defining desired *culture*

A Starter Guide for Culture Professionals

A practical guide for defining the values, behaviors, and experiences that bring culture to life. Based on the CultureJourney® Methodology.



vīdl work
energy, connection & courage at work

START WITH CLARITY

Before people can fully support culture work, they need to know where they're going.

When organizations begin or reinvest in culture work, employees naturally ask questions that reveal a healthy desire for direction.

QUESTIONS COMMONLY ASKED

01 What are we aiming for exactly?

02 What kind of culture are we trying to create?

03 How will we know if we've succeeded?

WHY IT MATTERS

A clearly defined culture creates the foundation for alignment, action, and meaningful measurement over time.

Think of it like this: Most organizations have strategic plans that define what success looks like and then work toward it. Most people do not question the worth of spending time and energy on creating a strategic plan; in fact, it's considered an essential step in ensuring progress with organizational outcomes over time. The same principles apply to culture.

A desired culture comes to life through three connected elements.



01 VALUES

Define what we believe is most deeply important.

What matters most.



02 BEHAVIORS

How we demonstrate those values in everyday work.

What we do.



03 EXPERIENCES

How people feel as a result of the behaviors we demonstrate.

What people feel.

PRACTITIONER NOTE

Developing the language for a clearly defined culture requires time and intention, but it's essential to eventual alignment within the organization and measuring change over time.

Because this is complex work, we recommend practitioners interested in leading it develop the skills, context, and confidence necessary to do it well. We offer a **CultureJourney® Practitioner** certification that provides this development. You can read about that certification on our website at **www.vidlwork.com/ourcertifications**.

KNOW YOUR STARTING POINT

Choose the path that reflects where your organization is today.

Organizations enter this work from different starting points. Some organizations already have defined values or behaviors and need refinement; others are starting from scratch. As a result, the number of segments required and the time required for each will vary.



SEGMENT 1 · VALUES

1A **DEFINE VALUES**

Start here when your organization is defining core values for the first time.

1B **REFINE VALUES**

Start here to refine existing organizational core values for maximum clarity.

Complete Segment 1 before moving into Segment 2.

SEGMENT 2 · BEHAVIORS

2A **DEFINE BEHAVIORS & EXPERIENCES**

Start here to define supportive behaviors and desired experiences for the first time.

2B **REFINE BEHAVIORS & EXPERIENCES**

Start here to strengthen existing language so it becomes easier to execute and observe.

Big Ideas to Keep in Mind



Values work is rarely linear. Groups often need to revisit earlier decisions as clarity improves. Refinement should be expected rather than viewed as failure.

Whether defining values for the first time or refining them for greater impact, the optimal number for maximum impact is 3–4 core values. More than four often results in dilution of impact as values begin to conflict with each other and become harder to remember and use to guide daily decision making.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Values should directly support the organization's long-term goals and strategic priorities.

Ask: *If we lived this value consistently, would it help us achieve our strategy faster or more effectively?*

CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATION

Values should distinctly describe the culture you want, not generic traits every organization claims are important (i.e., "respect").

Ask: *Does this uniquely describe how we want our organization to feel in a way that differentiates us from our competitors?*

TRUE TO IDENTITY (ASPIRATIONAL BUT AUTHENTIC)

Values should stretch the organization toward its desired culture but still be connected to its real DNA, strengths, and stories.

Ask: *Can we tell stories from the past year where this value has already shown up?*

OPERATIONAL

A value is only useful if it can be translated into visible, learnable, repeatable behaviors.

Ask: *Can we describe at least two specific behaviors that demonstrate this value—and at least two that do not?*

PRACTICAL AND ACTION-RELEVANT

Values should help employees navigate real-world tradeoffs and decisions.

Ask: *If two priorities conflict, would this value help us choose?*

UNDERSTANDABLE AND MEMORABLE

Values should be written in succinct, plain language and avoid corporate jargon.

Ask: *Would employees remember this after hearing it just once or twice?*

EMERGED FROM BROAD INPUT

Values are more meaningful and sustainable when they reflect what the organization's people say they need to thrive. Be cautious of engaging a small number of people in simply choosing words that sound good.

