

Five drawings I kept pointing at.

Almost every culture question is somebody trying to fix a problem at the wrong depth. These are the pictures that sort out which depth you're at, and one move for each. Nothing here needs a slide. A whiteboard and a pen is plenty.

one model a page. draw them yourself, badly. it works better that way.

O1 The stack

four layers, six conversations

O2 The three gaps

how to read a score

O3 The ladder

make the invisible observable

O4 The seesaw

demand and resource

O5 Think, talk, follow

the hard conversation

The Team Culture Model

four layers, read it from the bottom up.

Culture has parts, and the parts sit at different depths. Work at the wrong depth and nothing moves.

The floor is psychological safety, in two halves. **The read** is their assessment of you and this team, and it moves when you move. **The rule** arrived with them: is raising things the kind of thing one does? When either is low, people manage what they say, and everything above is only as true as what they were willing to tell you.

The conversations are the practice layer, and the only place a leader actually does anything. **Engagement** is a reading, not a lever.

Results is the language your executive already speaks.

THE THREE LINES THAT DO THE WORK

You can't train your way out of a safety problem. You can't survey your way to a behaviour change. There's only one layer you can act on.

Work out which layer your problem is at, then drop to the conversation underneath it.

04 · WHAT THE BUSINESS GETS

Results

Retention. Performance. Innovation. Growth.

what your exec watches

03 · HOW PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT THE WORK

Engagement

Energy. Focus. Purpose.

a reading, not a lever

02 · WHAT A LEADER ACTUALLY DOES

The six conversations

- O1 Expectation · make the unspoken spoken
- O2 Clarification · make the invisible observable
- O3 Communication · make the words a language
- O4 Capability · make the aspiration achievable
- O5 Confrontation · make feedback less difficult
- O6 Celebration · make recognition more meaningful

the only layer you can act on

01 · THE FLOOR

The read

is it safe here, with you?

The rule

is this the kind of thing one does?

local + imported

The three gaps

a score is interesting, a gap is useful

Not three more things to measure. Three ways of reading the same conversation, and the reason a healthy-looking average can be hiding half a room.

Aspiration is the distance between where the team is and the standard it set itself. A big gap means big ambition, or a behaviour nobody has started.

Perception is your read against your team's. When the leader scores higher, that's the gap most leaders never see, and the one that costs trust.

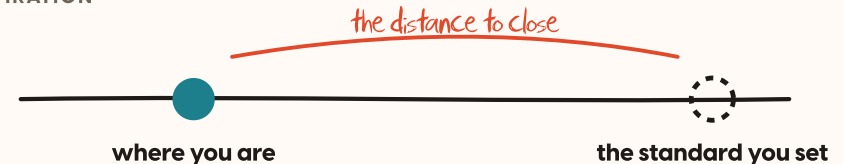
Spread is how much the team varies. High spread means some people are living a different culture from the rest, and the average is describing nobody.

ONE MOVE

Stop looking at the average. Split it by team, look at the range, and ask who the outliers cluster around.

The unit of culture is the team, not the organisation. Aggregate views hide the answer.

ASPIRATION



PERCEPTION



SPREAD



The ladder

make the invisible observable.

Start at the top with the word on the wall, and chunk down until you hit something you could point at on an ordinary Tuesday.

Take the word. Chunk it down twice. Then finish four sentences.

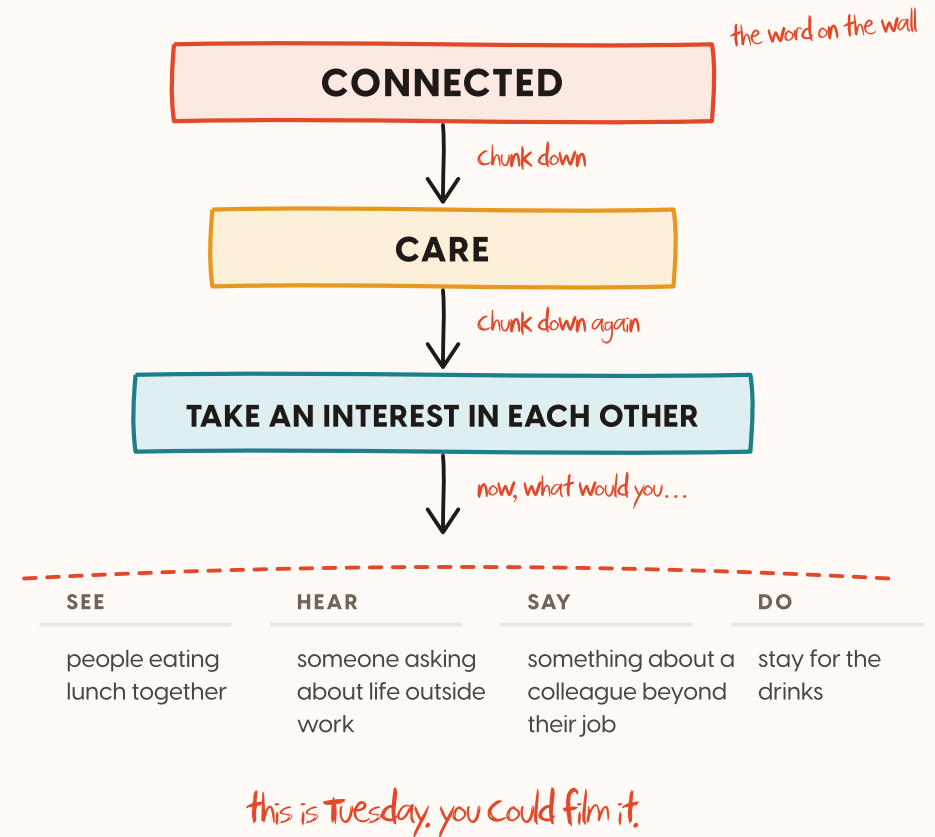
See: people eating lunch together. **Hear:** someone asking about life outside work. **Say:** something about a colleague that isn't in their job description. **Do:** stay for the drinks. Nobody had to do anything heroic, and you could film it.

