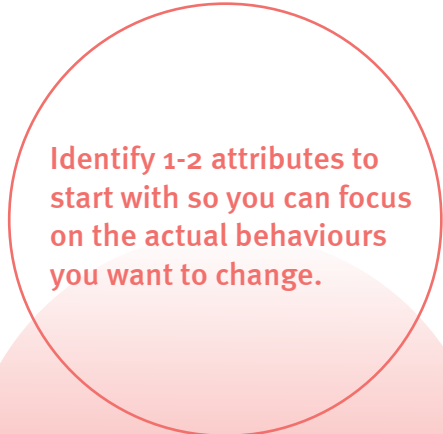
It should unify people and support organisational strategy and outcomes.

It could be a high-level aspirational statement, such as:

- *a positive and healthy culture that supports people to flourish*
- *to be respected by customers and community.*

Or a statement that focuses on a core attribute, such as inclusion – for example:

- *in serving the people and communities of Queensland, we bring our authentic selves to work, contribute meaningfully and thrive.*



3. Target behaviours

Identify a few behaviours that support a cultural attribute at the individual, team and organisational level. Consider foundational behaviours first before considering through the lens of growth and mature behaviours. The impact is maximised by targeting less behaviours. The results of current culture analysis and an assessment of consistently demonstrated behaviours inform selection of targeted behaviours. What ones may be easily converted and what need strengthening? Recognise that the acquisition of mature behaviours like 'connected' may be dependent on base behaviours such as empowering and accountable.

For more information refer to Appendix A.

4. Reward and reinforce new habits

Habits form when behaviours become routine, by repeating regularly and often subconsciously – the enablers are essential to achieving this. Habit is a formula the brain automatically follows: when I see (*cue*), I will do (*routine*), in order to get (*reward*).

Example of unhealthy habit loop for flexible work request:

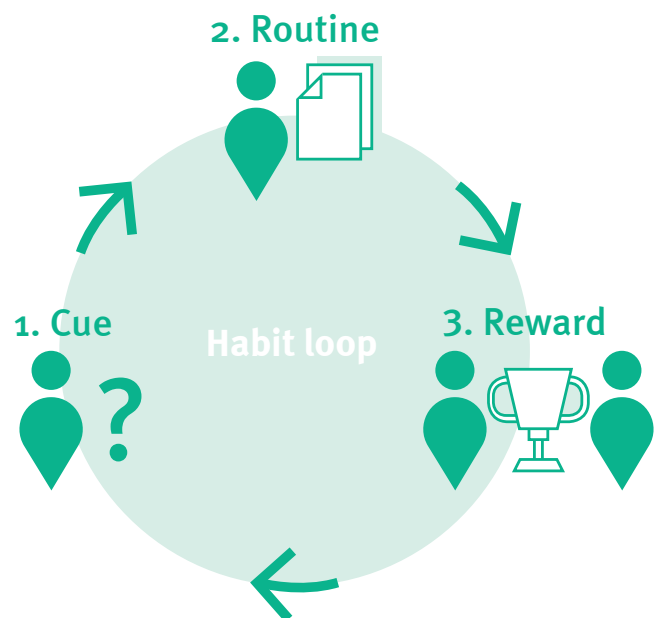
1. Cue: employee initiates request for working from home one day per week.
2. Routine: manager is unsure how to respond and assumes everyone will want it; wonders how they'll know if employee is doing work. Employee feels guilty for asking.
3. Reward: ease – manager can allocate a task face-to-face; trust – can rely on employee because they can see them; positive perception – looks like employees are productive and busy.

Example of new habit loop:

