You Can't Culture Your Way Out

The reflection prompts, extracted for your notes.

THE WORK BEGINS AFTER THE LAST PAGE.

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Reflections

Use these prompts after finishing each chapter. The questions are meant to be uncomfortable. The blank space is for you.

PREFACE

Preface

> *This book exists because you've felt something is broken and couldn't name it. Your frustration is evidence, not weakness.*

PROMPTS

1. When did you first suspect the problem wasn't you?
2. What would change if you stopped blaming yourself for organizational dysfunction?
3. Who in your life needs to read this book?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 01

The Impossible Mission

> *Special Forces teams have functional roles just like your company—but their structure forces external focus while yours permits internal focus. You can't culture your way out of a structural problem.*

PROMPTS

1. Think of your best professional experience. What was the team structure? What were you focused on—internal processes or external outcomes?
2. When has your organization created a "war room" that temporarily dissolved functional boundaries? What happened to performance?
3. What would your organization look like if every function owned mission success, not functional metrics?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 02

The Trust Cycle Mechanism

> *Trust cycles are neutral mechanisms that spin in whichever direction structure points them. Each step in a negative cycle is rational—which is why behavioral interventions fail.*

PROMPTS

1. Map a recent project failure to the three cycles (visibility, context, defensiveness). Which cycle dominated?
2. When have you personally engaged in defensive behavior that you knew was counterproductive but felt necessary?
3. Where do you see cycles spinning positive in your organization? What's structurally different about those situations?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 03

How Structure Breaks Trust at Scale

> *Functional organization isn't inherently broken—but at scale, without intentional subdivision, the mechanisms that erode trust are structural, not personal. The people aren't the problem; the structure is.*

PROMPTS

1. Which mechanism is most visible in your daily work? Trickle-down incentives? Context stripping? TPM bloat? Empire building?
2. Who benefits from the current structure? Be specific—names and roles.
3. Does your organization have the single-mission clarity that makes functional structure work (like SpaceX)? Or are you at the scale where these mechanisms have already taken hold?
4. What's one thing you've been blaming on "bad people" that might actually be structural?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 04

The Counterfactual

> *Same people, different structure, opposite outcomes. Structure determines results more than talent, effort, or culture.*

PROMPTS

1. Think of a talented colleague who "failed" in your organization. What structural factors contributed? Would they have succeeded in a different structure?
2. If your current team were reorganized as a cross-functional unit with complete ownership of a customer outcome, what would change in the first week?
3. What's the strongest objection you have to the claim that structure matters more than people? Write it down—then ask whether that objection is actually about structure.

YOUR NOTES

CH. 05

How Structure Builds Trust

> *Cross-functional teams work not because people are better, but because the structure changes what rational behavior looks like—visible outcomes, shared context, accountability that can't be diffused, and operational culture that sustains itself.*

PROMPTS

1. What would "visible outcomes" look like for your current work? What's preventing that visibility now?
2. How would your team's behavior change if peer accountability were real—if the team genuinely held each other to standards?
3. What context do you lack that would help you make better decisions? Who has it? Why don't you?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 06

Making Autonomy Sustainable: The Planning Exchange

> *Autonomy without proof becomes chaos. The planning exchange creates bidirectional trust—teams prove capability through rigorous planning, leadership proves commitment by enabling rather than directing.*

PROMPTS

1. Does your leadership provide strategic intent, or task lists? Be honest.
2. When have you been given autonomy that felt empowering versus autonomy that felt like abandonment? What was the difference?
3. What would you need to demonstrate to earn more autonomy? What would leadership need to demonstrate to earn your trust?
4. Is your leadership planning for the future, or projecting the present forward? What's the difference in your context?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 07

But What About...

> *Every objection to cross-functional structure has been answered by organizations that actually made the change. The objections are real—but they're implementation challenges, not impossibilities.*

PROMPTS

1. What's your strongest remaining objection? Write it in full.
2. Is that objection about whether cross-functional structure works, or about whether your organization is capable of change?
3. What "economies of scale" arguments have been used in your organization to justify centralizing functions across teams? What was the actual effect on those teams' performance? Was anyone measuring?
4. If your team's performance were posted on a public scoreboard that updated weekly—like F1 lap times—what would you measure? What consolidations would suddenly look indefensible?
5. What would it take to run a small experiment that tests your objection?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 08

What You Can Do

> *You have more agency than you think—and organizational systems are levers, not just obstacles. But you also have permission to leave. Staying and drowning is not noble; it's waste.*

PROMPTS

1. What's one experiment you could run in the next 30 days without requiring organizational permission?
2. What would have to be true for you to leave your current organization? Be specific.
3. Who else sees the dysfunction? Have you talked to them explicitly about it?
4. What are you tolerating that you shouldn't be?
5. Who in Operations would benefit from the waste you've documented?

YOUR NOTES

CH. 09

What Executives Must Do

> *Executives with structural authority have no excuses. Maintaining dysfunction when you have the power to change it is a choice—and it's the wrong one.*

PROMPTS

1. If you're an executive: What's stopping you from starting a pilot team tomorrow? Write down every reason—then evaluate which are real constraints versus comfort with the status quo.
2. If you're an executive: What budget authority have you actually delegated to teams? What would happen if you gave a team $80K in discretionary spending tied to their metric?
3. If you're not an executive: Does your leadership understand the structural problem? Have you explained it in terms they can act on—cost, velocity, outcomes?
4. What would it take to get this book in front of decision-makers in your organization?

YOUR NOTES

CONCLUSION: THE CHOICE

Conclusion: The Choice

> *The choice is yours. Fix it, find somewhere better, or accept the dysfunction. But stop pretending the problem will solve itself.*

PROMPTS

1. Picture the Monday morning described in the conclusion—the team that just works. How far is your current reality from that? What's the single biggest structural gap?
2. What are you going to do? Write it down. Be specific.
3. What's your timeline? When will you know if it's working?
4. What will you do if it doesn't work?
5. Who will hold you accountable?

YOUR NOTES