

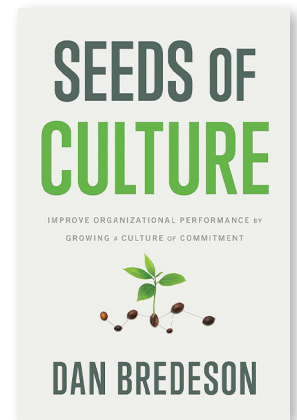


Executive Book Summaries[®]

Seeds of Culture

Improve Organizational Performance by Growing a Culture of Commitment

by **Dan Bredeson**



Contents

Introduction

Page 2

Part 1: Lay of the Land

Page 2

Part 2: Traits of Successful Culture Farmers

Page 3

Part 3: Seeds of Culture

Page 4

Part 4: Life Cycle of Performance

Page 6

Conclusion

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Culture can make or break an organization. Whereas a positive culture bears the fruits of meaningful work, commitment, and a shared goal, a toxic culture leads to a poor climate, lack of commitment, and slower organization-wide progress. This is why it's vital to get your cultural design right from its very onset.

The book *Seeds of Culture: Improve Organizational Performance by Growing a Culture of Commitment* reveals which “seeds” leaders must plant to grow a culture of commitment, and how they can properly nurture the growth of those seeds throughout their lifecycle.

Author Dan Bredeson shows leaders how affinity, priority, energy, authenticity, credibility, and integrity become vital players on their journey to “growing” a successful culture. His “seeds of culture” philosophy deep-dives into the importance and implementation of effective communication, ethics, psychological safety, diversity, generosity, autonomy, and mutual accountability for a thriving culture.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How organizational culture is directly linked to performance.
- What makes a great culture farmer.
- To sow the seven seeds that create a thriving culture of commitment.
- How to keep cultivating these seeds throughout their lifecycle.

Introduction

Winning leaders don't build culture, they grow it. Culture is an organic process. And much like my dad planted seeds of corn, leaders need to plant seeds of culture. Reflecting on my upbringing on a small dairy farm in southwest Wisconsin provided me with the "aha moment" that was the spark to write this book. Here, we learn which seeds you should plant to grow a culture of commitment, and how you can properly nurture the growth of those seeds throughout their life cycle.

Whether you lead an organization or not, I think you'll find a few grains of truth in the seeds of culture. I hope they help you achieve outstanding results and experience the joy that comes from working with like-minded individuals in a culture of commitment.

Part 1: Lay of the Land

Chapter 1: Defining Culture

How do you define culture? If you're new to an organization, your coworker's behavior will tell you "How we do things around here." Stick around long enough to see how the members of a culture dress, speak to one another, speak to customers, speak to stakeholders, resolve disagreements, handle failure, handle success, interact with leadership, and interact within their industry. In other words, how things in the organization really get done.

Culture can be a hero or villain. It can be a friend or foe, poison, or anecdote. Culture's versatility is matched only by its omnipotence. If culture is powerful enough to determine the success or failure of an organization, then it would seem prudent for leaders to understand how it works. Don't put up the toxic culture. Change it or get out. It's not worth it to stay.

Mission statements don't define culture either. Think about it: how do you describe your workplace? Do you quote the company's mission statement? Are you inspired to work hard because your job "helps deliver a competitive and sustainable rate of return to shareholders?" The way you answer questions about your job has more to do with culture than it does with any "big picture" goals the organization may have.

Chapter 2: Why Culture Matters

Four million. That's the number of Americans who quit their job from April 2021 through January 2022 (The Great Resignation period).

Most of the conversations surrounding the great resignation position it as a win for employees who finally took control of their professional destinies. While employees may have won, employers most definitely lost. Why? Because turnover is hella expensive. It costs you roughly 33 percent more to replace an employee than it does to keep them on the payroll. When good people leave your organization, they take experience, knowledge, and performance with them.

More money. Flexibility. Enjoying the work. Relationships with coworkers. Avoiding burnout. Mental health. All these contributed to the Great Resignation. If any one of these factors is missing from a job, it's powerful enough to force a person to resign. If several are missing from a job, it's a toxic cocktail (or should I say toxic culture?) powerful enough to force millions to resign.

Toxic cultures are rife with hostility, cliques, gossip, mistrust, and selfishness. They are a breeding ground for struggles, manipulation, abusive leadership, finger-pointing, poor communication, and horrible performance.

A better culture must go with better pay if you want to keep your team intact. If the economy is booming, a good culture will keep people from going to the competition and will attract more people to your cause. If the economy is a train wreck, a good culture will improve your organization's performance and help you stay afloat.

