

Session 1: Introduction to the Seven Practices

GOAL: During this first session, your goal is to start using Culture in Action’s seven practices and to confront one specific TENSION.

WHAT TO DO:

1. Pick a leader.

- Pick one team member to lead the first session.
- The leader should prepare the agenda. A standard agenda is with the course materials on the Culture in Action website. You can use the standard as is or adapt it to your needs. For the first session, it’s easiest to stick with the standard agenda.
- The leader should read the “Leader Tips,” which are available on the Culture in Action website.

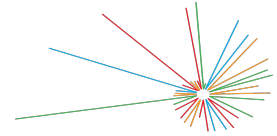
2. Get ready.

- The leader should schedule a 90-minute session, distribute this pdf (or a link to the website’s “Course Materials” page) to all participants, and let participants know whether they should submit their session prep before the meeting.
- All participants should spend 30 minutes or so prepping for the session.
 - First, they should do the pre-reading (below), which gives an overview of Culture in Action and the seven practices.
 - Second, they should do the “Session Prep” (below). For this first session, focus on STORY and TENSIONS.
 - Think about one short, very specific, very recent STORY that shows the best of how you come together as a team to get things done.
 - Think about one TENSION – a place where there’s a gap between where your team is today and where you want to be. Try to be open to possibilities, to acknowledge why you are where you are, and to frame it as an opportunity rather than as a problem. Using the phrase “how might we?” can help. For example: “How might we get the expertise we need to launch the new product and still meet the launch timeline,” rather than “We don’t have the expertise we need for the new product and we can’t hire anybody fast enough.” Don’t worry if you’re not totally clear on the concept of TENSIONS – we’ll talk about them more in the second session.

3. Go.

- Hold the session. Go through each of the practices in order. It’s ok if it’s a little uncomfortable – you’re just starting to explore and you may find parts that are different from what you’re used to or that you don’t yet fully understand. The leader can refer to the Leader Tips for help if you get stuck.
- When you get to TENSIONS, spend a few minutes letting the group name what they see as the most important TENSIONS the team is facing. Then, pick one to focus on during the session. Throughout, pay particular attention to making sure every person has a chance to be heard.

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Session 1: Pre-Reading

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is your organization's character and personality. It's how you come together to get things done. It's the sum of your values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviors, and attitudes. It's what attracts talent, drives engagement, affects satisfaction, and determines performance. It's how you turn your vision into reality.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

You might have the best idea and plan, the most disruptive technology, the most transformative mission. But unless you can get everybody on the same page and working together, you're not going to get the traction you want.

WHAT IS CULTURE IN ACTION?

Culture in Action is a set of seven practices that let you continually and consciously reinforce specific behaviors that help you succeed. Three of the practices focus on tensions – how to identify and work through the gaps between where you are and where you want to be, in order to create the conditions needed for growth and productive change. The other four practices focus on creating the psychological safety people need to speak up and take risks.

The curriculum is based on years of research and discussions with hundreds of successful business leaders who know how to make culture work for them.

For more on Culture in Action and the seven practices, go to www.cultureinaction.online.

HOW DO WE USE IT?

From day one, you can begin using the Culture in Action practices to solve at least one significant business challenge. Not a tactical, "top level" challenge. But a deep, structural challenge – one of those things that keeps you up at night, that lies beneath the surface and shapes how day-to-day problems get dealt with.

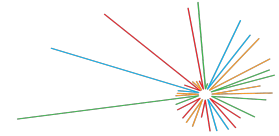
And as you master the practices and embed them in daily life, your culture will be stronger, healthier, and ready to exploit all the opportunities and solve all the challenges – big and small – that lie ahead.

WHAT ARE THE SEVEN PRACTICES?

The first three practices create a foundation for meaningful, productive substantive discussions.

- **Practice One: PRESENCE.** The first Culture in Action practice is as simple as a mother's advice and as complex as Buddhist theology. *PRESENCE focuses on the simple truth that in order to fully participate in and give your best to any CONVERSATION, you need first to create the space to be calm, open, and aware.* The practice of PRESENCE involves stopping long enough to be where you are, not in the past or in the future. Stop for a moment. Let go of whatever just happened. Stop worrying about what's coming. Silence your phone. PRESENCE is the foundational element to Culture in Action, since all of the other practices build upon and benefit from your strength of PRESENCE.
- **Practice Two: FOCUS.** The second The second Culture in Action practice uses the space you've created by being PRESENT to pay attention – to what's going on inside you, what's going on with others in the group, and what's going on for the group as a whole. *The practice of FOCUS is surveying what you're paying attention to, naming it, and intentionally directing your attention to what is important at this particular time.* The practice starts with silence, during which members of the team focus individually on what is

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happening for them. It then turns to the group, with each member of the group briefly checking in. And it ends with the group as a whole pausing for a moment to assimilate what they've heard in order to create a sense of what is happening for the group as a whole.

