



# Decisions that Matter

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## Leading with Culture in Uncertain Times

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“Decision making is easy when your values are clear.”

- Roy Disney

# INTRODUCTION

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## We will learn:

- Use company culture as a stabilizing force to guide decision-making during uncertainty and disruption.
- Maintain team alignment and cohesion by applying organizational values to real-time leadership decisions.
- Engage employees in culturally grounded decision-making to promote shared ownership, accountability and resilience.

# INTRODUCTION

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## Culturally Grounded Decision-Making:

- Is guided by an organization's culture.
- Aligns decisions with its core values.
- Supports operating in a way that is consistent with those values.
- Provides greater stability, cohesion and resilience.

# INTRODUCTION

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<b>Non-Aligned Decision-Making</b>	<b>Culturally Grounded Decision-Making</b>
<b>Looks outward:</b> “Let’s see how the market reacts.”	<b>Looks inward:</b> “Let’s generate solutions that meet our needs.”
<b>Second guesses:</b> “Should we table this project?”	<b>Moves forward:</b> “Let’s proceed, knowing it may take longer.”
<b>Increases ambiguity:</b> “We can’t act till we know more.”	<b>Builds trust:</b> “We can and will get through this, together.”



# INTRODUCTION

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- Culture's Role in Decision-Making
- Team Alignment and Cohesion
- Ownership, Accountability and Resilience
- Decision-Making and Uncertainty



A group of diverse people are gathered around a wooden table in a modern, bright room with large windows and brick walls. They are looking at and pointing to documents on the table, engaged in a collaborative discussion. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with soft lighting. The text 'CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING' is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING



# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Culture as a Strategic Filter

- It acts as a **decision-making compass**—shaping everyday decisions, not just the big-picture stuff (branding, etc).
- It aligns **values (why), vision (where), and strategy (how)** to help organizations navigate and thrive.





# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## The Culture Test

1. Does this reflect our values?
2. Will it maintain or build trust and cohesion?
3. Does it move us toward our long-term vision?



# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Examples

- A school district must reduce costs. It reviews options with school personnel rather than move to immediate layoffs.
- A law firm consults team members and clients for input on how market shifts may impact services.
- An appliance maker talks with parts vendors about managing costs rather than scaling back or cancelling orders.



# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Case Study: The High Cost of Construction

Cascade Electric has committed to making durable, high-performing construction products. Yet when materials prices skyrocketed late last year, orders and production slowed. Housing construction starts fell as well, threatening future revenue. The Cascade team has been working since last year to improve product quality, as part of its 5-year growth plan. However, given the situation, Kiera, the VP of Product Development, is considering cancelling the project.



# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Why Culture Anchors Matter

- Decision overload and ambiguity require cultural clarity.
- Anchors keep decisions and actions solution-driven and future-focused.
- Clear, consistent decisions boost team confidence, reduce stress, and lessens conflict.





# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Leadership in Disruption

Culturally grounded leadership behaviors such as

- Transparency in communication
- Values-driven consistency
- Psychological safety and team care

reinforce stability and must be part of the decision-making process.



# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## When Culture Is Ignored

Drifting from culture in times of uncertainty, due to

- Lack of communication
- Misaligned values and decisions
- Conflicting or competing expectations

only add to ambiguity and must be avoided.



# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Examples

*Staffing crisis.* A hospital's leadership consults staff to create a new shift model during a staffing shortage. The decision follows its core values of care, resilience, and teamwork—boosting morale and performance.

*Remote work changes.* An insurance company ignores its values of flexibility and collaboration by suddenly cancelling remote work when revenue falls. Employees resist, slowing productivity and creating mistrust.

# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Quick Reflection

Did your last tough decision reflect your culture—or drift away from it?





# CULTURE'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING

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## Section Wrap-Up

- Culture gives decisions clarity, cohesion, and credibility.
- Key behaviors—transparency, values alignment, and creating a 'safe' environment—keep decisions culturally grounded.





# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## Why Alignment Matters

- Misalignment is a hidden drain—culture keeps teams focused and together.
- It can lead to poor performance, ineffectiveness and inefficiency.
- Alignment sends a signal: We are still the same company—let's operate that way.



# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## Leadership Behaviors that Build Cohesion

- Transparency
- Role-modeling
- Group and individual feedback
- Empathy

Behaviors always must be values-driven (aligned), especially in times of disruption.





# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## Case Study: Staffing Crisis

A hospital's leadership consults staff to create a new shift model during a staffing shortage.

**Outcome:** Involving staff in solutions deepened trust and performance.



# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## Case Study: Remote Work

An insurance company ignores its values of flexibility and collaboration by suddenly cancelling remote work.

**Outcome:** Breaking cultural promises (values) erodes trust—fast.



## Cultural Pitfalls

What happens when leaders *say* one thing but *do* another?

- Uncertainty deepens
- Confusion arises
- Trust and accountability erode

At best, this creates more ambiguity. At worst, trust erodes—and performance issues may follow.



# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## The Culture Test

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# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## Quick Reflection

Think of a time when alignment succeeded—or failed. What made the difference?



# TEAM ALIGNMENT AND COHESION

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## Section Wrap-Up

- Leadership behaviors can lessen ambiguity—or deepen it.
- Transparency, empathy, feedback, and role modeling support cohesion and alignment.





# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Building Culture and Resilience

- Engaging teams isn't just inclusive—it's strategic.
- Teams create better solutions than leadership alone—ownership drives results.
- Participation in solution-creation builds teams that hold themselves accountable.





# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## From Compliance to Ownership

- Ownership and accountability grow when employees co-create solutions.
- Co-creation means employees actively participate in generating solutions.
- Culture-driven participation instills a sense of ownership and purpose that unifies and energizes teams.



# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Resilience is made, not born

- Resilience strengthens when teams develop a sense of ownership.
- Mobilized in this way, teams and individuals naturally hold themselves and one another accountable.



# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Examples:

- Cross-functional teams collaborate to manage growth pressure.
- Middle managers generate options for addressing business slowdown.
- IT and service delivery teams develop plans for adopting new technologies.



# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Ownership in Practice

What does accountability *look like* when culture is embedded?





# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Case Study: Cleveland Clinic

When COVID-19 struck, Cleveland Clinic knew it had to support its caregivers to maintain patient care quality and staff resilience. The leadership initiated a comprehensive support program, including:

- Daily check-ins and well-being assessments
- Dedicated support services (e.g., mental health, housing)
- Peer support and real-time problem-solving networks

The approach reflected the organization's core values of care, safety, and teamwork, as well as ensured that caregivers felt seen, supported, and heard. Staff morale, trust and engagement stayed strong despite the external pressure, adding to its long-

Source: Cleveland Clinic QD: *Taking Care of the Caregivers During COVID-19 Pandemic.*  
term resilience.

# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Quick Reflection

What's one challenge to accountability where you work?

How could culture help to overcome it?



# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Leadership Practices for Accountability

Set clear expectations, empower decision-making and reward aligned behaviors.



# OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

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## Section wrap-up

- Ownership and accountability grow out of co-creation and collaborative problem-solving.
- Ownership drives performance
- Engagement, when properly directed and supported, builds resilience.







