Leadership Worksheet – Mapping Your Culture

The Iceberg Framework

When I help leaders navigate change, we always start with this truth: What you see in your organisation is just 20% of the story. Like an iceberg, culture's most powerful forces are hidden beneath the surface. Ignore them, and even brilliant strategies sink. Here's how I map both layers with tools proven in the field.

Above the waterline: what you see

Observable, but often misleading

1. **Processes & Rituals**

   o *Look for:* Meetings that always overrun, approvals that mysteriously "fast-track," or safety gear left unused.

   o *Why it matters:* Like the corporate teams who ignored new org charts until they got two bosses, visible workflows reveal where people *really* invest energy.

2. **Physical Spaces**

   o *Look for:* Executive floors vs. crowded workstations, locked supply cabinets, or shortcuts through hazard zones.

   o *My finding:* At a factory, the path to toilets put workers at risk, exposing misaligned priorities—efficiency over safety.

3. **Communications**

   o *Look for:* Values posters nobody quotes, town halls where only leaders speak, or emails full of jargon like "synergy."

   o *Red flag example:* When managers recite values perfectly, but frontline staff stare blankly.

Below the waterline: what people usually miss

The 80% that derails transformations

1. **Unwritten Rules**

   o *Look for:* "How we *really* hit targets" (e.g., skipping steps), or silence in meetings followed by hallway debates or post-meeting coffee machine decisions.

   o *My fix:* Ask: *"What would get you fired faster: missing a deadline or embarrassing your boss?"*

2. **Shadow Networks**

Look for: The admin who "knows how to get things done," or influencers without titles (like the maintenance/logistics duo running my client's factory).

3. **Emotional Undercurrents**

Look for: Fear of blame (e.g., hiding errors), resentment from past failures, or quiet quitting signals.

4. **Sacred Cows**

Look for: "We've always done it this way" processes, or strategies no one dares question (e.g., when exposing risks whilst offering solutions, I was told I wasn't a team player and that negativity was not welcome).

Diagnostic: "What's the quickest way to get labelled 'not a team player' here?"

Your iceberg mapping toolkit

1. The "Tell Word" Tracker

Listen for:
- "Normally…" = "We ignore the rules"
- "Theoretically…" = "Reality doesn't match policy"
- "They should…" = "Accountability is broken"
- Your company culture equivalent

2. Polarity Pressure Points

Spot clashes like Stability (X) Innovation, Autonomy (X) Alignment, Centralisation (X) Decentralisation

Map where overcorrecting creates backlash (e.g., innovation sprints causing burnout).

3. The "Gemba Truth Test"

Physically trace one critical process (e.g., from customer order to delivery). Count:

- **Handoffs** (more than 5? Risk increases)
- **Assumptions** (Test you assumptions and theories against facts, data and people experiences)
- **Workarounds** (like the *nut placed on sensors* to fake quality metrics)
- **Faces vs. Screens** (How many people make eye contact?)

4. Ritual Autopsies

Ask after meetings/events:

- "What did we celebrate? What was avoided?"
- "Whose ideas got 'edited'?"