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▲ Faiā

Culture Thinking™

A Vision Paper

Let us help you navigate the future of
culture and technology.

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Executive Summary

In today's increasingly digital environments, culture is emerging as a key driver of business success. How organizations design and nurture their culture directly influences decision-making, collaboration, and overall performance. Yet, as the workplace shifts to more remote and decentralized models, traditional approaches to cultivating culture are becoming outdated. Leaders need a new framework — one that integrates both internal dynamics and external trends while remaining adaptable to constant change.

This whitepaper introduces Culture Thinking™, a forward-looking philosophy that treats culture as a dynamic force. Drawing from systems theory and behavioral psychology, along with Eastern concepts like “flow” (such as in Feng Shui), Culture Thinking™ provides decision-makers with tools to understand and guide culture in their organizations. Rather than leaving culture to chance, this framework enables leaders to shape it intentionally by leveraging both human and technological insights.

Key Insights Explored

- **Culture as a dynamic flow of energy:** Organizational behaviors, communication styles, and technology choices influence how teams interact and perform.
- **The reciprocal relationship between tools and culture:** While leaders shape their tools to improve work, those same tools then shape culture, guiding how employees collaborate, make decisions, and engage with the company's values.
- **Cultural visualization:** With the right technologies and data, leaders can make the invisible visible, mapping the cultural energy within their organizations to identify where it flows smoothly and where it's blocked.
- **Outside-in approaches:** In a world where external forces such as societal values and technological trends are reshaping the workplace, organizations must remain responsive to these changes when designing their cultures.
- **Adaptive and emergent culture design:** Instead of imposing culture from the top down, leaders should allow culture to evolve, guiding it with small but intentional adjustments that align with broader goals.

This paper offers practical frameworks and tools for decision-makers who want to guide cultural energy in ways that improve performance, foster collaboration, and create long-term business success.



Defining Culture Thinking

Culture Thinking™ reimagines organizational culture not as a fixed set of values or behaviors but as a living system — a flow of energy that moves through your teams, technology, and environment. This energy is shaped by two primary forces:

1. **Internal factors**, such as leadership styles, decision-making processes, and team behaviors.
2. **External influences**, such as market conditions, societal shifts, and technological trends.

In adopting this framework, leaders can move away from static definitions of culture and embrace it as a dynamic, constantly evolving force that can be intentionally guided. Just as we make adjustments to our operational strategies in response to changing circumstances, Culture Thinking™ allows us to guide culture in ways that help the organization adapt to internal and external pressures.

For example, a new collaboration platform might be introduced to increase transparency and speed up communication. This tool not only impacts how work gets done but also begins to shape the organization's cultural DNA — reinforcing behaviors like openness, speed, and collaboration. This is why Culture Thinking™ takes a comprehensive view, emphasizing that we shape our tools, but our tools also shape us.

Why Culture Thinking Matters

With remote work, decentralized teams, and evolving employee expectations becoming the norm, cultivating and maintaining a cohesive organizational culture has become significantly more challenging. Traditional culture-building models — like in-office rituals or top-down initiatives — are no longer sufficient in the modern digital workplace.

Culture Thinking™ provides a more fluid and adaptable solution. By focusing on cultural flow, it helps leaders intentionally design cultural systems that not only reflect the unique dynamics of their workforce but also evolve naturally over time. This adaptive approach makes Culture Thinking™ particularly well-suited for today's fast-paced, technology-driven environment.

Leaders who adopt **Culture Thinking™** can expect to see measurable outcomes such as faster decision-making, more collaborative teams, and reduced employee turnover. These are not abstract benefits — data from companies that prioritize adaptive cultures show a 20-30% improvement in overall performance and significant boosts in employee retention.

Culture as Flow

At the core of **Culture Thinking™** is the idea that culture behaves like energy flowing through an organization. This energy shapes how individuals interact, make decisions, and perform their work. Just as a poorly designed physical space can create inefficiencies or discomfort, the flow of cultural energy can either enhance or hinder organizational performance.