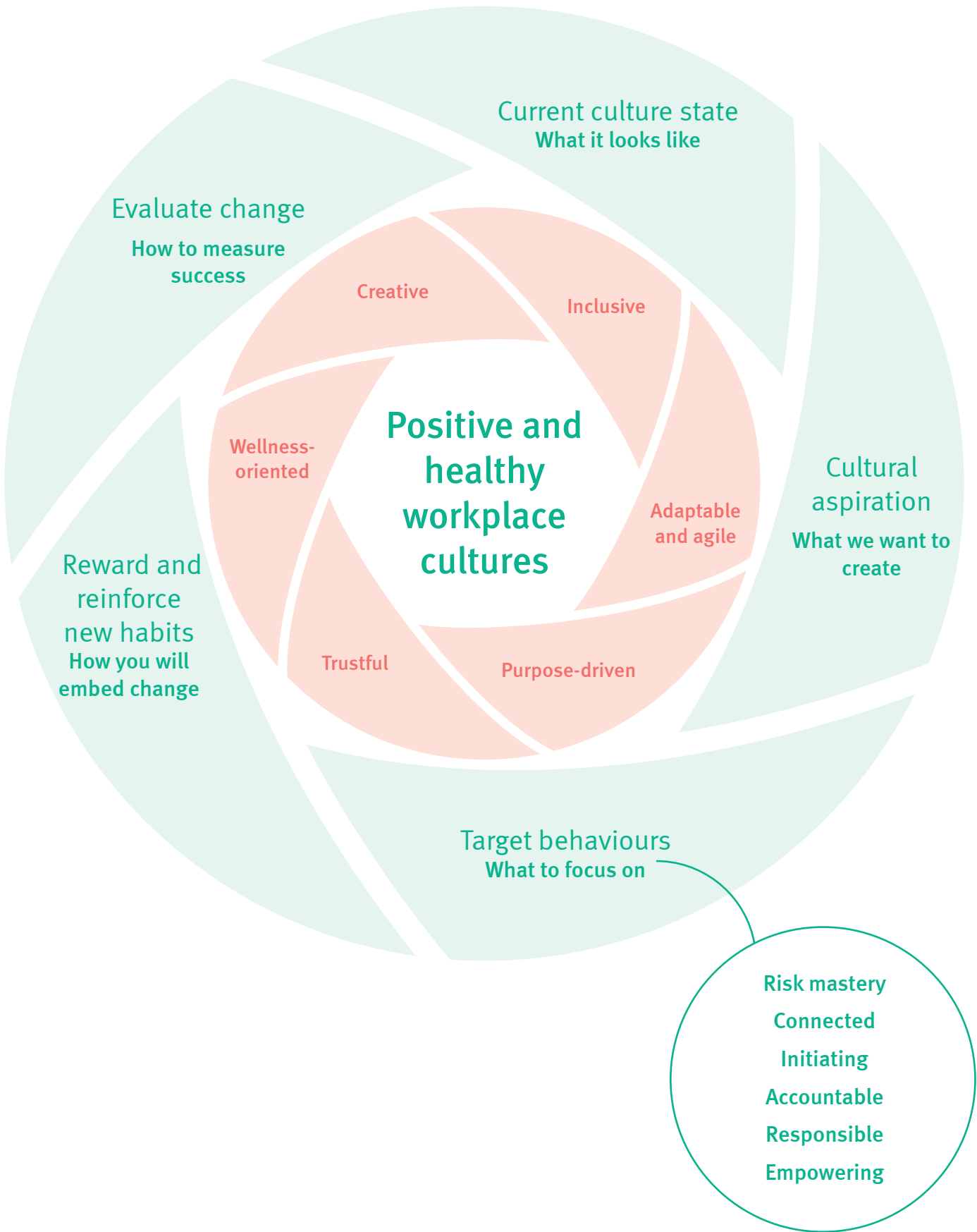
1. Cue: employee initiates request for working from home one day per week.
2. Routine: manager leads conversation by suggesting the whole team has a discussion at the next meeting to identify what options are available and how flexibility can work in the team.
3. Reward: ease – control of timing for conversation; trust – set up agreed outcomes and timeframe; positive perception – employees are attracted to work in this team and seen as open to new ways of working.

5. Evaluate change

Evaluation identifies quick wins to gain momentum and reinforce new habits. It allows for self-correction on the transformation pathway.



Steps to cultural transformation



5. Enablers

Multiple enablers work together to establish and reinforce new routines and ways of working.

Enablers include:

- leadership and vision
- organisational design
- systems and practices
- job design
- capability
- engagement and communication.

Without conscious design these can become inhibitors to behavioural change. Engaging leadership and the broader organisation in conversation, mutual experience and learning, and underpinning with data and analytics, is at the core of effective cultural change.

Leadership and vision

Ultimately, leadership at all levels owns culture and this approach to cultural transformation reflects that. The Leadership Board of Directors-General drives visible sector-wide change and individual leaders drive change through their respective agency. Leaders at all levels should demonstrate the change they want to see.

When leaders understand their 'why' and have a clear and compelling vision that resonates with people in the organisation, cultural transformation is more readily accomplished.

- Ask: What is the business challenge and how is culture influencing it?

