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A WHITE PAPER ON ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Seeing the System, and *Changing It*

The Behavior-Conditions Model: why transformation efforts stall, and a method for changing what an organization actually does

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01 · THE PROBLEM

Why change efforts keep failing, even when everyone does *everything right*

A leadership team commits to a transformation. They communicate the vision. They train the people. They buy the platform, run the pilots, celebrate the wins. Eighteen months later, the organization is doing almost exactly what it did before.

This pattern is so common it has become background noise. Transformation efforts routinely struggle to produce lasting changes in how organizations actually operate. And when they stall, the explanation often lands on "culture." The usual explanation is that people resist change. There was not enough buy-in. The communication was not clear enough. The training did not stick. So the next transformation adds more communication, more training, more change management, and produces the same result. The diagnosis keeps pointing at the people, and the treatment keeps failing.

There is a more useful explanation, and it starts by relocating the problem. The reason transformations fail is not that people resist change. It is that most change efforts aim at the wrong target. They try to change behavior directly, when behavior is not something you can change directly at all.

THE CORE CLAIM

You cannot change behavior directly. You can only change the conditions that produce it. *Behavior is an output. The system is the cause.*

Every behavior you see in an organization, the good and the frustrating alike, is being produced by a set of conditions. Who holds authority. What information reaches whom. What gets rewarded and what gets quietly punished. The rules, written and unwritten, that govern what is safe to do. Change the behavior without changing those conditions, and eventually, the conditions tend to win. They tend to win because they are still there the morning after the training ends, exerting the same steady pressure they did before.

This white paper lays out a different way to approach organizational change. One built on a simple reordering of cause and effect: stop trying to change people, and start redesigning the conditions that shape them. The method that follows is called the Behavior-Conditions Model.

02 • THE INSIGHT

Behavior is an output. The *system* is the cause

If behavior is produced by conditions, then the first job of any serious change effort is not to design new behaviors. It is to understand the system that is producing the current ones.

Most organizations have never actually seen their own system. They see its outputs, the behaviors, the results, the recurring frustrations, but not the machinery underneath that produces them reliably, day after day. When a pattern keeps recurring despite everyone's best efforts to change it, that is not a sign of stubborn people. It is a sign of a system doing exactly what it is built to do.

To change the outputs, you first have to make the machinery visible. That is the role of the **Cultural Operating System**, or COS: a model for seeing how an organization's conditions produce its patterns of behavior. It works the way an operating system does on a computer, running quietly underneath everything, shaping what is possible without ever announcing itself.

What the Cultural Operating System reveals

The COS traces behavior back through the layers that produce it. At the base are the **foundational conditions** the organization cannot easily change: the complexity of its domain, the pace at which its knowledge goes out of date, the regulatory realities it operates within. Above those sit the **systemic tensions**, the competing demands that can never be solved, only managed, and which quietly force trade-offs everywhere. Above those, **leadership intent** sets direction. And running through all of it are seven components that together generate the behaviors an organization actually exhibits: its identity signals, its desired behaviors, its invisible rules, its systemic reinforcers, its environmental enablers, its future-ready capability, and its unlearning agenda.

The details of those seven components are the work of an engagement. What matters for now is the shape of the idea: the behaviors you can see are the surface. The COS is how you read what is underneath, and understand why the patterns persist no matter how many times you have tried to change them.

WHY THIS MATTERS

When you can see the system that produces behavior, a transformation stops being an act of persuasion and becomes an act of *design*.

03 · THE REDESIGN

Four conditions you can actually *redesign*

The Cultural Operating System explains why the patterns persist. Cultural Architecture is the method that redesigns the structural conditions producing them. If the COS is how you see the system, Cultural Architecture is how you change it.

The appeal of working at the level of conditions is that conditions are concrete. They are things a leadership team can actually decide to change. And in practice, much of the leverage sits in four of them: the four intervention dimensions of Cultural Architecture.

i.

Decision Rights

Who decides what, at what level, with what authority. Move a decision, and you move the behavior of everyone around it.

ii.