- **Practice Three: STORIES.** Ever bought a new car and, suddenly, you see that car all over the place? Our brains are continually bombarded with information – most of which we ignore. The third Culture in Action practice focuses on the basic truth that when something is top of mind, we notice it. *The practice of STORIES involves telling and hearing quick, one or two sentence STORIES highlighting the best of the team's culture in action, in order to make the cultural practices you want clear, explicit, and visible.* While STORIES are short and simple, they play a crucial role by affirming your team's strengths and values, highlighting specific actions that demonstrate those strengths and values, and placing positive actions front and center so they are more likely to be noticed and repeated.

These first three practices take little time – together they should take at most 10 minutes. They are an important first step, however, to get the team ready to deal with the challenges facing the team.

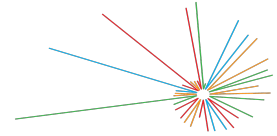
- **Practice Four: TENSIONS.** TENSIONS are the inevitable gaps between the current reality and the desired future state. At any moment in time, your organization is full of TENSIONS. They can be uncomfortable ... but they are healthy and necessary, since change can only occur when we actively confront the gaps between where we are and where we want to be. *The practice of TENSIONS involves naming the gaps between the present and the desired future state honestly, in a way that acknowledges why you are where you are and maximizes the room to see how you could get to where you want to be.* The trick with TENSIONS is to avoid simplistic, negative, self-fulfilling descriptions of the current state, or self-defeating views of the challenges involved in getting to the future state.
- **Practice Five: CONVERSATION.** Having named the TENSIONS the team is facing, the next step is to select the TENSION you want to dig into and then to have a CONVERSATION about it. *The practice of CONVERSATION involves confronting the TENSION with open-mindedness and creativity. Think of it as working collaboratively to see the muscle that connects the present to the future and to stretch that muscle in a way that moves you forward.* Good CONVERSATION requires discipline: to stay focused on the specific TENSION you're working on, to pay attention to the dynamics within the group, to draw out the contributions of all team members, and to agree on meaningful action.
- **Practice Six: ACTION.** Every CONVERSATION needs to end with agreed upon actions. These ACTIONS don't need to resolve the TENSION. Sometimes, in fact, maintaining the TENSION is healthy and can lead to more creativity or better solutions. However, *CONVERSATIONS do need to create clarity, a shared path forward, and meaningful commitments.*

The final practice lets the group step back from the TENSION, CONVERSATION, and ACTION to once again pay attention to the team.

- **Practice Seven: APPRECIATION.** APPRECIATION is designed to explicitly reinforce the team's commitment to honesty and continual improvement. *During APPRECIATION, participants name a specific action or contribution that somebody made during the session that they valued.* As with STORIES, these are quick, one or two sentence offerings about specific things people said or did. While brief, APPRECIATION is essential to focus the group on what went well so that it can continually get better at the seven practices.

That's it. Seven practices.

PRESENCE. FOCUS. STORIES. TENSIONS. CONVERSATION. ACTION. APPRECIATION.



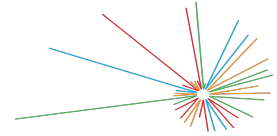
Session 1: Session Prep

Before every session, each participant should read the background materials for the session and think: about the last session, about what’s happening and what it means to them, and about the session to come.

The following chart will help you prepare. You can use this written form if it’s helpful.

If you like, your group can collect submissions in advance and share them. Doing so can help make **STORIES** more visible and streamline the identification of **TENSIONS**.

<p>PRESENCE: What are your current practices and how do you feel you’re doing with them?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SKIP FOR SESSION 1</p>	<p>The goal of this pre-work is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Think about PRESENCE, ACTION, STORIES and TENSIONS before the session. ➤ Collect TENSIONS in advance in order to make the session as efficient as possible. ➤ Make the STORIES, TENSIONS and ACTIONS public and a normal part of work. <p>Even though you won’t have time to address all TENSIONS during the session, it’s still valuable to spend some time naming them.</p> <p>At a minimum, it helps the group see things more clearly.</p> <p>Sometimes, simply naming TENSIONS is enough to make slight shifts to the system over time.</p> <p>If you want, you can agree to get together to talk about them in another setting.</p>
<p>ACTION: What actions did you agreed to at your last session? What progress have you made?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SKIP FOR SESSION 1</p>	
<p>STORY: Jot down a positive culture story – a real, recent example of something that you believe demonstrates the best of your culture in action.</p>	
<p>TENSION(S): What TENSION(s) do you want to FOCUS on/raise with the group? Remember to phrase them as questions: “How might I/we?”</p>	



Session 1: Additional Resources

If you're interested in reading more about the seven practices, it's ok to peak. Just go to the "Course Materials" page on the Culture in Action website and look at the materials for one or more future sessions.