For example, when communication flows freely across departments and teams, decision-making becomes faster, and collaboration improves. On the other hand, if tools, processes, or leadership styles create bottlenecks – such as overly complex approval chains or unclear communication channels – cultural energy can become blocked, leading to frustration, inefficiencies, and disengagement.

Culture Thinking™ uses the metaphor of energy flow to help leaders visualize how small adjustments – like changing a workflow or introducing a new communication tool – can redirect and improve the cultural flow. It's about designing environments where positive energy can thrive, making teams more engaged, productive, and aligned with organizational goals.

Layering Culture:

FROM BELIEFS TO ACTIONS

To understand how culture flows, it's important to consider how it's layered. One of the foundational models of organizational culture was developed by Edgar Schein, who identified three primary layers that drive an organization's cultural system:

- **Underlying Assumptions** (the core beliefs that drive behavior)
- **Espoused Values** (the values the organization promotes), and
- **Artifacts and Practices** (the visible manifestations of culture, such as rituals and behaviours).

Introducing the Fourth Layer

In expanding on Schein's original model, we propose a four-layer approach that includes **Believed > Said > Felt > Done:**

1

Believed: The underlying assumptions or deep beliefs that are often unspoken but guide decision-making and behaviors. These are the foundations of the culture, often embedded so deeply that they are taken for granted.

2

Said: These are the espoused values — the principles and ideals that the organization publicly expresses. What is written in mission statements, policies, and what leaders say during meetings falls into this category.

3

Felt: This new layer captures how culture is experienced emotionally by employees, particularly in a digital or hybrid work environment. In these environments, culture is often “felt” through digital interactions — through the vibes employees pick up from online communication, how supported they feel, or how valued they feel in virtual meetings. This layer speaks to the emotional pulse of the organization, addressing how connected or disconnected employees feel in a setting where they interact mostly through screens.

4

Done: The visible, observable actions that reflect the culture, including workflows, decisions, rituals, and everyday practices. This is where culture is enacted and made tangible through behavior.

By introducing the **Felt** layer, we acknowledge that, in today's digital (and now increasingly, AI) world, leaders must pay attention to the emotional “**vibes**” that flow through the organization. Whether it's through digital tools, virtual meetings, or online collaboration platforms, the way employees **feel** — the emotional vibration of the workplace — can either enhance or diminish their sense of connection, belonging, and engagement.

Tools as Cultural Shapers

One of the most important insights of **Culture Thinking™** is that culture isn't just shaped by people; it's also shaped by the tools and technologies we use. This is where the saying, "We shape our tools, but our tools also shape us," becomes particularly relevant. Whether it's the introduction of a new collaboration platform, a shift to remote work, or even the adoption of AI-driven processes, tools can have a profound impact on organizational culture.

For instance, a team that adopts Slack for faster, real-time communication may develop a culture of transparency and quick decision-making. On the flip side, a cumbersome legacy system might unintentionally promote a culture of inefficiency, where delays and workarounds become normalized. In this way, tools don't just support culture — they actively shape it.

CultureStack, one of Faiā's proprietary tools, is built around this premise. It allows organizations to choose and implement the right tools that not only improve operational efficiency but also enhance cultural alignment. By making intentional choices about the tools we use, leaders can actively guide cultural flows toward outcomes like stronger collaboration, improved communication, and higher engagement.

When it comes to digital tools, it's not just about what gets done, but also about how employees feel during these interactions. Tools like **CultureStack** help organizations manage both the practical and emotional dimensions of culture, ensuring that the right "vibes" are being fostered across all digital touchpoints.

Comparison to Feng Shui

Much like **Feng Shui** use in physical spaces, **Culture Thinking™** helps organizations optimize their environments for cultural harmony. Just as Feng Shui practitioners carefully place objects to encourage positive energy flow, decision-makers using **Culture Thinking™** can leverage engagement data, feedback loops, and collaboration analytics to design their workplace cultures — whether in a physical or digital space.

