

Culture - You Can Measure It

Why culture is a system, not a vibe

Culture is one of the most talked-about and least clearly understood parts of business. People describe it as a feeling, an atmosphere, a set of values on a wall, or “how things are done around here”.

Those descriptions aren't wrong. They're just incomplete. Because culture isn't a mood. It's a system. And systems can be understood, shaped, and measured.

WHAT CULTURE ACTUALLY IS

Culture is not what you say you value. It's what actually happens consistently when pressure is applied, trade-offs are required, and no one is watching. Over time, those patterns harden. That's culture.

Culture as a Vibe	Culture as a System
– A feeling that's hard to name or change	– A repeatable pattern of behaviour that can be observed
– Carried only by founders and lost when they step back	– Deliberately designed, lived consistently, supported structurally
– Degrades during growth as assumptions replace conversations	– Translated into expectations, roles, and decision frameworks
– Good people aren't enough without structural clarity	– Incentives and accountability aligned with stated values
– Succession is risky because culture relies on personalities	– Leadership transitions smoothly because culture outlasts individuals

Culture Lives at the Intersection of I / We / It

I - The Individual

Individual values and behaviour. You can have great people but poor team dynamics, or leaders who don't live the culture they've built.

We - The Team

Team norms and expectations. A strong team with incentives that reward the wrong behaviour will still produce the wrong culture.

It - The Business

Business structures, incentives, and governance. Good structure with leaders who don't live it will always produce cultural inconsistency.

What It Means to “Measure” Culture

Measuring culture doesn't mean turning it into a spreadsheet. It means making the invisible visible. You can observe culture by asking:

- How are decisions really made?
- How is disagreement handled?
- Who has power both formally and informally?
- What behaviour leads to progression?
- What behaviour quietly blocks it?

Broadleaf uses systems from Adapt by Design to consistently embed and maintain strong culture - guided peer catch-ups, career valuation tools, leadership surveys, and values codification.

Culture Compounds

Culture usually weakens not because people stop caring, but because growth outpaces clarity. As businesses grow, assumptions replace conversations and informal norms stop scaling.

The clearest test of culture is succession. A business with strong culture:

- Transfers leadership smoothly
- Absorbs change without losing identity
- Maintains trust through transition

Small behaviours, repeated daily, shape outcomes years later. That's why culture work feels slow until suddenly it isn't. Businesses that take it seriously early, treat it as a system, and align it with ownership tend to outperform in durability and trust.

"Culture is not something you 'have'. It's something you do every day. Make expectations clear. Align incentives with intent. Measure what actually happens. And be willing to adjust the system when behaviour drifts. Get that right, and culture becomes a source of strength, not a mystery, not a slogan, but a system that works even when you're not in the room."