



**COACHING
LEADERS!**

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRANSFORM
COACHING AND THE CULTURE-FIT MODEL

By Levi Nieminen, Benjamin Biermeier-Hanson,
and Daniel Denison.





COACHING AND THE CULTURE-FIT MODEL

The Challenge:

You have been asked to coach a leader who epitomizes integrity and commitment, but whose blind spots and lack of skills are hurting rather than advancing his organization's goals. How do you transform him into someone with the vision and abilities to help reshape his organization toward successful attainment of its corporate mission and goals?

The Answer:

By understanding the Leader-Culture Fit.

An organization's culture is inextricably tied to its leadership. Leaders influence culture . . . and cultures influence leaders. The way that interaction plays out is unique to every leader-organization combination.

Understanding the interaction requires a three-fold evaluation:

- Assessing the leader's strengths, weaknesses, and goals.
- Assessing the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and goals.
- Mapping the matches and mismatches between the two.

The final step, mapping, provides a picture of what we call the Leader-Culture Fit. Understanding the Leader-Culture Fit can help to identify aspects of the culture that need to change as well as the ways in which the leader will be most capable and most challenged in facilitating the change process. Only then can both culture transformation and leadership development be addressed effectively. And then coaching can be tailored to better prepare leaders for their dual role of operating in and on the organization.

3 Three Keys to Effective Leader-Culture Fit Assessment

For your assessments to be successful, you must use tools that meet three important requirements.

1

Parallel attributes. The leader and the culture must be assessed on the same set of attributes—such as team building, customer focus, and clarity of strategic direction. This gives you both a common language and a data-driven basis for comparing a leader's strengths/weaknesses with the corresponding strengths/weaknesses within the organization. You may use descriptive tools, prescriptive tools, or a combination, as long as they assess parallel attributes.

2

Commensurate measures. The assessments must use a common rating scale. As a coach, you will help interpret and contextualize assessment scores, taking into consideration such factors as the rater source (boss, self, peers, direct reports, etc.), consequent rating discrepancies, and their implications. But the rating scales themselves must be the same.

3

Evaluative judgments of leader and culture attributes. The leader, together with you, the coach, needs to determine whether an increase or decrease of particular attributes is desired. This judgment is based on a combination of the organization's and the leader's needs.

As a coach, you play a pivotal role in integrating the data across sources, facilitating a sense-making process with the leader, and helping the leader develop into one whose skills and vision can lead his organization to the successful attainment of its goals and mission.

Assessing the Right Stuff

When you assess a leader and an organization, it's important to choose your assessment categories and tools wisely.

Assessing employee engagement, for example, is not merely a matter of determining if employees are happy. Rather, you want to know if they are proactively engaged in activities that further your organization's mission and goals.

Assessing market responsiveness is not just a matter of verifying that you are aware of changing customer trends. It also includes knowing that



you have the systems in place to respond to those changes in terms of product development, marketing, and delivery.

The Denison Model assesses 12 key culture and leadership traits that are all statistically linked to high performing business cultures. Together, these are helpful in predicting a leader's or organization's bottom line business performance.

2

The 12 traits fall into four categories:
Mission, Consistency, Adaptability, and Commitment.

How **MISSION FOCUSED** are you?

- 1) Do you create a shared vision?
- 2) Do you set clear goals and objectives . . .
- 3) . . .with strategic direction and intent?

How **CONSISTENT** are you?

- 4) Do you define core values?
- 5) Do you develop organizational agreement?
- 6) Do you manage the coordination and organization-wide integration of business processes in a way that supports those values?

How **ADAPTABLE** are you?

- 7) Do you keep a focus on customers and their changing needs?
- 8) Do you promote organizational learning?
- 9) Do you help create change?

How **COMMITTED** are you to staff involvement?

- 10) Do you build teams?
- 11) Do you empower all of your employees?
- 12) Do you develop their capabilities in line with your mission and values?

All 12 of these traits are important. Overemphasizing (or ignoring) any one yields a lopsided leader and, eventually, affects the organization's success.

To align leadership development strategies with the broader organization's development needs, a coach must identify key ways in which the leader can serve as an agent for positive culture change. Well-designed assessment tools organize and augment a coach's subjective insights about how the organizational culture may support or constrain the leader's development of desired capabilities. The coach can then help the leader strategize, taking that organizational context into account. That's where mapping comes in.

Our assessment tools, the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) and the Denison Leadership Development 360 (DL360), assess these 12 traits using matching measurements so that they can be mapped against each other as explained below. That way, leaders' traits can be strengthened so that they can, in turn, create high-performance organizations.

Mapping

Which skills are most relevant to the change process in your leader's organization? Which ones should you help the leader focus on? The answer, as we've said, depends on the Leader-Culture Fit.

Determining the Leader-Culture Fit requires mapping the strengths and weaknesses regarding the various assessed traits against each other as shown here.



	Example Trait	Leadership Attribute	Organization Attribute	Map
1	Setting clear goals	Low	High	Unmatched Low
2	Defining values	Low	Low	Matched Low
3	Customer focus	High	Low	Unmatched High
4	Team building	High	High	Matched High

More than four traits should be assessed, of course. The ones shown here are merely examples to illustrate the four key mapping results possible for any given trait: Unmatched Low, Matched Low, Unmatched High, and Matched High.

Line 1: Unmatched Low. When a leader is weak in areas where the organization is strong, you can leverage the existing culture in the leadership development process. The organization is likely to be supportive of the leader's development, providing practical support and psychological safety for learning and growth.

Line 2: Matched Low. When both the leader and the culture are weak on a particular trait, unique challenges arise. You must address and overcome potential cultural constraints (active or passive) on the leader's growth. There may be mixed or inconsistent signals about what leadership behaviors are valued within the organization. Support for learning and applying new skills may be nominal, so it may be useful to connect the leader with external opportunities for development, such as offsite training. The key is to understand the unique challenges presented by the culture, enhance the leader's awareness of these challenges, and adjust the development plan accordingly.

Line 3: Unmatched High. When the leader is strong in areas that the organization is weak, you can help develop the leader as an agent for culture change. Coaching strategies will differ based on factors such as the organization's awareness of the current state of its culture, the level of support and momentum for change, and the leader's experience and credibility.

Line 4: Matched High. When both the leader and the organization have high marks on a particular trait, it's possible to build the organization utilizing and further developing those strengths. However, this requires specific development plans that avoid an overemphasis on the strengths which could result in ignoring or even fostering comparative weaknesses.

Transforming corporate culture requires growth at every level of an organization as you develop new patterns and skills to meet the demands of new circumstances. Leading culture transformation requires development and honing of leadership skills.

Regardless of the mix of matched and unmatched highs and lows that make up a particular Leader-Culture fit, coaching can help the leader recognize her potential as an agent or champion in the ongoing change process and clarify the level of involvement and role that would be most appropriate.

Building the Balance

Based on over 25 years of research and on-the-ground experience in hundreds of companies, Denison helps assess and develop leaders so they can transform their organizations into high-performance cultures. Contact us for more information about the Denison Model, our assessment tools, and our consulting services.

US Office

To speak with someone in our US office, please call **(734) 997-6933**.

Switzerland Office

To reach our Switzerland office, please call **+41 71 911 3406**.



References

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