Ask: *Does this value reflect employee voice?*

STARTING POINT 1A

Defining Values for the First Time

OVERVIEW

What is the purpose of this process?

The purpose of this process is to define 3–4 organizational values that are strategically aligned, culturally distinctive, authentic to the organization's identity, operational, practical, memorable, and grounded in broad input from the people who shape and experience the culture. The process is designed to move from broad input to focused alignment.

Who should be involved in the conversation?

Values should not be identified and defined exclusively by senior leaders, but they also should not be crowdsourced without decision ownership. Think of value creation as similar to creating a strategic plan for the organization. Input from employees is important but formal leaders do most of the discussion and planning.

Research on team effectiveness, complex decision-making, information sharing, and consensus provides a basis for recommending a Core Group of approximately 6–8 people and definitely no more than 10. The group should include:

- Members of the senior leadership team
- Key informal influencers / respected voices
- Cross-functional representation

How long might this take?

This process might take several weeks to months depending on how quickly the leader of the process moves people through it and how quickly stakeholders do their part. The process will require multiple segments with space between for reflection, completion of activities, and synthesizing data. If values emerge quickly, be cautious. Fast agreement sometimes means the group selected generic language rather than doing meaningful differentiation work.

Overview of Process

01 Engage participants in the purpose and assign pre-work.

02 Collect and synthesize employee voice data.

03 Translate data into no more than eight possible values.

04 Prepare for a facilitated discussion with the Core Group.

05 Facilitate discussion with the Core Group.

06 Fine-tune language and test.

07 Communicate values to employees.

Step-by-Step Process

STEP 1: Engage Participants in the Purpose

All employees need to understand why values matter, how the process will work at a high level, and what kind of input the organization will be using to identify core values. The members of the Core Group need to understand this, plus what their role is in identifying values and how the process will work specifically for them. The same is true for all employees.

1A. All Employee Communication

Draft, finalize, and send an all-employee communication that transparently and succinctly describes:

- Why the organization is investing in this work
- How employee input will be gathered
- What is expected of employees
- What employees can expect of the process
- What will be communicated during and after the process
- A timeline for the process and expected completion

1B. Core Group Briefing

Bring the Core Group together in person or virtually if necessary to kick off the work and prepare the members of this group.

By the end of this session, participants should:

- Understand the purpose of defining or refining organizational values
- Understand the criteria for impactful values
- See their role in shaping the outcome
- Feel invited into an honest, thoughtful process
- Know what reflection work they are being asked to complete and by when

This can be completed:

- Via a stand-alone in-person or virtual group meeting led by the facilitator as a "kickoff" to the process; or
- As part of another meeting the Core Group is already having, as long as enough time is dedicated in the meeting to get fully through the conversation.

STEP 2: Collect and Synthesize Data

2A. Gather Qualitative Data From Employees

Invite the selected group of diverse employees to answer questions in writing through a platform that allows for easy synthesis of qualitative data, such as Microsoft Forms.

The purpose of the individual reflection is to generate stories and examples that reveal what employees experience the organization valuing when it's at its best, what people need in order to thrive, and what the culture may need more of to achieve its strategic priorities.

2B. Review Existing Data

While the survey is in process, gather recent organizational data that may provide valuable input for defining values, including engagement data; strategic plans; recent customer, student, client, patient, or community feedback; exit interviews; etc.

2C. Synthesize Both Forms of Data

Use AI and/or manual qualitative synthesis to review individual reflections and existing organizational data. The goal is to identify patterns, recurring themes, distinctive language, meaningful tensions, and stories that point toward possible values.

STEP 3: Translate Themes Into Possible Values

Each possible value should include:

- The word or phrase
- A plain-language, one-sentence description for each value
- 2–3 stories, examples, or data points that support why each value was chosen
- Initial examples of behaviors and experiences that would demonstrate each value
- Any tensions, questions, or concerns that need to be explored with the Core Group

> **TEST THE FIRST-ROUND VALUES AGAINST THE CRITERIA**
> Before bringing the values to the Core Group, review each possible value using the criteria for impactful values listed in the ‘Big Ideas to Keep in Mind’ section on pages 5–6. Remove or refine any that do not.

