

Cultivating Team Climate and Culture

Both the enduring culture of our organisations and the day-to-day climate in our teams have a powerful impact on the health and effectiveness of people and ministries. Whether we like it or not, a leader's character, presence, emotions, choices and behaviour all have an enormous impact on both culture and climate. The Bible's truths, stories and patterns challenge us to be intentional in shaping every aspect of team and organisational culture, from the mundane to the strategic. This session will provide a biblical framework for reflecting on **how and why you shape the dynamics of your team and organisation**, and provide you with tools that will help you **bring biblical vision and godly intentionality to the culture you lead**.

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Some underlying questions:

1. How might we develop a distinctively Christian vision for leadership (for all of life, not just the leadership of the church)?
2. How do we exercise gospel-shaped leadership within a dominant culture that denies Christ, that denies the sovereignty of a creator God?

Definition

Culture

- Culture as **the arts** – e.g. high culture, popular culture, creative arts
- Culture as **customs, patterns & norms of a people group** – sociology
- Culture as **'the way we do things around here'** – org. culture
- Culture as **what grows in certain conditions** – biology

Cultivating Leadership

In scripture we have a rich and radical vision for leadership, not only leading God's people, but for leading in all of life. We might call it '**cultivating leadership**', for several reasons:

It brings growth and flourishing

It has the potential to shape the patterns of a group or a society

It values meaning and beauty, not merely accomplishment and utility.

In the Beginning:

A biblical vision for culture and relationships

CREATION - FALL - REDEMPTION - HOPE

Let's start with Genesis 1 & 2:

- Who created and how?
 - God is before creation: not part of it, or emergent from it. He is absolute.
 - God is Trinity: personal, one and many, perfect unity, love.
 - God is both transcendent and immanent.
- Place and Time are established
- Order and structure are established
- And then humanity: created in God's image
 - Made to relate – to God, each other, and the rest of creation
 - Made to cultivate – to name, to fill the earth and subdue it
 - BUT made with boundaries and limits

Foundational patterns are established:

- Personal and Ordered
- One and Many
- Love and Power
- Transcendent and Immanent

Polarities: Two things which are seemingly opposite but most effective and powerful when both together. The Bible repeatedly cuts through and integrates these apparent opposites. (But not everything is in a polarity!)

***Task:** Take at least one of the following three 'polarities' and describe examples in your organisation of where one side dominates at the expense or exclusion of the other.*

- *Structure and Freedom*
- *One and Many*
- *Love and Power*

What would change if both sides were strongly present?

Can you think of examples of where they are kept tightly integrated?

‘Cultivating’ Leaders (Leaders Who Cultivate)

- Cultivation is core to the purpose of mankind given in Genesis 2.
- Lack of cultivation is a sign of judgement (Isaiah 5:6, Isaiah 7:25)
- Renewed cultivation is a sign of restoration & rebuilding (Ezek 36:34, Micah 1, etc)
- Cultivation continues in a restored creation (Isa 2:4; Micah 4:3 etc)

How do we as leaders exercise the **mandate for cultivation** in the day-to-day life of our organisations?

What does it mean to shape every facet of our organisation culture and team climate according to God’s nature and purposes?

How can we build relationships and practices that are visibly shaped by the gospel of grace rather than the culture around us?

A parallel idea: *Pedagogy*, the art and science of teaching. A gifted educator knows that every facet of what happens in the classroom (and much of what happens out of it for that matter) contributes to learning – it is not enough to know and tell stuff – and will be intentional about cultivating those conditions. So too as leaders we create a home or space whose conditions – the culture – will impact on the people we lead.

A classroom, or a workplace, or a home or a neighbourhood – is the place where a human system lives and functions.

“Complex adaptive systems” have:

- Independent actors
- Influential interactions
- Patterns which form quickly, are stable once formed, but which can be altered.

Reflect: Think back to a group you’ve joined or a family dynamic or an office team you’ve been part of. How do those patterns come about and what sustains them and holds them in place?

Cultivating a biblical culture – one that reflects the nature of the God we serve and the hope we have in Christ – is not simply a matter of expressing a Christian worldview whenever you can sneak in the opportunity. **It involves seeing the people I lead (or work alongside) as valuable human beings, created in the image of God – and then conducting myself and fostering conditions in a way that reflects that reality.**

The choices we can make are infinite! Here are some concrete dimensions we can focus on:

- Space
- Time
- Language
- Behaviour & energy
- Others?

Getting practical: A framework for reflection and action

Start by focusing this reflection and analysis on a specific activity, event, meeting or interaction. Later you can adapt the framework to help you reflect on and analyse the whole entity (team, organisation etc).

- **GOAL:** What *could* this [event, activity, meeting, process] look like if God's created design for his created people were better reflected? What would one step healthier look like?
- **REALITY:** Describe what's happening and what impact it's having. How are time, space, language, and behaviours being used? How are these shaping the experience and the outcomes? What feels stuck or tolerated? What are the unwritten rules, and what are they holding in place?
- **OPTIONS:** What specific changes could you make – in terms of using time, space, energy, language, norms – that would help shift the dynamic and the culture in a better direction?
- **WILL:** What is the first step? Who will you work with in implementing the changes? What will you do if you get resistance? How will you assess the impact? How will you make culture development and habit and keep the task of cultivation alive over time?

(Note: Resistance is valuable: it is a way of individuals or the group letting us know that something important has been missed or is seen as being threatened. Learn to respond to resistance with curiosity and patience).

Examples:

- Mealtime conversations
- Organising a shared storage space
- Meeting structure and style

Concluding Thoughts

You can't design or control every nuance. But it all starts and continues with the deeper values and priorities that anchor you as a leader, and knowing and holding firm to what really matters. You develop this and keep it healthy through your own sustained, everyday discipleship, and through your active participation in the community of God's people.

NOW: Reflect:

- What does the 'home' I create as a leader offer to those who inhabit it?
- What does the culture I create and sustain say of the leader I am becoming and of the Lord I serve?

Application work

Take one team or community (e.g. leadership team, family home) in which you are an active participant – whether you are a designated leader or a regular member.

Apply the GROW framework to reflect on how you might cultivate that environment for the growth and flourishing of others.

Then take one specific idea from your reflection (keep it simple), enact it, and observe the impact.

Stretch assignment for senior leaders:

Read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'Life Together'. It was written as a 'rule of life' for a learning community during his time as leader of an illegal seminary in Germany in the 1930s. It is centred on Christ and rich with the doctrines of God and humanity. It is also deeply practical and in some places delightfully quirky!

Make notes on what you might include if you were to write such a document to capture and communicate the biblical principles and patterns you would want to have shape the life and culture of an entity that you lead or belong to.