Organisational design

Organisational design can support or hinder targeted behaviours and habits. Customer-centric and networked teams who are empowered to make decisions can deliver powerful results for an organisation. Be conscious of hierarchical structures which can sometimes be associated with risk aversion, stability, control, rules and lengthy approvals.

- Ask: Are we preparing ourselves for tomorrow's challenges or yesterday's problems?

Systems and practices

To establish and reinforce new routines and targeted behaviours, alignment of systems and practices is critical. Organisations of the future will need to act and behave like a living organism, adapting to change and evolving to address society's needs as they develop. This new paradigm will define success by how effective we are in competing within rapidly emerging ecosystems.

- Ask: If our organisation was an ecosystem – designed for agility – how would it look?

Job design

Flatter structures enable distributed decision-making, greater autonomy and agility. It also allows greater mobility and enables people to move across the organisation and sector as required. In a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, a high performing public sector becomes ever more critical. The speed of change will demand more agility, particularly around resource deployment. Flexibility is crucial.

- Ask: How do our job descriptions and recognition and performance systems strengthen or advance our culture?

Capability

Embedding continuous and lifelong learning, and empowering employees to take charge of their careers will ensure the organisation has the capability it needs to flourish. Employees increasingly seek skills for life rather than a job for life.

- Ask: In a learner-centric environment, what approaches can be considered that will make learning more effective in the organisation?

Engagement and communication

Focusing on a challenge or aspiration and how culture is affecting the related work positively and negatively makes a strong and clear connection to the results of the organisation. It engages the organisation to a much greater degree in conversations about change, shared learning, and mutual experience with faster results than general culture work.

- Ask: How does our culture help or hinder us to attract and retain talent – what does it say about our brand?

Enablers are effective in reinforcing behaviours through:

- **mindsets:** surfacing beliefs that are widely shared, but often exclusively invisible
- **recurring acts:** identifying recurring acts that trigger other behaviours and habits
- **symbolic reminders and artefacts:** identifying signs, symbols and artefacts that reinforce old mindsets or behaviours.

Agencies can also:

- look globally and locally for insights into how others apply enablers in response to similar challenges
- disrupt the status quo to discover new ways of reinforcing desirable behaviours

- prototype and test a range of ways to determine the best possible approach for the circumstances
- continuously monitor the impact of initiatives
- learn and respond with agility
- draw on a range of sector-wide human capital strategies, programs and initiatives that already guide and support local agency programs and initiatives.

New habits arise from rewarding and reinforcing targeted behaviours (see table below) in these indicative ways.

6. Values

The sector’s values support positive and healthy attributes and behaviours required to achieve the cultural vision.

Values are an important part of shaping organisational cultures because when culture and values are in alignment, engagement, reputation and satisfaction all benefit.



Customers first

- Know your customers
- Deliver what matters
- Make decisions with empathy



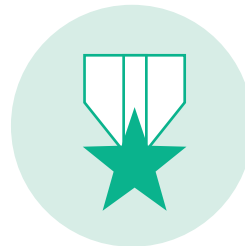
Ideas into action

- Challenge the norm and suggest solutions
- Encourage and embrace new ideas
- Work across boundaries



Unleash potential

- Expect greatness
- Lead and set clear expectations
- Seek, provide and act on feedback



Be courageous

- Own your actions, successes and mistakes
- Take calculated risks
- Act with transparency



Empower people

- Lead, empower and trust
- Play to everyone’s strengths
- Develop yourself and those around you

7. Ideas to trigger cultural change

Cultural change happens when leaders and leadership teams take ownership of their cultural change journey and invest time to engage their teams.

There are already many activities happening across the sector. Whilst there is no single check list, examples of what some agencies are doing include:

Leadership

- Be visible and vocal at all levels of the organisation.
- Identify and promote diverse voices who will champion new and different ways of working.
- Understand pain points and barriers to success.
- Involve the team in the journey.
- Help everyone see how they can contribute to a positive and healthy culture.
- Apply design thinking, experiment with risk and run sprints to accelerate action.
- Map employee journeys to understand the needs of the workforce.

- Recognise and reward people for their input and outcomes – not their position.
- Gather insights from contingent workers and others that can speak to the reputation and brand of the organisation.
- Empower teams to make their own decisions and set their own goals.
- Include accountability and responsibility for cultural transformation in performance discussions.

Story-telling

- Gather and share stories – it’s a great way to influence others.
- Celebrate success and progress along the way.
- Unpack *Working for Queensland* results to rethink roles, structures and organisational design.
- Have ‘culture conversations’ with new recruits.