STEP 4: Prep for Second Facilitated Session

4A. Prepare a First-Round Values Summary

Create a simple summary document or slide deck that includes:

- The process used to gather input
- High-level themes from the data
- 6–8 possible values
- Supporting stories or examples for each possible value
- Questions for group discussion

The facilitator should be careful not to present the first-round values as final. They are working drafts designed to help the group reflect, challenge, refine, and narrow.

4B. Prepare an Agenda

Design an agenda that reasonably fits the time allotted for the session. Plan a very structured agenda and be prepared to flex as the discussion unfolds.

4C. Prep Participants

Send the agenda and summary to participants in advance. Ask them to complete pre-work outlined in the following box and send you their responses in advance of the facilitated session so you can enter the session with clarity, context, and a better idea of how to lead the conversation to alignment.

PARTICIPANT PRE-WORK
Evaluate each proposed value using a 1–4 scale: 1 = weak fit, 2 = possible fit, 3 = strong fit, 4 = essential.

Force Prioritization

- Which values feel overlapping or potentially combinable?
- Which value would be hardest to live consistently, and does that make it more or less important?
- Which two values must be included in the final set?
- Which one value would you be most comfortable removing, and why?

Finally, ask participants to name any concern, reservation, or question the group should discuss before making a decision.

STEP 5: Present First-Round Values and Discuss

RECOMMENDED LENGTH: 2.5 HOURS

The purpose of Session 2 is to help the group make sense of the synthesized data, discuss the first-round possible values, and narrow toward the strongest 3–4 values. By the end of this session, participants should:

- Understand the major themes that emerged from the data
- See how the possible values were generated
- Discuss where the draft values feel accurate, incomplete, generic, or unclear
- Identify which values feel most important, distinctive, and useful
- Have narrowed down to their top 3–4 values

RECOMMENDED FLOW FOR A 2.5-HOUR SESSION

0:00–0:10	Reestablish the decision and criteria
0:10–0:25	Share the pre-work patterns
0:25–0:55	Discuss the emerging front-runners
0:55–1:20	Explore tensions, overlaps, and lower-supported values
1:20–1:35	Establish and test the final set as a system
1:35–2:05	Allow final advocacy and reservations
2:05–2:10	Conduct a structured vote
2:10–2:30	Confirm alignment and next steps

STEP 6: Fine-Tune and Test

Once the Core Group has aligned on the concepts:

- Refine wording and definitions
- Confirm that employees can understand and distinguish the values
- Confirm that behaviors can reasonably be generated from each
- Make limited refinements based on feedback

STEP 7: Communicate to Employees

Using the methods of communication that have proven to be most impactful for your organization, share information with employees that includes:

- A refresher on why the values were defined and whose input shaped the outcome
- What the values are, including a clear and succinct description of each value
- Why the final set was selected
- What will happen next to translate the values into everyday practice

Avoid communicating refined values as the completion of the culture work as they are the foundation for Segment 2. Communicate this message through multiple channels to ensure all employees hear it at least once.

Refining Existing Organizational Values

If your organization already has established values, use the process described in **Segment 1A: Defining Values for the First Time**, with the adaptations described in this section.

The fundamental process remains the same: gather broad input, involve a Core Group in interpreting that input and making decisions, test possible values against the criteria for impactful values, align around a final set of 3–4 values, and communicate the outcome. What changes is the starting point and the nature of the inquiry.

Some organizations begin this process with three or four values that are fundamentally right but need clearer language, stronger definitions, or greater usefulness in everyday practice. Others begin with six, eight, or more values that overlap, feel generic, no longer align with strategy, or may need to be substantially reconsidered. This means that "refinement" can range from relatively light revision to significant consolidation, replacement, or reframing.

Do not allow the existence of current values to create artificial pressure to preserve them or move quickly. The purpose of refinement is not to protect previous work or change it unnecessarily. It is to determine what still deserves to be carried forward.

