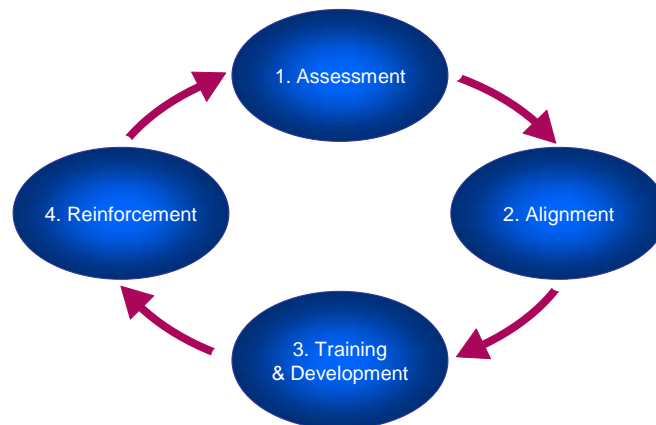


## The Four Stages in Building and Sustaining a Service Culture

A true service culture is a community of leaders at all levels who embrace a service mindset and build lasting relationships with customers and employees. Organizations, try as they may, cannot create such a culture through training alone.

How do you ensure that employees embrace and demonstrate the new mindsets and skills needed to reach a higher level of service? Implement the Four Stages in Building and Sustaining a Service Culture. As you work to link the service training initiative with the business plan, start by identifying the measurable business results you seek. Focus on creating a concrete, yet flexible, project plan for each of the Four Stages. It should include a communication plan, timeline, human resource allocation, budget, and an estimate of the level of employee readiness to receive and implement what will be taught in this initiative.

### Sustaining Measurable Results



#### Stage 1 – Assessment

In this stage you assess and develop a *shared sense* of current reality of the service culture. Identifying the perceptions of where you are now heavily influences the implementation of the rest of the initiative. Expectations for the future need to be anchored in an accurate understanding of current reality. If not, you are setting yourself up for misunderstandings and possible failure—budgets, timelines, people and resource allocations may end up way off.

The key question is: *Do you have enough data to form an accurate and relevant picture of the service culture and service standards, or do you need to do more assessment?*



Communico has conducted research on organizations that have been able to create and sustain exceptional service. We have found that a true service culture is only sustained when the following Five Pillars of a Service Culture are present:

1. **Shared Service Vision and Values.** Clear, compelling shared vision and organizational values support the expression of service excellence. They emphasize an exceptional experience for employees and customers.
2. **Service-Focused Leaders.** Leaders at all levels model the service mindset, value the contribution of employees and strive to continually improve the customer's experience.
3. **Consistent Service Delivery and Measurement.** The standards for service delivery are clear, consistent and integrated in the organization's systems. Established measures for face-to-face, phone and e-interactions are shared by all and practiced with employees and customers.
4. **Developmental Training and Coaching.** Training is provided to all employees so they can develop the attitude, communication skills and knowledge to provide an exceptional customer experience. Developmental performance coaching, versus punitive or evaluative, identifies and promotes service contributions and individual growth.
5. **Constant Systemic Improvement and Reinforcement.** Systems and processes are constantly improved and aligned with the service vision and values.

Choose an assessment tool that provides insights into your service culture, not just classic organizational performance measures.

The reason for beginning with a genuine assessment of the service culture is so that front line staff feels that someone in a senior role has *listened to them*. They each have a view of current reality that influences their everyday performance. *They must feel their reality is understood and their voices are heard*. Without this, the likelihood of people adopting and assimilating new communication skills and attitudes is low.