By aligning technological tools, leadership practices, and workflows with cultural goals, organizations create an environment where employees feel connected, empowered, and more engaged. The result is a culture that not only supports business objectives but also evolves organically with the needs of the team.

Understanding the Broader Cultural Environment

No organization operates in isolation. Just as the flow of energy in a physical space is influenced by its surroundings, organizational culture is shaped by both internal dynamics and external forces. These external influences include societal trends, industry shifts, technological advancements, and evolving workforce expectations.

For example, the global shift to remote work — driven by the COVID-19 pandemic — forced many organizations to rethink how they cultivate and sustain their culture in a decentralized, virtual setting. Similarly, increased focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has led many companies to build cultures that are more reflective of societal values, requiring cultural adjustments that resonate with both internal and external stakeholders.

In this context, **Culture Thinking™** emphasizes an **outside-in approach** to cultural design. This means that leaders must remain aware of external pressures and trends when shaping their organization's culture. By acknowledging these broader forces, organizations can create cultural systems that are both resilient and responsive.

Addressing Internal Dynamics

While external forces play a significant role, the internal dynamics of an organization — such as team behaviors, communication styles, and leadership approaches — are equally important. In **Culture Thinking™**, leaders are encouraged to take a deep look at how internal processes either facilitate or obstruct the flow of cultural energy.

Leadership, in particular, plays a pivotal role in shaping culture. However, **Culture Thinking™** advocates for a balance between leadership-driven initiatives and team ownership of culture. When employees feel empowered to contribute to the culture, the organization benefits from a collective sense of alignment and engagement. Leaders guide the process, but culture is ultimately co-created with the workforce, making it more adaptable and sustainable.

The **outside-in approach** encourages decision-makers to not only respond to external forces but also to **observe and refine** internal cultural flows. By doing so, they can ensure that culture evolves in a way that supports both the organization's goals and the changing expectations of its employees.

Adapting Culture Over Time

In contrast to the traditional, top-down method of imposing culture, **Culture Thinking™** takes an **emergent and adaptive approach**. Culture, in this view, is not something that can be rigidly controlled or set in stone. Instead, it evolves organically through everyday interactions, decisions, and workflows.

Leaders who embrace **Culture Thinking™** understand that culture cannot be built overnight or through one-off initiatives. Instead, small, strategic adjustments — such as introducing new communication norms or responding to team feedback — allow culture to emerge naturally over time. These changes can ripple across the organization, gradually shaping behaviors, interactions, and outcomes.

For example, a company that introduces flexible work policies in response to employee feedback might notice a shift toward greater work-life balance, which could enhance overall productivity and engagement. Similarly, fostering a culture of open feedback can lead to better collaboration, as teams feel more comfortable sharing ideas and resolving conflicts.

Designing for Flexibility

To support this emergent approach, organizations must prioritize flexibility in their processes, policies, and technology choices. In a world where change is constant — whether due to market dynamics, technological advancements, or shifting employee expectations — organizations need systems that can adapt seamlessly.

An example of this is Slack's **Focus Mode**, a feature designed to help employees manage time more effectively. By introducing tools like these, companies allow cultural energy to flow more efficiently, enabling teams to stay aligned even as work patterns evolve.

Ultimately, **Culture Thinking™** empowers leaders to make small, intentional changes that help their culture grow and adapt. This ensures that the organization remains aligned with both its strategic goals and the needs of its workforce.

Visualizing Cultural Flow

One of the most powerful tools in **Culture Thinking™** is the ability to make cultural energy visible through data. Just as leaders use metrics to track operational performance, they can now use technology to map how culture flows through their organization. This can reveal critical insights into how teams interact, where communication bottlenecks exist, and which groups are aligned — or misaligned — with the organization's broader goals.