DIFFERENCES IN THE PROCESS

1. Clarify how much change is genuinely possible.

Before gathering input, leaders and the Core Group should be clear about the scope of the work.

Is the organization primarily trying to improve the wording and definitions of values it already believes are right? Or is it genuinely open to combining, replacing, adding, or releasing values?

This distinction should be communicated transparently. Employees will respond differently if they believe they are being asked to improve existing values than if they are being invited to reconsider whether those values still represent what matters most. Do not invite broad reconsideration if leaders are unwilling to act on what they hear.

2. Treat existing values as a starting point, not a conclusion.

One of the greatest risks in a refinement process is anchoring: assuming an existing value should remain simply because it is familiar, has history, or has already been communicated throughout the organization.

Ask the employees offering input and the Core Group to hold the current values lightly. The framing of the question of the work should be something like:

If we were defining our values today, based on who we are, where we are going, and what we have heard from employees, which of these values would still earn a place?

Existing values should be evaluated using the same criteria for impactful values used in Segment 1A.

3. Change the nature of the employee inquiry.

When an organization is defining values for the first time, employee input is primarily used to uncover stories, experiences, priorities, and patterns that point toward possible values.

When values already exist, the inquiry should help practitioners understand both how existing values are functioning in practice and what is missing.

Employee input should illuminate questions such as:

- Which existing values feel authentic and important?
- Which values meaningfully guide behavior or decision-making?
- Which feel generic, unclear, outdated, or difficult to translate into action?
- Where do you see meaningful overlap between values?
- Where is there a gap between what the organization says it values and what employees actually experience?
- What important cultural commitment, if any, is missing from the existing set?

Asking these types of questions can move employees from thinking about whether they "like" particular words to gathering evidence about what should be preserved, strengthened, reconsidered, or added.

4. Assess each existing value before building the new set.

As you synthesize employee input and other relevant organizational data, evaluate each current value and assign it an initial working status:

- **Retain:** The underlying concept and current language remain strong.
- **Refine:** The concept remains important, but the wording, definition, or boundaries need improvement.
- **Combine:** The value overlaps substantially with another value and may be stronger as part of a broader concept.
- **Reconsider:** The evidence is mixed, or significant questions remain about whether the value belongs in the final set.
- **Release:** The value no longer earns a place in the final set.

These categories are not final decisions. They are a way for the practitioner to organize the evidence and prepare the Core Group for a thoughtful discussion.

Also remain open to new values emerging from the data. Refining existing values does not mean the organization is limited to concepts it has previously named.

5. Facilitate toward the strongest overall set.

In the Core Group discussion, expect participants to have greater emotional or historical attachment to existing values than they would to newly generated possibilities.

Help the group move beyond questions such as whether a particular word is liked, familiar, or historically important. Keep returning to the strength of the full set.

Questions that may be especially useful include:

- Which existing values unquestionably deserve to remain?
- Where are we preserving language primarily because it is familiar?
- Which values are competing for the same conceptual territory?
- What becomes clearer or stronger if two values are combined?
- What would we lose if we released this value?
- Does the final set collectively describe the culture we most need to create?
- If someone encountered these values without knowing our organization, would they understand what makes us distinctive?
- Can each value reasonably be translated into observable behaviors?

If the current values are fundamentally strong, this process may move relatively quickly. If they are numerous, overlapping, generic, or disconnected from the desired future culture, the process will naturally begin to resemble Segment 1A more closely.

In either case, the goal is to emerge with 3–4 organizational values that are strategically aligned, culturally distinctive, authentic to the organization's identity, operational, practical, understandable, memorable, and grounded in broad input.

STARTING POINT 2A

Defining Priority Behaviors and Desired Experiences

OVERVIEW

What is the purpose of this process?

Core values become useful only when people understand what those values look like in everyday practice and have shared agreement about the importance of embodying them through behavioral commitments. The purpose of Segment 2 is to translate each organizational value into:

1. Supportive behaviors the organization wants people to demonstrate and reward more frequently.
2. Undermining behaviors the organization wants people to minimize and discourage.
3. Desired felt experiences the organization wants more people to consistently have as a result of demonstrating desired behaviors and minimizing undesired behaviors.

