

# Book Review: Cracking Your Church's Culture Code

by Carrie Cavanaugh

Cracking Your Church's Culture Code: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision & Inspiration by Samuel R. Chand is a book that helps church leaders, and in fact leaders of any organization, address the slippery concept of organizational culture. With so much emphasis upon vision statements and carefully honed strategy, culture is often overlooked. Vision can be hard to diagnose and even harder to change. But Samuel Chand not only demonstrates why it is necessary, but also gives practical steps to determine where your church stands culturally and what to do to change it if necessary.

Why is culture so important? According to Chand, vision, not strategy, determines how receptive staff are to new ideas. It alone can unleash creativity. It determines the level of enthusiasm and pride about your mission. Chand claims, "Ultimately the culture of an organization—particularly in churches and nonprofit organizations—shapes individual morale, teamwork, effectiveness, and outcomes."

This book doesn't present a quick solution to culture change. Instead Chand explains that "culture

problems, by their nature are never solved quickly. They require a clear understanding of the problem, a commitment to systematic change, and patience and persistence to see change take root." Thus, we should embrace difficulties and patiently work through them, focusing on what we can learn from the experience rather than just trying to resolve it as quickly as possible.

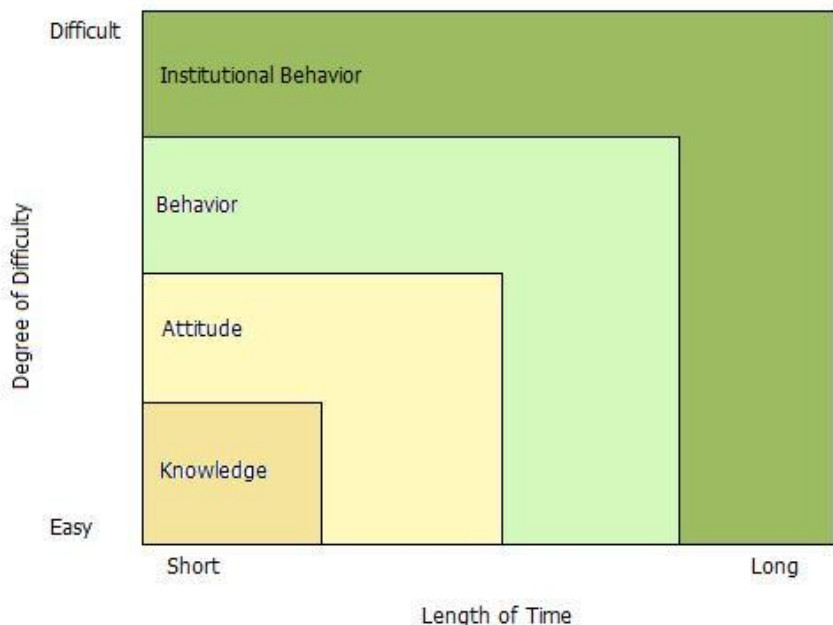
In diagnosing cultures, Chand has broken the spectrum of health down into five categories:

1. Inspiring
2. Accepting

3. Stagnant
4. Discouraging
5. Toxic

Cultural health, as Chand has identified it, is a measure of individual perceptions of the seven key components of CULTURE: **C**ontrol, **U**nderstanding, **L**eadership, **T**rust, **U**naframed, **R**esponsive and **E**xecution. This isn't a scale measuring problems, but rather how problems are addressed: "Looking at the top end of the scale, we shouldn't assume that inspiring and accepting organizations simply don't have problems and that this is why they excel. Quite the contrary. They all

## The Process of Change



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experience difficulties, but the leaders of healthy organizations are steadfastly committed to resolving problems, not with a heavy hand to rigidly control people, but by treating everyone with respect.” To aid in indentifying your cultural health, you can take a free CULTURE analysis at [www.freeculturesurvey.com](http://www.freeculturesurvey.com).

Culture can seem like a nebulous quality that is nearly impossible to influence, but Chand asserts that is not the case. He begins by explaining the process of change, which is comprised of four stages: Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior and Institutional Behavior. This process usually takes about three years. The first stage—Knowledge—is a change in mind as a result in increased information. Attitude about roles, goals, and relationships will change as leaders respond with empathy to their staff's fears. Behavioral changes take place as new habits are formed. Finally the cumulative effect of knowledge, attitudes, and new habits, results in the change of the culture at large. “Each person on the team has had time to think, plan, and experiment with new actions that, over time, take root

and change the expectations and relationships.”

In the chapter “Change Starts with Me” Chand presents a series of questions to guard against graceless comparisons:

***“This may sound counterintuitive to forward-thinking, visionary leaders, but . . . people need to be gripped by the need before they will embrace the solution.”***

- Who are the new voices that have recently inspired me?
- What are some books that have challenged my thinking in the past few weeks?
- What concepts, strategies, or visions have produced in me a sense of godly discontent?

This is just one list of questions throughout the book, which are very helpful to develop reflective leadership. Chand follows up on this list with the following comment that exemplifies the

avenue of addressing culture—heart rather than hands:

These questions focus more on *being* than *doing*, more on the ontology of who we are than on what function we perform. Too often, we focus our development strategies on roles and skills instead of heart and character, but trust is primarily a response to the internal rather than the external characteristics of a person. God created Adam and Eve as perfect human beings, but after today, we define ourselves and describe each other by the things we do instead of by heart and character. In the Garden, mankind shifted from acceptance, grace, and love to blame, shame, and the compulsion to prove ourselves by our performance. To recapture God's design, we need new voices that penetrate our crusty defenses and speak to our souls, not only inspiring our actions but, even more, enflaming our hearts.

Another insight about change that Chand shares is that change often fails because focus is put on the solution rather than the problem. Chand explains, “This may sound counterintuitive to forward-thinking, visionary leaders, but . . . people need to be gripped by the need before they will embrace the solution.” Certainly, making the problem apparent to your staff needs to be the first step in helping them understand your solution.

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Another encouraging aspect to culture change is the idea of changing culture one "tribe" at a time. Chand explains that small organizations may only have one tribe, but larger organizations have many tribes. Thus one individual can have a profound affect on their specific tribe and that tribe in turn will effect the entire organization. But even if it takes a long time for the changes to take shape on a large scale, individuals should be encouraged by reaping the fruit of their efforts within their tribe more quickly.

Dr. Samuel Chand grew up in India, making him more alert to the intricacies of societal norms in the US. He has served as a senior pastor, college president, chancellor and board member giving him first-hand knowledge about the challenges churches and Christian organizations face. As recognition of his leadership skills, he was named one of the top thirty global leadership gurus by [www.leadershipgurus.net](http://www.leadershipgurus.net).

[Cracking Your Church's Culture Code: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision & Inspiration](#) by Samuel R. Chand is the best resource on how to shape your organization's culture

that I have read. I hope it will be an asset to you as you fearlessly mold the heart of your organization for God's glory.