Chapter 3: Culture and Performance

Organizations that win and organizations that lose both have a culture, but there's obviously something different going on in the two organizations. What is it about the culture of a winning organization that influences its members to make choices that improve organizational performance? The answer: commitment. There's an emotional weight with commitments that goals don't have. A goal is something you achieve if everything comes together. A commitment is a promise you keep, even if everything falls apart. Teams with a culture of commitment are ready when a storm of adversity blows through.

Culture is an organic process. The four CP Life Cycle describes how culture farmers influence the seeds of culture to improve organizational performance. The stages of the 4CP Life Cycle include:

- Culture: "How we do things around here."
- Climate: "How we feel about the culture."
- Commitment. "An individual choice based on how I feel

A positive culture leads to a good climate, which inspires commitment to the organization. . .

about the climate.” Organizational commitment is an individual’s psychological attachment to an organization.

- **Community.** A group of people committed to each other and the organization.

A positive culture leads to a good climate, which inspires commitment to the organization, which manifests itself in the behaviors of members who are devoted to the success of the community where they work.

Part 2: Traits of Successful Culture Farmers

Chapter 4: Think Like a Farmer, not a Carpenter

Both farmers and carpenters utilize tools to manipulate raw materials. But both have a different mindset when it comes to three concepts: control, force, and speed.

Farmers exert influence; Carpenters expect control. If you are a leader who has a thirst for control, quench it with a hobby. But please do anything other than direct your need for control toward the culture you want to grow. A big reason why leaders shouldn’t expect control over the results of a cultural change effort is because people, and the culture they’ll align themselves with, don’t respond well to force. Forcing cultural change into an organization normally leads to one of two results: the organization openly rebels against the changes, or the organization’s members verbally agree to the change but quietly conduct business as usual.

Without an effective culture farmer, an organization’s culture is at the mercy of human nature. If a leader fails to plant specific seeds of culture, human nature takes over and nobody knows what the crop of culture will look like. Culture also takes time. There are no shortcuts. The growth of culture in your organization must be approached with the patience of a farmer.

Chapter 5: Affinity

Affinity for people as it relates to growing culture means we find a way to like people, even when they seem to be

unlikeable. Maintaining affinity isn’t always easy, but it’s possible with some intentional effort. If you feel your affinity slipping, try exhibiting 3 qualities I’ve noticed all great culture farmers have in common: humility, curiosity, and connectivity.

Stay humble or you’ll get humbled by the marketplace. Your position on the organizational chart doesn’t make you any better than anyone else. Everyone has a fascinating story to tell. Be the type of person who wants to hear it.

People don’t leave companies; they leave people they have no connection with. Find ways to connect with people in the organization. Build a personal connection that goes beyond business etiquette but never crosses professional boundaries.

Chapter 6: Priority

There’s no value in waiting to plant seeds of culture. You’ll always wish you had done it sooner.

Acknowledge culture’s existence. Openly discuss the importance of culture so it stays top of mind. Respect culture’s influence. Once culture has taken root, it wields tremendous influence. Avoid changes to policies, processes, and procedures that run counter to cultural principles unless, of course, you’re trying to change the culture.

Give culture space to grow. Most things planted in a garden need a little space to grow. Seeds planted on top of one another end up fighting for resources. Culture is no different. People need space to move freely and interact with other members of the organization.

Chapter 7: Energy

Just like a farmer, anyone interested in growing a culture must expend their physical, mental, and emotional energy to ensure the seeds of culture take root:

- **Physical energy:** A leader who is too exhausted to be present won’t have much success growing culture.
- **Mental energy:** The mental energy to grow culture is a combination of your current knowledge and your

willingness to learn every single day

- Emotional energy: Think of emotional energy as a team with an offense and a defense. Enthusiasm is your offense; Resilience is your defense.

Culture farmers rarely ever take a day off. The seeds of culture aren't going to plant themselves. Be prepared to expend a lot of physical, mental, and emotional energy. Every. Single. Day.

Chapter 8: Authenticity

First impressions are overrated. Culture farmers must focus on lasting impressions instead. Don't "fake it till you make it." Instead, just remember "being real has great appeal."

Building authenticity as a culture farmer begins with self-awareness and sincerity. Self-awareness is knowing who you are and who you are not, before asking people to commit to your vision. Sincerity is staying true to who you really are. Gather the courage to ask yourself, "What is my reputation?" Then, ask the same to someone you trust, and who cares for you enough to be honest with you.

Chapter 9: Credibility

Credibility is the reason people will start listening to you. The credibility you have with the team is in direct proportion to the value you deliver to the organization. If you offer some helpful advice or deliver on a promise, those are deposits in your credibility bank. If you are the reason a project goes sideways or you mishandle an important customer, those are withdrawals from your credibility bank.