Communication with impact

- Develop a communications strategy to highlight the importance of culture.
- Start with explaining ‘why’.
- Enlist support of leaders at all levels.
- Seek out different points of view and discuss how they relate to your vision.
- Track and be transparent about changes over time.
- Engage with real time feedback tools and programs.
- Understand the drivers of engagement in the organisation.

Connecting and integrating

- Culture is not something in a poster on the wall – it is something that is integrated into everything we do. Make it easy to integrate.
- Explain how cultural transformation supports and adds meaning to the Queensland Public Sector values.
- Integrate messages about positive and healthy cultures into other communications material.
- Understand cultural transformation doesn’t happen overnight – it is about continuous learning.
- Responsibility for cultural change does not rest solely with HR – it’s everyone’s responsibility.
- Focus on a few critical behaviours (linked to business objectives).
- Environmental scanning– where is cultural transformation thought leadership?
- Look outside the organisation for great examples of positive and healthy cultures.
- Scan digital and social media platforms for signals in the noise that point to areas that might need attention.
- Establish sector-wide or issue based working groups to lead whole-of-sector imperatives

8. Measure progress

Cultural transformation is a long-term process. Agencies may wish to measure baseline cultural attributes and behaviours, and ongoing change through:

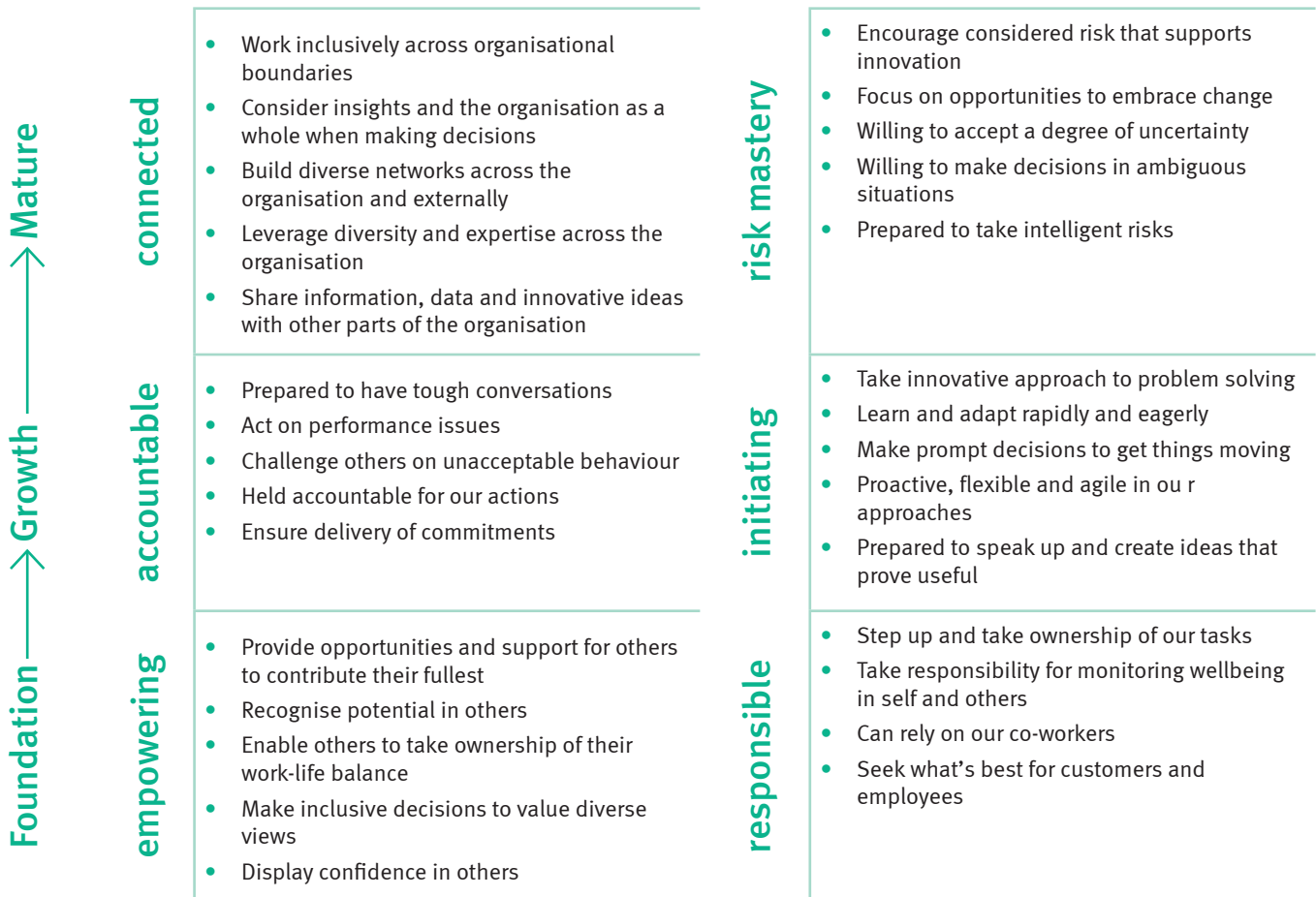
- behavioural pulse surveys
- *Working for Queensland* survey
- facilitated group conversations or interviews
- customer experience insights.