The assessment data becomes the benchmark for your measurement of the success of the initiative. It can give decision-makers, and all participants, the answer to two key questions:

1. *Why are we doing this?*
2. *What does winning look like?*

## Stage 2 – Alignment

In the Alignment stage you prepare the organization for new initiatives. You now begin to adjust the culture so it will welcome and embrace the introduction of new skills and mindsets. Before you can do this effectively, your workforce needs to see genuine signs of alignment between the organization's:

- Business Objectives
- Service Vision and Values
- Service Standards
- Systems and Processes

Without this, improved service practices will not take root. Consider the following questions:

1. *What are the key business objectives driving this area?*
  - How does this initiative relate to those objectives?
2. *Would every area and level in your organization agree that you have a shared service vision and values? If yes:*
  - How were they developed?
  - When were they developed?
  - Was it a shared process where everyone was engaged in some form?
3. *Do a shared service vision and values need to be developed or revisited? If yes:*
  - What process will you use to engage the organization in this?
  - Who will own, drive and contribute to the process?
4. *Does your organization have clear, measurable service standards for internal and external contact via the phone, face-to-face and in e-interactions? If yes:*
  - Are they consistent throughout every area in the organization?
5. *Do clear, measurable standards need to be developed or revisited? If yes:*
  - How will you develop or revisit these?
  - Who will own, drive and contribute to the process?
6. *Have you identified which systems and processes encourage or discourage your service vision, values and standards? If yes:*
  - How will you begin to align your systems and processes?
  - Who will own, drive and contribute to the process?



In addition to aligning business objectives, vision, values, standards, systems and processes, people at various levels need to be aligned. This is true for senior executives as well as the frontline. Consider these questions:

1. *Have you identified which senior executives are crucial to the success of the initiative? If yes:*
  - How will you engage them to participate?
  - How will you encourage them to model new service-oriented behaviors?
  
2. *Have you identified how you will build “local” support for the initiative? If yes:*
  - How will you engage “natural leaders” throughout the organization so that they communicate, model and encourage service mindsets and skills?

### **Stage 3 – Training and Development**

The organization, having begun to move from an old sense of current reality to a more aligned commitment to exceptional service, is ready to receive and support your service training programs.

To ensure that the programs achieve your business goals, prior to scheduling your first class, a number of activities need to occur. The first in this stage is to decide which programs you are offering to which groups.

To be most effective, these programs need to be tailored to your organization and incorporate realistic skill practices and individual feedback. This method allows associates to immediately put in practice everything they learned in the program.

Prior to launching the training, plan how you will:

- Measure program results
- Customize programs to different roles/functions/departments
- Identify program delivery formats and logistics
- Prepare employees for the benefits of service training and reinforcement
- Prepare facilitators to work effectively within your employees’ context
- Contract with senior leadership to speak in your classes



## **Stage 4 – Reinforcement**

Through your Assessment and Alignment processes you have begun to create the ideal climate for enhancing service excellence. Now, surround your people with a culture that reinforces exceptional service and assures that the skills and attitudes they have learned will be sustained. Answer the following questions to help you sustain your Service Culture.

### *Measurement*

- What reward and recognition systems will you provide?
- How will you ensure that you are rewarding the right behaviors and attitudes?
- How will you measure your service standard levels?

### *Leaders*

- How will leaders at all levels communicate their appreciation of employees, independent of their performance?

### *Coaching*

- How will you coach to your service standards?
- How will you ensure that the coaching is developmentally focused versus evaluative or punitive?
- Will you train your team leaders and supervisors how to provide developmental coaching?
- Will you offer quality assessment calibration sessions to your coaches?

### *E-Reinforcement*

- Will you offer e-Learning reinforcement? How will you use these for coaching purposes?

### *Systemic Improvements*

- How will you continually adjust and align your departments' systems and processes with your service vision, value, and standards?
- How will inter-department barriers to exceptional service be addressed?



### *Training Programs*

- Will you offer refresher sessions?
- How will you design modules to meet specific needs as they arise?

### *Reassessment*

- When will you formally reassess the service culture to check progress and make adjustments?

**These Four Stages provide a process for developing an organization's ability to provide exceptional service in each and every interaction – now and in the future.**



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