Always bring value and make more deposits than withdrawals. Be sure to surround yourself with credible people. If your inner circle is filled with people who don't bring value to the rest of the team, your credibility as the leader will suffer.

You can earn credibility and you can lose it, all depending on your actions. So, keep working on your skills and abilities. Get better at what you do so you can help everyone around you get better at what they do.

Chapter 10: Integrity

Credibility is the reason people will start listening to you. Integrity is the reason people will continue listening to you. Be courageous enough to start acting with integrity and stubborn enough to maintain it.

Culture farmers don't operate in the dark. The team is watching how you do everything. Your personal integrity

is imprinted on the organization by the actions you take, the decisions you make, the things you celebrate, and the behavior you tolerate. So do the right thing, even when it's uncomfortable.

Optimism promotes winning more than cynicism prevents losing. Mustering the cynicism necessary to assume everyone is out to screw you over is exhausting. Sure, you've been burned a few times, but who hasn't? Instead, believe that optimism promotes winning more than pessimism prevents losing.

Part 3: Seeds of Culture

Chapter 11: Before You Plant

Seeds of culture are affected by the Weather (external environment) and Soil (internal environment). Culture farmers can't control the Weather, but they need to react quickly and adapt to it. Similarly, no organization is airtight. The outside world will always find its way in.

There isn't a bad time to plant seeds of culture and it shouldn't take long to check the Weather and Soil. A good culture farmer can learn a lot about an organization in a matter of weeks. The history of an organization will provide a lot of clues about its culture. Understand how the past influences the present if you want to grow a culture of commitment in the future.

Chapter 12: Effective Communication

Effective communication is rooted in clarity, transparency, and consistency. You need this first seed of culture before planting the others.

Clarity is the difference between simply receiving information and knowing what to do with it. Don't speak to be heard, speak to be understood. Understand what your audience wants to know. Regardless of the type of communication you have with the team, your audience wants answers to the following questions:

- What exactly are you asking me to do?
- Why are you asking me to do it? Why should I care?
- Who can I go to for help?
- How do I begin?

Transparency follows clarity. Remember, the cover-up is worse than the crime. When you screw up, tell the team you screwed up. Apologize. Tell them you'll do better in the future, and then make sure you actually do. Have the cour-

When you screw up, tell the team you screwed up. Apologize. Tell them you'll do better in the future, and then make sure you actually do.

age to be candid because the story people make up on their own is always worse than the truth. Finally, develop the discipline required to stay consistent. Consistency is finding a cadence of communication that suits the purpose of the message you're trying to deliver, putting that cadence on the calendar, and then sticking with the schedule.

Chapter 13: Ethics

In an increasingly connected world, it's becoming more difficult for unethical organizations to hide their transgressions. People today don't commit to organizations they can't trust. Don't try to cover up your transgressions in a world where everyone records everything and can broadcast it to the entire world in real-time.

Doing the right thing isn't always the easy thing to do. The way to encourage the growth of ethics in an organization is for the leader to model a strong ethical code.

As a culture farmer, define the ethical standards for the team and make a deliberate display of ethics. Avoid the slippery slope. There is right, and there is wrong. Choose right. Yes, people will think you're being uptight about the rules, so what? You are the person who will get called on the carpet if the organization falls into an ethical abyss, so hold your ground.

Chapter 14: Psychological Safety

Psychological safety creates an environment where people can create, innovate, share opinions, and make mistakes without fear of reprisal, embarrassment, or blame.

People won't commit to an organization they are afraid of. Psychological safety promotes dialogue based on trust, which leads to more effective solutions and greater performance. The professional candor that comes with psychological safety reinforces expectations and allows teammates to collaborate and challenge each other in the right way.

Planting psychological safety starts with leaders setting the tone from the top, setting clear expectations, encouraging participation, and reacting appropriately.

Chapter 15: Diversity Is a Good Start

Diversity includes differences that are visible and not visible. Equality means treating everyone equally and giving everyone access to the same resources. Equity means treating everyone fairly and giving everyone access to the resources they need to compete, based on each person's circumstances. Inclusion refers to the perception that everyone's unique contributions would be appreciated.

In other words, Diversity is being invited to the party. Equity is getting a ride if you don't have a car. Inclusion is being invited to dance and feeling free to show off all your dance moves. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) should matter to culture farmers because diversity is inevitable. The world isn't going to be less diverse five years from now. Embrace the diversity that is inherent in our increasingly global and remote work environment, or you'll be run over by it.

Chapter 16: Generosity

When I'm on the receiving end of generosity, the warm, fuzzy feeling I get inspires me to be generous with the next person I meet. And that person pays my generosity forward, and so on. Viral generosity inspires organizational commitment. Generous acts with no strings attached prove to the team that you care about them.

