

# Five Culture Blockers You Need to Know

By Shane Michael Hatton



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hen it comes to the reasons a culture initiative may fail, it can't be said that managers don't try or don't care.

In a McCrindle study of 1,000 Australian middle managers, we sought to understand the experiences and beliefs about their roles in culture to help determine what strengthens organizational culture and what may cause culture initiatives to fail.

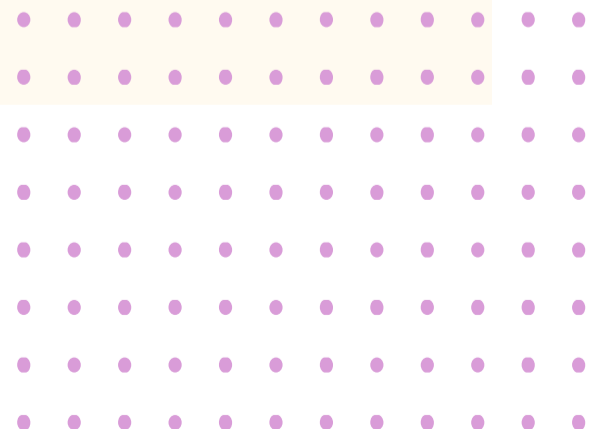
Almost all the managers (99 percent) told us they believed that culture 'definitely' or 'somewhat' played an integral role in the overall success of an organization, with a large proportion (74 percent) of those responding with 'yes definitely.' Additionally, more than four in five believe that creating a healthy team culture is a crucial element of their role. So then, why do some managers struggle to create the culture they want and instead tolerate the culture they have? Let's take a look at five key culture blockers:

### 1. Expectations Are Left Unspoken

They may not be written down and we may not always be able to articulate them, but internally we all carry a set of expectations of how we would prefer things to be, which informs our actions and responses. These expectations are often carried but not communicated, leaving team members attempting to read between the lines of the way things get done. Tory Eletto said, "What isn't communicated is felt. What is felt is interpreted. What is interpreted is often inaccurate."

● **Tip 1:** Take time with your team to surface what you value and hold in high regard individually, collectively, and organizationally. As you uncover these expectations, seek to identify the common themes that you aspire to have as central to your team culture.

Teams \_\_\_\_\_



## 2. Behaviors Are Left Undefined

Just 36 percent of managers strongly agree that their organizational values are more than words and that the behavioral expectations are clearly defined. Values on the wall may tell people what you hold in high regard, but clearly defined behaviors show people how these values are lived out day-to-day.

- **Tip 2:** Involve your team in a conversation to create a set of shared behaviors that you agree will help shape the culture you aspire to create in your team.

## 3. Communication Is Left Unclear

Only a third of people leaders see shared organizational language as an important ingredient for creating a healthy culture, which means they may be overlooking a valuable opportunity. Creating a shared language can empower the people on your team to talk about expectations and behaviors in a way that is both consistent and contagious. Your culture can become a language woven into the fabric of your day-to-day conversations when you share phrases, memes, mantras, and stories that are both memorable and meaningful.

- **Tip 3:** Ask your team how they would talk to others about your culture. What words, phrases, or stories would they use? Consider how you can capture and amplify them.



**Author:** Shane Michael Hatton, author of *Let's Talk Culture: The Conversations You Need to Create the Team You Want*, is an expert in leader communication, blending his experience in business and psychology to help leaders communicate, connect, and collaborate more effectively in order to bring out the best in those they lead. Learn more at [www.shanemhatton.com](http://www.shanemhatton.com)

## 4. Feedback Is Left Unsaid

Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker wrote that “the culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate.” When critical feedback is left unsaid, cultural inconsistencies are left to thrive. This accountability flows in every direction of the team. The conversation you don't have may just reinforce the culture you don't want.

- **Tip 4:** Get clear on the behaviors that will not be tolerated on your team, and empower each person on the team to address cultural inconsistencies when they see them.

## 5. Appreciation Is Left Unrecognized

Nearly half of people leaders in our study said that a lack of reward and recognition contributes to an unhealthy culture in an organization. An old proverb says, “No news is good news.” As it turns out, no news is actually very bad news for employees. According to Gallup, you're about twice as likely to be actively disengaged at work when your manager ignores you compared to if they focus on your weaknesses or negative characteristics. Take the time to meaningfully reward the behaviors that build the team culture you aspire to create. Because ultimately, people repeat and replicate what they see recognized and rewarded.

- **Tip 5:** Make recognition more intentional by considering and then sharing how the celebrated behavior connects to the team's cultural aspiration.

