

Make Your Culture Sing

Align the puzzle pieces of your organization's culture to achieve extraordinary results.

Reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

The Culture Puzzle: Harnessing the Forces that Drive Your Organization's Success.

By Mario Moussa, Derek Newberry, & Greg Urban. Hardcover. 236 pages. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, bkconnection.com.

Modern leadership is relationship-oriented. That means culture is more important than structure when it comes to effective leadership.

Leadership is also more transformational than transactional. Leaders increasingly play the role of coordinators, not directors, willing to cede some power to team members. Although leaders influence organizational culture, they don't control it.

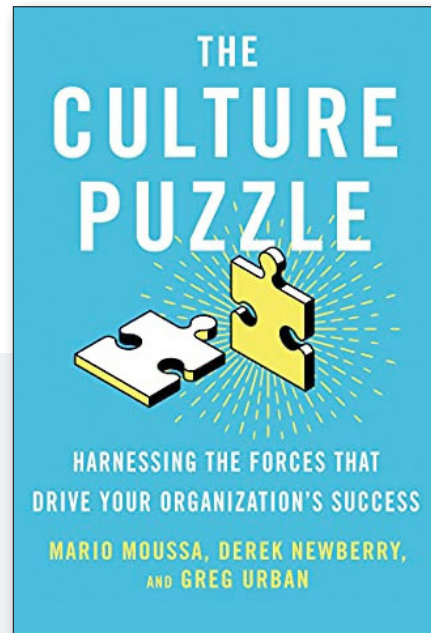
This book helps interpret organizational culture and explains how to cultivate a sustainable one. The authors use the allegory of gardening to explore how four forces plant seeds to motivate team members and cultivate organizational culture:

- 1. Vision.** Do people embrace a clear set of values?
- 2. Interest.** Are team members fully engaged in their work?
- 3. Habits.** Do people follow routines that promote success? Do you use rituals to reinforce positive habits?
- 4. Innovation.** Do people apply their utmost creativity to solve the most pressing problems? Innovations typically come from front-line workers analyzing and tinkering cooperatively. Encouraging tinkering can empower team members and build important organizational moments while solving problems.

Even when things are operating smoothly, it's important for leaders to review organizational habits that build solidarity. Two-way symmetrical communication is vital to foster these habits.

Rife with examples, this book demonstrates how to maintain a healthy culture. Doing so takes careful listening, participation, and reflection to produce the best results together.

The importance of participatory organizational culture means that leadership is becoming increasingly complex. This book can play a role in helping all team members understand their roles and maneuver their organization through this complexity.



Build Innovation into Your Culture

Here are a few things you can do to cultivate an innovative culture:


Work side by side with people at every level of your organization. The best ideas come from the people closest to the work. When you get up close and personal, you may come up with some amazing ideas yourself.

Don't forget the "error" in "trial and error." Reward rather than punish mistakes and help people see the lesson in every failure.

Listen to the stories of people in your organization. Notice common threads. These themes provide important clues to what may need to be fixed or changed.

Experiment with small-scale projects designed to close the gaps between what people need and what your organization delivers.

Remain open to the idea that everything you think you know about a given situation may be wrong.

Measure out boundaries, then set people free to create their own problem-solving culture. 

Terrence Fernsler, MNPL, PhD, has been a nonprofit professional for over 35 years. He is currently an instructor and advisor in the James Madison University Nonprofit Studies minor program, an instructor in the Nonprofit Management and Leadership for the Master of Public Administration in the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University program, and principal of Sustainable Nonprofit Leadership Strategies.