Through tools like **CultureStack**, organizations can gather data from employee engagement surveys, communication platforms, and project management tools. This data can then be visualized to create a “map” of cultural flows. For example, organizations can identify teams that are isolated or under-communicating with other departments, which may indicate a siloed culture. Similarly, data can highlight areas where cultural energy is blocked, such as teams that are disengaged or facing high turnover.

Visualization isn't just about diagnostics — it's about enabling leaders to take targeted action. When you can see the cultural flows within your organization, you can adjust them with precision. For instance, if communication gaps between remote and in-office teams are identified, leaders might introduce new collaboration tools or create regular cross-team rituals to address the disconnect. This approach ensures that cultural adjustments are **data-driven** and impactful.

Beyond just capturing what's happening in terms of communication and workflows, **CultureStack** can also provide insights into the vibes across teams (also known as “sentiment”). By analyzing engagement and sentiment, leaders can get a pulse on how employees feel — whether they feel supported, motivated, or disconnected in their day-to-day work. Understanding these vibrations can help leaders make more informed decisions about how to improve cultural alignment and emotional engagement.

Turning Data into Action

Once cultural energy is mapped, the next step is to convert those insights into concrete actions. With a clearer understanding of where the culture is thriving and where it's facing friction, leaders can prioritize interventions that directly improve performance and engagement.

For instance, if visualization shows that certain teams are more productive due to their frequent use of specific tools, that information can inform broader adoption strategies. Alternatively, if a lack of communication between departments is identified, new team-building efforts, cross-department meetings, or revised communication protocols can be put into place to improve the flow of information.

By regularly visualizing and analyzing cultural flows — both in terms of performance metrics and **emotional vibes** — organizations can move from reactive problem-solving to proactive cultural **shaping**. This continuous feedback loop not only improves day-to-day operations but also ensures that the organization remains adaptive, resilient, and aligned with its strategic objectives.

Actionable Steps for Organizations

1

Diagnose Current Cultural Flow: Use tools like CultureStack to map the current flow of communication and collaboration across the organization. Identify areas where energy is blocked or misaligned.

2

Adjust Communication Methods: Ensure that communication flows freely between teams, whether they are remote or co-located. Tools that promote transparency and connection are essential in overcoming silos and disengagement.

3

Rethink Digital Tool Usage: Evaluate whether your digital tools enhance collaboration or create unintended friction. Tools should simplify work processes and align with the culture you're trying to build.

4

Done: The visible, observable actions that reflect the culture, including workflows, decisions, rituals, and everyday practices. This is where culture is enacted and made tangible through behavior.

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Guiding Principles of Culture Thinking™

To fully harness the power of **Culture Thinking™**, leaders must adopt several key principles that guide how they understand, shape, and evolve culture within their organizations. These principles provide a foundation for designing cultural systems that align with business goals while remaining adaptive to change.

1

Environmental Contextual Awareness

Culture does not exist in isolation — it is shaped by both internal dynamics and external forces. Leaders must remain attuned to these external pressures, such as market shifts, technological advances, and societal changes, while also understanding the internal flow of cultural energy within their teams. By staying aware of both, leaders can better anticipate challenges and opportunities, guiding cultural evolution in the right direction.

2

Collective Alignment

A healthy organizational culture reflects the collective values and behaviors of its workforce, without sacrificing too much of the individual. Culture Thinking™ emphasizes inclusivity and collaboration, where employees at all levels contribute to shaping the culture. Leaders should foster environments where feedback is welcomed, and employees feel empowered to participate in the cultural conversation. This collective alignment ensures that culture is not just top-down but co-created by the people who live it every day.

3

Iterative Adjustments

Culture is dynamic, which means it must be adjusted regularly to remain aligned with business goals and external realities. **Culture Thinking™** promotes an iterative approach, where small, strategic changes are made over time rather than through sweeping, one-time initiatives. This allows leaders to test new cultural practices, gather feedback, and refine their approach to ensure that culture continues to support the organization's objectives.