Climate and engagement data provides high-level clues about culture. The strengths and challenges may be better understood through behavioural surveys and expertly facilitated conversations with employees.

Appendix A

Behaviours

Research suggests there are six behaviours which drive positive and healthy cultures:



For higher order behaviours like risk mastery to flourish, it requires base behaviours, such as responsible, empowering, accountable and initiating to exist. Select one or two attributes to focus on at a time through the lens of one or two behaviours.

Empowering and responsible

The foundational behaviours – empowering and responsible – encourage a focus on people and relationships. By building a sense of individual and collective responsibility and empowering individuals and teams to own their successes and failures in an environment where it is not only safe to do so but encouraged.

As empowering and responsible behaviours become habits, they will support red tape reduction, autonomous decision making, faster responses, greater productivity, risk intelligence, agility, trust and inclusion.

A belief that all things good, bad or otherwise in the workplace are determined by chance or outside forces that are beyond a person's own control can lead to feelings of

helplessness. This is a key habit to break. The belief and behaviour drives blame culture, and stifles creativity and individual ownership. Where a person believes they can influence events and outcomes through their behaviours, they focus on their own responsibility, own their actions, own the results, and share the ownership for mistakes and issues.

Accountable and initiating

Once foundational behaviours are demonstrated consistently, additional behaviours – accountable and initiating – build on these to support a faster rate of cultural transformation and the imperative of innovation, customer-centricity and digitisation. It is easier to foster accountable behaviours and mindsets when people are demonstrating being empowered and responsible.

As the accountable and initiating behaviours form into habits, agencies will have clearly defined expectations of performance, behaviour and rewards, regular constructive conversations between people, restored workload balance for high performers, and poor performers proactively managed. The initiating behaviour will encourage people to innovate, be proactive and get things started with openness and responsiveness. Quick and efficient decision-making will put ideas and initiatives into action with speed. Products, services, systems and processes will evolve through innovation and continuous improvement.

Acceptance of poor or mediocre performance is the key habit to break. It sends a message that underperformance is ignored or rewarded.

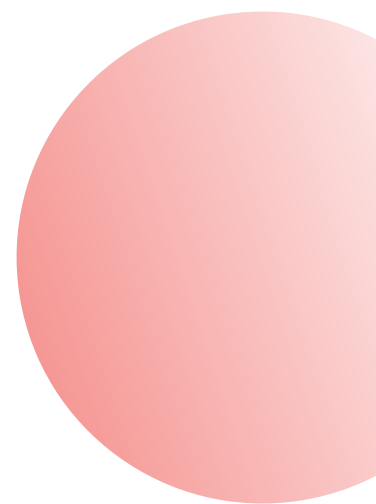
Connected and risk mastery

Where an agency is demonstrating foundational and growth behaviours – empowering, responsible, accountable and initiating – the higher order qualities of collaboration and ability to take smart risk become the next priority.

Individuals, teams and leaders actively understand the value of diversity and manage risks, rapidly enhance innovation and promote organisational agility in rapidly changing environments. They maintain productivity through times of uncertainty, and continue to make decisions to progress the agency's agenda with little direction.

To better meet customer and community needs, achieve efficiency and consistency, and capitalise on opportunities, people work effectively across team and agency boundaries leveraging diversity and expertise.

Teams working competitively, in isolation and not proactively sharing key information, knowledge and opportunities will be the key habit to break.



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Notes



The Positive and healthy workplace cultures guide is a strategic imperative (cultural transformation) within the Queensland public sector 10 year human capital outlook – creating a different workforce future by design.

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