# DECISION-MAKING AND UNCERTAINTY

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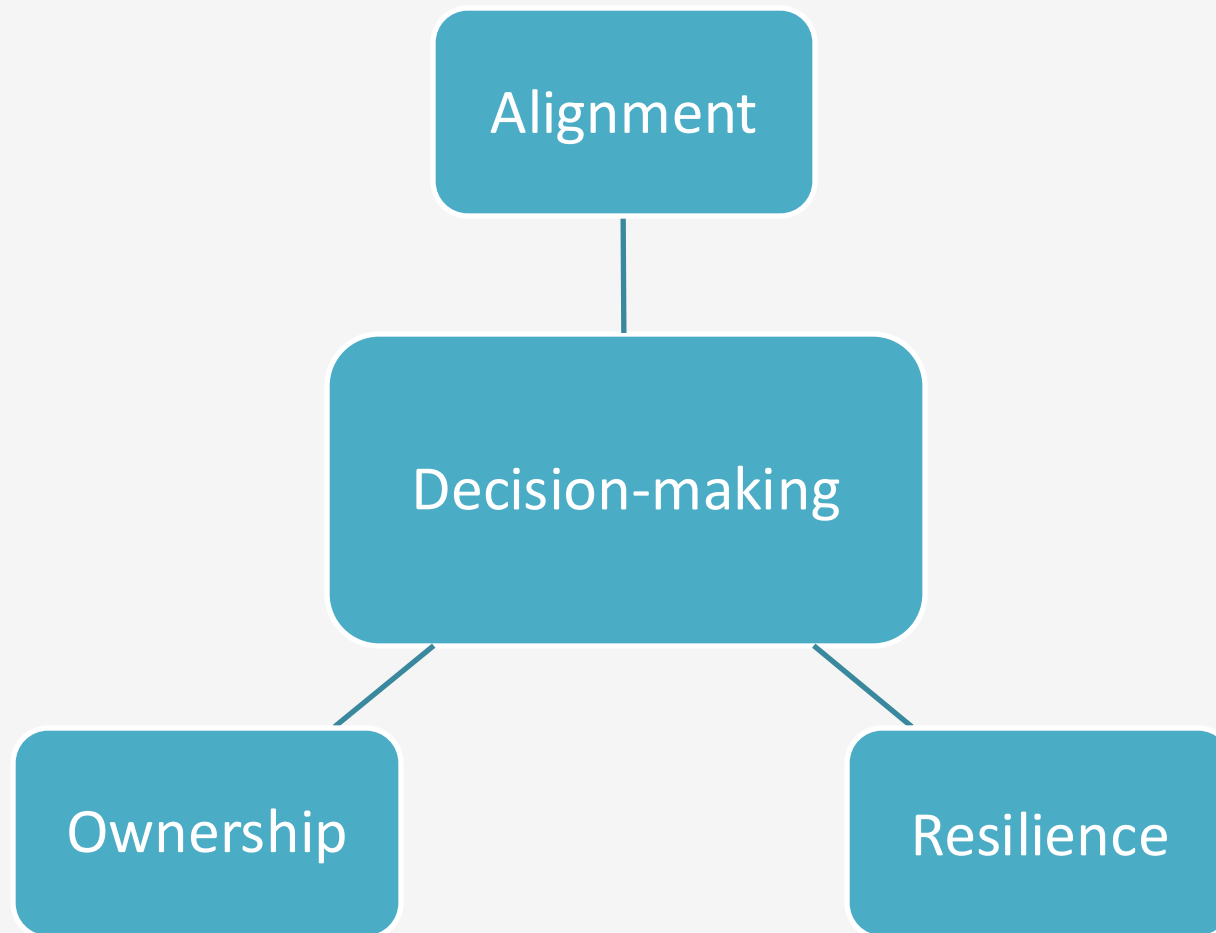
## Framework Recap

Culture must remain practical, shared and aligned—anchoring leadership in uncertainty.

Participation in decision-making is critical to gaining employee buy-in, ownership, accountability—and building team resiliency.



## Making Decisions in Uncertainty



## Culture's Long-Term Role

Beyond crisis—embedding culture into sustainable leadership practices.





# DECISION-MAKING AND UNCERTAINTY

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## Final Reflection

What's one commitment you will make to strengthen culture's role in leadership and decision-making?

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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- Aligning decisions with core values promotes stability, ownership, accountability and resilience.
- Leadership behaviors that provide transparency, feedback and show empathy support collaborative problem-solving are key.
- A culture of accountability starts when leaders take ownership, strengthening trust and confirming organizational values through regular feedback.

A photograph of three people—two women and one man—collaborating at a table. The woman in the center, with curly hair and wearing a dark blazer, is pointing at a laptop screen. The woman on the left, also with curly hair and wearing a light grey top, is looking at the screen. The man on the right, with short dark hair and a beard, is smiling and looking towards the laptop. On the table are a laptop, a smartphone, a glass of water, and some papers, including one with a pie chart. In the background, there is a white bookshelf filled with books and a window with a view of trees.

# QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

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