

School Culture Discovery Process

This step-by-step process guides school leaders and staff through a comprehensive culture assessment using the “School Culture Discovery Audit” and “Culture Types and Outcomes” tools. This process ensures school leaders have a clear, actionable framework for understanding and improving their organizational culture, including the following.

- *Discovering the details of their existing culture through a reflective audit*
- *Classifying their culture types using a comparison of identified themes with known culture characteristics*
- *Understanding the implications of their culture type, including both positive impacts and potential drawbacks*
- *Developing a strategic action plan to enhance the culture, align with the school's vision, and address any cultural challenges*

Step 1: Complete the “School Culture Discovery Audit”

1. **Distribute the audit:** Begin by having participants complete the “School Culture Discovery Audit” (page 171) individually or in small groups. The audit includes questions covering key elements of school culture such as the following.
 - + *Vision and purpose*
 - + *Values and beliefs*
 - + *Norms and rituals*
 - + *Climate and atmosphere*
 - + *Celebrations and recognition*
 - + *Communication and network*
 - + *Symbols, heroes, and stories*
2. **Reflect honestly:** Encourage participants to answer honestly, based on their actual experiences rather than their ideal perceptions of school culture.

Outcome: A collection of detailed responses that reflect the staff’s perceptions and experiences, providing a comprehensive snapshot of the current school culture.

Step 2: Analyze the Audit Results to Identify Key Themes

1. **Group and organize responses:** Gather the completed audits and categorize responses under each section of the audit.
 - + **Vision and purpose:** *Look for common themes related to the school’s overall goals and aspirations.*
 - + **Values and beliefs:** *Identify the dominant values and ethical principles guiding behavior.*
 - + **Norms and rituals:** *Highlight the unwritten rules and regular practices that shape daily interactions.*
 - + **Climate and atmosphere:** *Assess the overall mood or emotional environment within the school.*
 - + **Celebrations and recognition:** *Note the types of achievements celebrated and how they align with the school’s values.*
 - + **Communication and network:** *Evaluate the flow of information and the effectiveness of communication channels.*
 - + **Symbols, heroes, and stories:** *Identify key symbols and narratives that embody the school’s identity.*

Outcome: A list of dominant themes and patterns that provide insight into the current cultural dynamics of the school.

Step 3: Use the “Culture Types and Outcomes” Tool to Match Themes With Culture Types

1. **Review the “Culture Types and Outcomes” tool, which includes six simplified culture types:**

- + Collaborative growth culture
- + Results-driven accountability culture
- + Community-centric purpose culture
- + Innovative and agile culture
- + Traditional safety and compliance culture
- + Toxic or survival culture

2. **Match the themes:** Compare the identified themes from the audit results with the characteristics of each culture type in the table.

For example:

- + *If your themes include teamwork, shared learning, and a supportive climate, this suggests a collaborative growth culture.*
- + *If the themes focus on data-driven decisions, accountability, and high pressure, this aligns with a results-driven accountability culture.*
- + *If the themes emphasize community engagement and relationship building, this points to a community-centric purpose culture.*

3. **Determine the predominant culture type:** Select the culture type that most closely matches most of the themes identified. Note any secondary culture influences if multiple culture types seem relevant.

Outcome: A clear identification of the predominant culture type or types based on the audit themes and comparison with the “Culture Types and Outcomes” tool.

Step 4: Evaluate the Positive and Negative Impacts of Your Identified Culture Type

1. **Review the positive and negative impacts:** Refer to the columns in the “Culture Types and Outcomes” tool that highlight the potential positive and negative impacts of each culture type.

Positive impacts: Consider the strengths of your identified culture type. For example:

- + *A collaborative growth culture fosters innovation, high morale, and strong team dynamics.*
- + *A results-driven accountability culture ensures high performance and clear accountability.*

Negative impacts: Acknowledge any potential downsides. For example:

- + *A collaborative growth culture may struggle with groupthink or slower decision making.*
- + *A toxic or survival culture can lead to high turnover, low morale, and poor overall performance.*

Outcome: A deeper understanding of both the strengths and challenges associated with the identified culture type, providing clarity on what aspects may need to be preserved or improved.

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan Based on Your Findings

1. **Leverage strengths:** Identify specific actions that can capitalize on the positive aspects of your culture type.
For example: If you identified a community-centric purpose culture, focus on strengthening community partnerships and expanding inclusive events.
2. **Address weaknesses:** Create strategies to mitigate the negative impacts associated with your culture type.
For example: If you find elements of a toxic or survival culture, prioritize initiatives to improve morale, increase support, and foster open communication.
3. **Align with desired vision and goals:** Ensure your action plan aligns with the school's long-term vision and desired cultural shifts. Engage staff in setting clear objectives and metrics for tracking progress.

Outcome: A targeted action plan that leverages the strengths of the current culture while addressing areas for improvement, helping the school move toward a more positive and effective culture.