

Pete couldn't wait to implement the new project management process his friend Bill told him about. After Bill described the incredible success their organization had with it, Pete ran out and bought the book Bill recommended and read it that week. Replacing their aging donor management system seemed like the perfect project to launch it on.

*Fast forward six months...*

Pete's frustrations were at an all-time high. The original project plan called for the implementation of the new system to be well under way by now. Instead, they were still arguing over which vendor to select. How could Bill have been so successful with this methodology that was failing him so miserably?

What Pete didn't take into account were the cultural differences between the two organizations. Sure, they were both non-profits, about the same size in staff and budget, and had even been in existence for almost the same amount of time. But Bill's staff was accustomed to functioning in a very collaborative manner, which lent itself well to this methodology. Pete's was a much more top-down culture, so the project team wasn't skilled at group decision making. Furthermore, Pete's staff was used to meetings for informational purposes with well-prepared presentations. This methodology leaned heavily on group working sessions, which made this team uncomfortable. Especially since it was a cross-functional team with members from different levels of the organization.

The problem wasn't the methodology, nor even the culture of Pete's organization. But the two didn't work well together, at least not without a lot of adaptation.

Large construction projects begin with geological surveys to understand the makeup of the ground being built on. Bedrock calls for different types of construction than sand. Likewise, building an organization requires understanding the cultural underpinnings of the organization in order to build successfully.



But leaders are often so immersed within their own organizational culture – a culture they probably helped create – that they don't even recognize many aspects of that culture. And it's what they don't see that is waiting to ambush their next big initiative.

Cultural characteristics can propel an organization forward or be their biggest ball and chain. The very characteristics that helped bring about today's success may well be tomorrow's lead weight. Like nearly everything else in life, cultures must adapt to survive. But few things change as slowly and reluctantly as a deeply embedded culture.

It may not be easy, but cultures can change. In fact, they will change – the question is whether leaders are guiding that change or just reacting to it. There are two ingredients in the recipe to guide cultural change: 1) Leadership that is not only willing, but committed to driving appropriate (and sometimes painful) change; and 2) a means to reveal and identify the cultural components that need to be addressed to assure a healthy future for the organization.

If you're the kind of leader that can provide the first ingredient, *enLumen Leadership Services* is here to help with the second.