It is not necessary and won't be feasible to identify every priority behavior or positive employee experience. The goal is to prioritize what matters most at this point in the organization's culture journey.

We recommend no more than:

- 12 supportive behaviors total
- A corresponding undermining behavior for each supportive behavior
- 12 priority desired experiences total

Who should be involved?

Continue using the same Core Group whenever possible. Broader employee input should again inform the process, particularly because employees throughout the organization are often best positioned to describe what supportive and undermining behaviors actually look like in everyday work.

How long might this take?

Expect several weeks from initial discovery through final alignment. Trying to draft behaviors quickly in a facilitated session without first gathering examples often produces generic statements such as “communicate effectively,” “be accountable,” or “show respect.”

These ideas may sound right but offer little behavioral clarity. Time may be required to crystallize language to its most impactful state.

Overview of Process

01 Re-engage Employees and the Core Group

02 Gather Stories, Examples, and Experiences

03 Synthesize the Input

04 Draft First-Round Behaviors and Experiences

05 Test the First-Round Statements Against the Criteria

06 Prepare the Core Group

07 Facilitate the Core Group Session

08 Fine-Tune and Test

09 Communicate the Defined Desired Culture

Criteria for Priority Behaviors

HIGH IMPACT

Choose behaviors that, if consistently increased or reduced, would meaningfully shift alignment with the associated value.

Ask: *If this behavior changed, would we notice a meaningful difference in the culture?*

FREQUENT AND OBSERVABLE

Focus on behaviors people regularly see or experience.

Ask: *Does this show up in the real life of employees daily or weekly?*

TEACHABLE AND LEARNABLE

Choose actions people can improve through awareness, intention, practice, feedback, or skill development. Avoid personality traits.

Ask: *Can this behavior be improved through awareness, intention, and practice?*

ACTIONABLE AT ALL LEVELS

Whenever possible, identify behaviors people throughout the organization can demonstrate in some form.

Ask: *Is this something everyone can take responsibility for in some form?*

RESPONSIVE TO CURRENT PAIN POINTS

Values may endure for years. Priority behaviors should reflect what the culture most needs now.

Ask: *What behaviors are creating friction, distrust, or poor performance right now?*

SPECIFIC ENOUGH FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Avoid vague statements such as “communicate better.”

Ask: *Would two different teams understand this behavior in roughly the same way?*

Criteria for Desired Felt Experiences

- Written as first-person lived experiences
- Specific
- Within the organization’s control or influence
- Aspirational but achievable
- Future-oriented but grounded in evidence that the experience is possible
- Written as the positive presence of something desirable rather than the absence of a problem
- Free of unnecessary jargon or complicated language

EXAMPLE
Use: “I feel safe raising a concern with my leader.”
Rather than: “Our organization is psychologically safe.”



Step-by-Step Process

STEP 1: Re-engage Employees and the Core Group

Re-engage the group and remind them that defining values was only the first step.

SAMPLE MESSAGE

We have identified the values that define what is most important about the culture we want to create. Our next step is to make those values practical.

Values only become meaningful when we can recognize what they look like in everyday behavior. Over the coming weeks, we will identify a small number of behaviors that most clearly demonstrate each value, behaviors that undermine those values, and the experiences we hope to create when we consistently work in alignment.

Again, employee input will be an important part of the process.

We are not trying to create an exhaustive list of everything people should or should not do. We are identifying a small number of priorities that can create the greatest positive impact on our culture right now.

STEP 2: Gather Stories, Examples, and Experiences

Invite broad employee input through a survey, Microsoft Forms, focus groups, individual conversations, or a combination.

For each value, helpful questions might include:

- Think of a specific moment when you saw someone demonstrate this value particularly well. What did the person actually say or do?
- When we are under pressure or reacting mindlessly, what do we sometimes do that pulls us away from this value?
- What one behavior, if practiced more consistently, would make the biggest positive difference in aligning us with this value?
- What one behavior, if reduced, would make the biggest positive difference?
- If we consistently lived this value well, what would you personally experience more often?

- How would you know, based on your own day-to-day experience, that our culture was becoming more aligned with this value?