Information Flows

What data moves where, how visible it is, and how accessible. People act on what they can see, and not on what they cannot.

iii.

Recognition

What gets rewarded, celebrated, promoted, and measured. The surest signal of what an organization actually values, whatever it says.

iv.

Governance

The rules, policies, controls, escalation paths, and accountability that define what is permitted and what is not.

These four are powerful precisely because they are impersonal. You are not asking anyone to be different. You are changing the conditions they operate within, and letting the new conditions do the work. The behavior shifts in response, not because people were persuaded, but because the system now produces something different.

THE MECHANISM

Changed conditions produce an adapted system, which produces different behavior, which produces different outcomes. *The lever is always the conditions.*

04 · THE ARCHITECTURE

Five kinds of change, *happening at once*

Redesigning conditions is the heart of the Behavior-Conditions Model, but it is only part of a full transformation. Because any significant change is not one kind of change. It is at least five different kinds, each needing its own approach, all unfolding at once.

The Behavior-Conditions Model organizes these into five layers. The first is the foundation. The next three are where change reaches individual people, technology, and the wider group. The fifth wraps all of them.

i. System Conditions

Understand and redesign the conditions that produce behavior, using the Cultural Operating System to see the system and Cultural Architecture to redesign it. Every other layer sits on this one.

ii. Individual Readiness

Move an equipped, motivated person through the change. It is not enough for the system to permit new behavior; the individual has to be ready, able, and willing to act on it.

iii. Technology Adoption

Get the technology trusted, accepted, and actually used. A tool that is deployed but not trusted changes nothing.

iv. Social Diffusion

Spread and normalize the new practice across the group, until it becomes the shared default of how things are done here.

v. Learning & Adaptation

Wrapping every other layer: sense whether the change is producing the intended outcomes, correct course, and evolve. This is the Decision Learning Loop, and it never stops running.

Most change programs run one or two of these layers well and neglect the rest. The Behavior-Conditions Model insists on all five, because a weakness in any one is enough to stall the whole.

05 · THE SEQUENCE

How the layers activate across *seven phases*

The five layers do not all switch on at once. The system work comes first, because everything else depends on it. The individual, technology, and social layers activate once the conditions are understood and redesigned. The learning loop runs throughout.

	PHASE	WHAT RUNS	KEY MODEL
1	Structural Diagnosis	Understand conditions, tensions, cultural logic, and the mechanisms producing current behavior	Cultural Operating System
2	Decision Discovery	Surface the consequential decisions and where authority actually sits	Decision Architecture
3	Decision Classification	Classify decisions by type, stakes, ownership, and reversibility	Decision Classification
4	Architectural Design	Redesign conditions across the four intervention dimensions	Cultural Architecture
5	Behavior Design	Specify target behaviors and indicators; design the easy path; frame for autonomy	Behavior design
6	Implementation	Run adoption; get the platform accepted; spread through peers	Change methods
7	Calibration & Learning	Sense whether the redesigned system is producing intended outcomes; recalibrate	Decision Learning Loop

Phases one through four are system work: seeing the conditions and redesigning them. Only in phase five does attention turn to specifying behaviors, and notably, it comes *after* the conditions have been redesigned, not before. This ordering is the whole point. Behavior is designed last, because it is downstream of everything else.

THE ORDERING IS THE ARGUMENT

Conventional change starts with behavior and hopes the system cooperates. This model starts with the system, and lets the behavior *follow*.

PUTTING IT TO WORK

The system was always *producing your results*. Now you can redesign it.

Every organization is already running a system that produces its behavior, whether or not anyone designed it. The Behavior-Conditions Model is a way to see that system clearly, redesign the conditions that matter, and move the change through people, technology, and the group, while a learning loop tells you whether it is working.

The full model includes the seven components of the Cultural Operating System, the detailed mechanics of each intervention dimension, and the phase-by-phase execution that turns the architecture into a running program. That work happens inside an engagement, tailored to the specific system an organization is trying to change.

If your organization has a transformation it cannot afford to have stall, or a pattern of behavior that refuses to change no matter what you try, this is the conversation worth having.

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