4

Strategic Alignment

While culture must be adaptive, it should also be aligned with the organization's broader strategic goals. Leaders should continuously ask, How does our culture help us achieve our business objectives? Whether it's improving collaboration, speeding up decision-making, or fostering innovation, cultural flows must support the organization's mission and performance metrics.

5

Visualization as a Tool

Understanding and visualizing culture is critical to effective leadership. By using data to map cultural energy — such as communication patterns, engagement levels, and team interactions — leaders can gain insights into how culture is functioning in real-time. Visualization helps identify areas where adjustments are needed and provides a clear basis for making informed decisions about cultural interventions.

6

Contextual Symbolism

Cultural symbols — whether they are rituals, traditions, or shared language — play a powerful role in shaping behaviors and reinforcing values. **Culture Thinking™** encourages organizations to be intentional about creating symbols that reflect their unique identity and values. These symbols act as touchpoints that remind employees of the behaviors and mindsets that are important to the organization, helping to reinforce the cultural flow.

Implementation Process – From Ideation to Action

Implementing **Culture Thinking™** involves a step-by-step approach that helps leaders diagnose, design, and adapt cultural systems in a way that supports both organizational and employee goals. Below is a roadmap for applying this philosophy within your organization:

● **Diagnosis of Digital Flow**

Use tools like **CultureStack** to analyze your current cultural dynamics. This includes mapping communication flows, team interactions, and engagement levels to identify where cultural energy is blocked or misaligned with organizational objectives.

● **Cultural Ideation**

Based on the diagnosis, brainstorm potential adjustments to improve cultural flow. This could involve introducing new collaboration tools, updating communication practices, or reshaping leadership behaviors to better align with the desired culture.

● **Prototyping and Testing**

Pilot cultural changes with small teams or departments. This allows leaders to gather feedback and evaluate the effectiveness of new cultural initiatives before scaling them across the organization.

● **Strategic Implementation**

Once successful prototypes have been identified, roll out these initiatives organization-wide. Ensure that changes are communicated clearly, and leadership models the behaviors that align with the new cultural adjustments.

● **Continuous Feedback**

Culture is never static. Establish continuous feedback loops where employees can share insights and reactions to cultural shifts. Use this feedback to make iterative adjustments, ensuring that cultural flows remain adaptive and supportive of both the organization and its people.

Conclusion

Culture Thinking™ offers a fresh and dynamic approach to understanding, shaping, and guiding organizational culture in today's complex, fast-paced world. By viewing culture as a fluid, evolving force rather than a static set of values, leaders can take a more proactive and data-driven approach to cultural design. This framework allows organizations to:

- Align their culture with strategic goals.
- Adapt to both internal and external pressures.
- Leverage tools and data to visualize, guide, and improve cultural energy.

Through principles like **collective alignment**, **iterative adjustments**, and **visualization**, **Culture Thinking™** helps leaders create a more collaborative, engaged, and resilient workforce. The ability to see culture as a flow of energy - shaped by both people and tools - empowers leaders to make thoughtful, intentional adjustments that drive measurable results. Whether it's improving team collaboration, speeding up decision-making, or fostering a more inclusive work environment, **Culture Thinking™** provides a practical pathway to cultural and business success.

In a world where work is increasingly distributed and digital, organizations need cultures that are just as adaptable and fluid. By adopting **Culture Thinking™**, decision-makers can ensure their culture evolves in step with their people, their goals, and the world around them.

Call to Action

Want to unlock faster decision-making, more cohesive teams, and a culture that adapts effortlessly to change? At Faiā, we specialize in helping organizations align their cultural flow with measurable business outcomes through **Culture Thinking™** and our proprietary tools like **CultureStack**.

Contact us today to explore how **Culture Thinking™** can help your organization design a culture that not only meets today's challenges but thrives in the face of future opportunities.

- **Website:** faiacorp.com
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