There is a well known expression that “Culture eats Strategy, for breakfast”. In reality this is very true, because even if you have the worked through and smartest strategy for your organization, it still will be very useless unless the culture in your team supports your strategy. If the people who are to execute and fulfill the strategy do not think and feel that they work in a healthy and trusting environment, then they will not have their focus on reaching your strategic objectives.

Strategy exists in the objective collective visible reality, often materialized in some form of strategy document with goals and targets. Culture on the other hand exists beneath the surface within each individual in their minds and emotions, which is invisible and quite often even subconscious. A culture starts by each individual becoming conscious of their own values and the collective values of your team and then this becomes visible in people’s behaviors and performance.

However, culture needs strategy to survive! In order for a culture to live and prosper, the culture needs a shared ambition, purpose and direction. This is what a good strategy provides. So even if the culture could jeopardize your strategic ambitions, it still needs the strategy to survive. So the key is that you realize that you need both strategy and culture to free the full human potential!

The process to align your strategy with your culture is not as complicated as it may sound. Simply put, it is a conscious act of asking yourself what culture you need in order to reach your strategic objective. This tool provides you with these steps.

**PURPOSE**

To help you connect your strategy with a wanted culture that supports your strategic objectives.

**OBJECTIVE**

At the end of this session you should have realized your key challenges and identify behaviour and actions needed connected to each strategic objective.

**TIME**

The estimated time for this exercise is 1-2 hours.
BEFORE THE SESSION

1. Anchor the decision to do the exercise in your team.
2. Select participants and book a meeting room. Ideally it should be the leaders, but if a smaller team it could involve the whole team.
3. Decide whether you should prepare yourself or use a guest speaker to introduce the workshop and/or create the right atmosphere. Like your top leader, a customer, external speaker, etc.
4. Send out an invitation, communicate purpose and objective, when, where and who. Ask all participants to prepare themselves by defining what they regard as the prioritized strategic objectives the coming 12-18 months. Ask them to list them in short bullet points and in priority order. Ask them to print and bring their list to the meeting.
5. Select the slides you intend to use. What documents does your organization have to communicate your strategy? Slides, Word documents, printed leaflets, etc. Bring them! Look for ideas and select other supporting slides at www.valuescentre.com/getconnected.
6. Print the handouts, one for each participant.
7. Make sure the meeting room is ready with all the material needed.
8. If you intend to use a meeting evaluation or reflection, have it prepared in advance (see page 172).
9. Try to come at least 20 minutes before everyone else.
10. Write the Purpose, Objective and Agenda on a flipchart so that everyone can see it during your whole session.

DURING THE SESSION

1. Present the Purpose, Objective and Agenda of the meeting. Highlight when you intend to end the meeting. Ask if everyone will be able to stay for the whole meeting.
2. Ask the manager to introduce the workshop by expressing his/her personal view on how important this work is. And underline the importance for each participant to clearly share and articulate their view in an honest and open way, based on trust.
3. Introduce the exercise by sharing the steps to be taken. Make sure everyone understands the exercise. Allow time for questions and concerns.
4. Make sure everyone gets the opportunity to voice his or her view. Be assertive and probe for questions. Remember, the process is as important as the outcome.
5. Ask everyone to talk two by two about their expectations of this workshop. Then ask the team to share what they have talked about. Ideally, capture their expectation on a flipchart or white board so that everyone can see it. This is both to make everyone more connected to this work here and now AND for you as a session leader to hear and connect to their expectations.
6. Ask everyone to bring up their pre-work answer about the prioritized strategic objectives. Hand out the first handout and ask them to individually write down their answer to these two questions. When they are ready, ask them to talk about their answer in small groups of 3-5 persons.
7. Display the answers to the first question on a flipchart. Conclude if the displayed prioritized strategic objectives for the whole team are aligned and shared.
8. Share the challenges that have been identified in order to reach our strategic objectives. Try to define if these challenges are “hard/objective/tangible” challenges (above the surface) or “soft/subjective/intangible” challenges (below the surface). If possible display them on a white board, above or below a horizontal line like a waterline. The most common answer is that the most of the challenges identified are below the surface. See example below.

9. Look at the identified challenges and reflect upon “what does this tell us about our team and what we need to focus on to reach our strategic objectives?”.

10. Hand out the second handout. Ask everyone to individually answer the two questions. When ready, share the answers in small groups of 3-5 persons. Ask them to reflect upon: When looking at the answers to question 1, what becomes clear to you? How do the identified values and behaviours align with the culture we have today? What are the major gaps? What proposed tools and actions have been identified? Ask them to prioritize 2-4 actions. What is needed to make this happen, and by when?

11. Collect and list all prioritized actions. Assign persons and resources, and set time.

12. Conclude the exercise with a shared reflection of the experience and learnings.

**AFTER THE SESSION**

1. Make sure actions are understood to meet the expectations of the commitments done at the meeting.

2. Include the follow up of the agreed actions into existing follow up meetings.
**Agenda**
(proposal and facilitator notes)

1. **Introduction**  
   Go through Purpose, Objective and Agenda. Be open for questions and concerns.  
   10 min

2. **Our prioritized Strategic Objective and Challenges**  
   Everyone present their prioritized strategic objectives.  
   30 – 60 min

3. **Culture Values & Behaviours needed**  
   Ask everyone to identify the values and behaviours, plus the tools and actions needed.  
   30 – 60 min

4. **Whole Group Reflection**  
   Have the group reflect on what was the major thing they learned and took away from this exercise.  
   15 min
Questions for reflection:

Your prioritized strategic objectives:

What are your biggest challenges to succeed in reaching your strategic objectives?
Questions for reflection:

Based on your shared strategic objectives (for your organization as a whole, plus for your team in particular)…

1. What values and behaviours do you need to live by in order to reach your strategic objectives?

2. What tools and actions do you need to grow these values and behaviour?