Run it **downward** when a value isn't landing. Run it **upward** when the day job has lost its purpose, because purpose sits at the top and most organisations chunk up and then wonder why nobody moves.

ONE MOVE

Take one of your values and finish the four sentences before Friday. I'd see. I'd hear. I'd hear someone say. I'd watch someone do. If you can't finish all four, you've found your real problem.

If we all left the room right now, would we know what to do to make this a reality? If not, you have a word, not a behaviour.



The seesaw

demand and resource.

When your team says “we can’t reduce the workload”, they’re probably right. Agree with them. Then look at the other end.

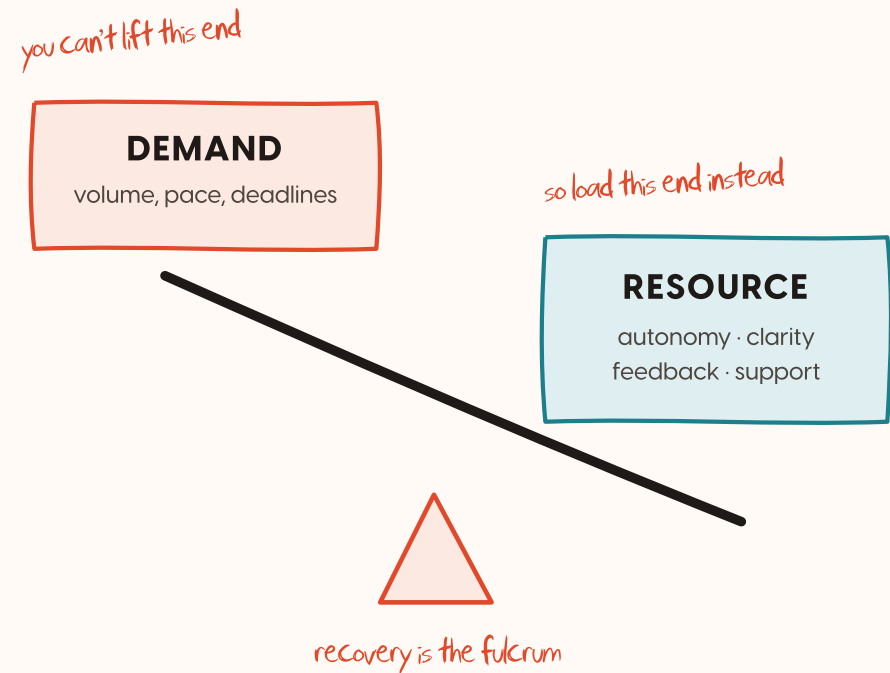
You can’t lift the demand end: volume, pace, deadlines. You can load the resource end: **autonomy, clarity, feedback, support**. And recovery is the fulcrum, which is why finishing with something left in the tank matters more than running less overall.

Workload is one of six areas of worklife. The other five are control, reward, community, fairness and values. **Five of the six levers are not hours.** Most teams have an unclear workload problem and describe it as an unrealistic one. Those are different problems.

ONE MOVE

Run the workload five at your next team meeting. How do we measure success? Where do you go if you’re unclear? How do you prioritise? What do you do when you’re struggling? And the sleeper: what are your expectations of each other around sharing workload?

Realistic isn’t a volume. It’s an agreement. Most teams don’t have one, they have an assumption each.



Job Demands-Resources, Bakker & Demerouti · six areas of worklife, Maslach & Leiter

Think through, talk through, follow through

the third step saves the relationship.

The reason a hard conversation feels like a relationship risk is almost always that we've skipped the preparation and gone straight to the talking.

Before: is this a problem or a complaint? A problem has an outcome you can name. And is it hot or cold? Hot, press pause and let it cool. Cold, start more personally and warm it up.

During: observation, impact, input, coach or redirect, agreement, appreciation. If you only remember three, remember **observation, impact, input**. Input is four words, “what do you think?”, and it's the step people skip.

After: record it, act on it, notice, celebrate, evaluate, communicate. Then decide: is this solved, or managed?

ONE MOVE

Before the next hard conversation, write the observation sentence down. One sentence, no adjectives. If you can't write it without an adjective, you're not ready.

If your goal is to prove you're right, you'll almost always go wrong. If your goal is to make things right, you'll almost never go wrong. And just be kind.