SAMPLE MESSAGING COMPONENTS

Do not worry about writing the "right" statement; just focus on behaviors and experiences. For example: Instead of "communicate better," tell us what someone would actually say or do. Instead of "I want a more supportive culture," describe what you would personally experience if the culture felt more supportive.

STEP 3: Synthesize the Input

Use AI and/or manual qualitative analysis to identify:

- Frequently described supportive behaviors
- Frequently described undermining behaviors
- Current behavioral pain points
- Behaviors associated with moments when the organization was at its best
- Desired employee experiences
- Common themes across multiple values
- Behaviors that appear important but are too vague or difficult to observe
- Experiences that may be meaningful but difficult to measure

Do not simply select the most frequently mentioned behaviors. Frequency is useful data, but prioritization should also consider potential impact.

STEP 4: Draft First-Round Behaviors and Experiences

Develop a working set for each value. Aim initially for approximately 4–5 possible supportive behaviors per value so the Core Group has room to prioritize.

For each supportive behavior, draft a corresponding undermining behavior. Whenever possible, make the two behaviors conceptually parallel.

FOR EXAMPLE

- **Supportive:** We raise concerns early, before silence turns into frustration or stories.
- **Undermining:** We avoid raising concerns until frustration has already built.

Avoid creating undermining behaviors that merely add the word "not" to the supportive behavior. Describe the behavior people actually observe when the value is undermined.

Also draft possible desired experiences. These do not necessarily need to map one-to-one with individual behaviors or values. A single desired experience may result from several values and behaviors working together.

STEP 5: Test the First-Round Statements Against the Criteria

For each supportive and undermining behavior, and for each desired felt experience, assess the degree to which it fits the criteria listed on page 19–20.

STEP 6: Prepare the Core Group

Provide participants with:

- Final values and definitions
- High-level themes from employee input
- First-round supportive behaviors
- First-round undermining behaviors
- First-round desired experiences
- The criteria for evaluating each

PARTICIPANT PRE-WORK
Ask each participant to identify:

For Behaviors:

- Which 6–8 behaviors across all values would have the greatest impact if practiced consistently?
- Which behavior feels least specific or observable?
- Which behaviors overlap and could potentially be combined?
- Which current cultural pain point is not yet adequately addressed?
- Which behavior would be hardest to hold someone accountable for because the wording is unclear?

For Experiences:

- Which experiences matter most?
- Which are redundant?
- Which would be difficult for an individual employee to rate based on their own experience?
- What important desired experience is missing?

STEP 7: Facilitate the Core Group Session

RECOMMENDED LENGTH: 2–3 HOURS

The purpose is to arrive at a focused set of no more than 12 supportive behaviors, corresponding undermining behaviors, and no more than 12 desired experiences.

RECOMMENDED FLOW FOR A 3-HOUR SESSION

0:00–0:15	Reestablish purpose
0:15–1:20	Evaluate behaviors by value
1:20–1:30	Break
1:30–1:55	Examine undermining behaviors
1:55–2:25	Prioritize desired experiences
2:25–2:45	Test the entire system
2:45–3:00	Confirm alignment and next steps

STEP 8: Fine-Tune and Test

Test with a small group of employees who represent the organization's diversity of age, ethnicity, race, positional power, gender identity, experience with the organization, and role.

Test questions might include:

- Could you recognize when someone demonstrates this behavior?
- Could you recognize when someone undermines it?
- Does any statement feel unrealistic?
- Does any desired experience feel difficult to answer based on your own experience? What language is confusing?

Make limited adjustments rather than reopening the entire process unless testing reveals a substantive problem.

STEP 9: Communicate the Defined Desired Culture

Communicate all three elements together in multiple formats over time:

1. **Our Values:** What matters most.
2. **Our Priority Behaviors:** How we demonstrate those values—and how we undermine them.
3. **Our Desired Experiences:** What we hope more people experience when we consistently live those values.

Explain that these behaviors are **priorities, not an exhaustive code of conduct**. They represent the areas where increased consistency can most meaningfully move the culture forward right now. Also communicate that priority behaviors may evolve over time as the organization grows and cultural needs change.