To plant generosity, make empathy your default mode. People will care about the team if they know the team cares about them. Be generous with your time. Reach out to members of the organization when you don't have a reason to. Be generous with your money. Spending money on your current team costs less than finding their replacement if they quit. Be generous with your praise. Praise is a renewable resource, after all. Be generous when giving credit to your team.

Chapter 17: Autonomy

Autonomy is the freedom to do a job in the manner you see fit. It is not freedom from consequences if you do a bad job.

If you've planted effective communication, the team should know how to do their jobs. If you've planted ethics in the organization, illegal ethical breaches shouldn't scare you. If

you've planted psychological safety, the candor you've encouraged to grow allows you to quickly rein in anyone who goes beyond the pale. Plus, psychological safety removes the stigma of failure when experimenting with new ideas, but you have to let people go out on their own and experiment!

Don't be afraid to give up control. You never had it in the first place. Reframe autonomy as an opportunity for team members to build self-efficacy (a belief in one's own ability based on previous success).

Chapter 18: Mutual Accountability

Heavy-handed accountability may get you compliance, but you'll never get commitment. Why? Because people who are truly committed to something don't need to be held accountable for doing it.

Far too many leaders, managers, and supervisors use accountability as a guise for micro-management. It's a tough spot for a leader. If they ignore accountability, mediocrity will creep into the organization. But if they try to force accountability, the team will resist it. What's the leader supposed to do? The answer: become a good culture farmer and plant the seed of mutual accountability.

When team members embrace accountability from leaders and each other, the organization has reached a state of mutual accountability.

Part 4: Life Cycle of Performance

Chapter 19: Cultivating Performance

Planting seeds of culture is the first stage in the Life Cycle, but it's not the last. There's work to be done to cultivate those seeds and encourage them to influence performance. Understanding the factors in play during each stage of the four CP Life Cycle will increase the likelihood that a culture farmer's efforts will lead to improved performance.

One concept I haven't discussed but can't ignore is subculture. Most organizations will have different teams, departments, or work units. Each of these groups may develop its own subculture if the members share common tasks and history and the team has a stable membership. Respect their influence because they have a greater impact on performance than the large organizational culture.

Leadership and transformational practices set the cultural tone. Management and transactional practices determine the climate. Each team member chooses their level of com-

mitment based on the climate. If they like it, they'll commit. If they don't, they won't. Effective commitment (the want to type of commitment) will yield the greatest results. Finally, a sense of community will grow when a group of individuals choose to commit to each other and the organization.

Chapter 20: A Final Lesson for Aspiring Culture Farmers

If given the choice, why would someone choose a life of physical exertion, mental exhaustion, emotional vulnerability, and economic uncertainty? My dad could have made a living in any number of different ways. Why did he sign up for the life of a farmer? One day I decided to ask him. The answer he gave is the final lesson I'll pass along to all aspiring culture farmers out there. My dad answered my question with one of his own:

“Why would I ever want to do anything else?”

That's the mindset you need if you want to be an effective culture farmer. You have to want it, no matter what. My dad knew that the most difficult challenge led to the most satisfying victories. He enjoyed the challenges. He embraced the grind. Culture farmers need to have the same attitude.

Conclusion

Growing culture isn't as hard as farming, but that doesn't mean it's easy. If it were easy, then everyone would do it. Planting seeds of culture will probably be the most difficult thing you do in your career, but that's what will make it so rewarding.

There will be days when you question yourself. Keep going there will be days when you want to quit. Don't stop. There will be days when you're humiliated. Laugh it off and show up the next day. The people around you will see your effort. They'll see the work you're putting in, day in and day out. And when the performance starts turning around, and I guarantee it will, they won't have to ask how you did it because they've been watching you do it every day. The question they'll ask instead is “Why did you do it?” My hope is you'll answer the same way my dad did: “Why would I ever want to do anything else?”



Dan Bredeson is an organizational cultural and leadership consultant with over twenty years of experience. Throughout his career, Dan has garnered a unique perspective on culture by interacting with and observing every level of the organization in hundreds of different businesses and nonprofit organizations. He has firsthand knowledge of how leadership decisions made in the C-suite impact the culture and, ultimately, the performance of an organization. Dan combines his professional experience with academic research, and then looks at it through the lens of his upbringing on a farm to offer a new paradigm for organizational culture.

Seeds of Culture: Improve Organizational Performance by Growing a Culture of Commitment by Dan Bredeson ©2023 by Dan Bredeson. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Greenleaf Book Group Press. ISBN 979-8886451009. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright © 2024 Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. For permissions and reprints, please contact service@summary.com. 46SS06A