Consider creating a brief and clear document (two pages maximum) that contains the values, behaviors, and experiences in one place. Use this document and frequent messaging to begin to reinforce the language.

STARTING POINT 2B

Refining Existing Behaviors and Desired Experiences

Organizations beginning at Starting Point 2B can generally follow the process described in **Starting Point 2A: Defining Priority Behaviors and Desired Experiences**. The desired outcome is the same: a focused set of no more than 12 supportive behaviors, corresponding undermining behaviors, and no more than 12 desired felt experiences.

The primary difference is that the organization is not starting with a blank slate. Existing behaviors and experiences become an additional source of data to evaluate alongside employee input, current cultural realities, organizational priorities, and the criteria described earlier in this guide.

How the Inquiry Changes

Rather than primarily asking, What behaviors would best bring this value to life?, the inquiry becomes:

- Which of our existing behaviors are still important and useful?
- Which meet criteria?
- Which need stronger or more specific language?
- Where is there unnecessary overlap?
- Which no longer represent our highest cultural priorities?
- What important behavior or current cultural pain point is missing?
- If desired experiences already exist, which remain meaningful and measurable—and which need to be refined?

Employee discovery should therefore include both reaction to the existing framework and fresh stories and examples from everyday work. Avoid simply asking whether employees "like" the current behaviors. Ask whether people can recognize them, understand what they require, use them in feedback and accountability conversations, and see their relevance to the culture the organization is trying to create.

Audit Before You Rewrite

Before drafting revisions, evaluate each existing behavior against the behavior criteria. A useful working classification is:

- **Retain** — strong and useful as written
- **Rewrite** — important idea, but the language needs improvement
- **Combine** — overlaps substantially with another behavior

- **Replace** — the underlying priority remains important, but a different behavior would better express it
- **Release** — no longer a sufficiently important or useful priority

Apply the same discipline to any existing desired experiences. Assess whether they are clear, first-person, realistically influenced by the organization, answerable from an employee's own experience, and sufficiently distinct from one another.

The amount of change required will vary. Some organizations may need only modest editing. Others may discover that their existing framework contains too many behaviors, substantial redundancy, vague or aspirational statements, or priorities that no longer reflect the organization's current needs. In those cases, "refinement" may include significant consolidation, replacement, or removal.

Make the Evolution Visible

When preparing recommendations for the Core Group, show how the existing framework might evolve rather than presenting an entirely new list without context. Identifying which behaviors are recommended to be retained, rewritten, combined, replaced, or released helps participants understand the reasoning behind the changes and honors useful work that has already been done.

The Core Group can then use essentially the same prioritization, testing, and alignment process described in Starting Point 2A, with one additional question continually in view:

Is this existing statement earning its place among our highest-priority behaviors or experiences now?

Communicating the Refined Framework

The final communication should acknowledge that the framework has evolved. Explain why it was revisited, what employee input revealed, what changed, what remained, and why the final set has been intentionally limited.

If behaviors are removed from the priority framework, make clear that removal does not necessarily mean those behaviors are unimportant. It means the organization is choosing to focus collective attention on the smaller number of behaviors most likely to move the culture forward at this stage of its journey.

SUMMARY

Defining a Clear and Measurable Desired Culture

This guide presents a two-segment process for defining a clear, measurable desired culture: first establishing or refining 3–4 core organizational values, then translating those values into a focused set of observable supportive and undermining behaviors and desired employee experiences.

Each segment begins with broad employee input, uses a representative Core Group to interpret and prioritize that input, and applies clear criteria to test the strength and usefulness of the resulting language.

Organizations starting from scratch follow the full discovery and definition process, while those with existing values or behaviors use the same overall methodology but focus more heavily on evaluating what should be retained, refined, combined, replaced, or released.

The process emphasizes thoughtful prioritization rather than exhaustive lists, with the goal of identifying the small number of cultural commitments most likely to shape everyday behavior and experience.

Finally, the framework is tested, communicated broadly, and positioned as the foundation for ongoing culture reinforcement and measurement over time.