Culture Hacking

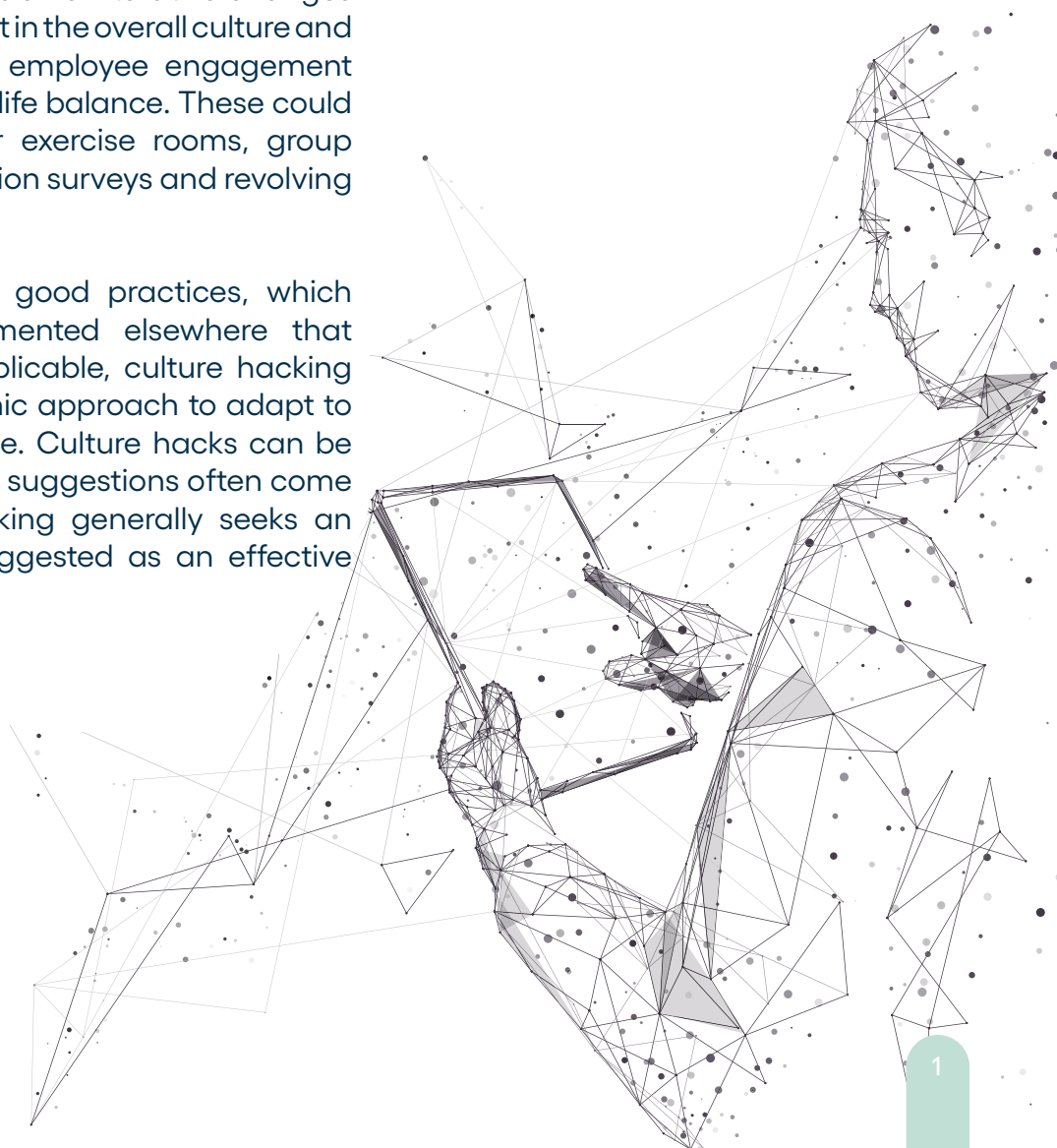## THE SECRET TO MAKE THINGS BETTER

ALTIMETRIK®

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Culture is nothing but a collection of behaviors and involvement between people and organization. The sum of shared thoughts and beliefs within a group to enhance overall performance and well-being. Hacking is obtaining an intimate understanding of a system, for an explicit purpose.

Culture hacking is the gradual process of bringing numerous small, positive changes in an organization that can be used to increase productivity along with employee satisfaction.

According to 2018 CIO survey, 46 percent of respondents said the greatest impediment to digital transformation is culture. Culture hacking applies small iterative changes that can have significant impact in the overall culture and work environment, increasing employee engagement and promoting a healthy work-life balance. These could include flexible hours, nap or exercise rooms, group challenges, employee satisfaction surveys and revolving shared duties.
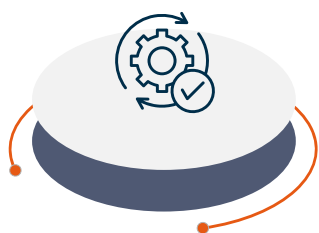
Instead of using the idea of good practices, which can often use ideas implemented elsewhere that may be misguided or not applicable, culture hacking attempts to take a more organic approach to adapt to the organization and its people. Culture hacks can be suggested by business, though suggestions often come from employees. Culture hacking generally seeks an internal response, which is suggested as an effective way to change behavior.
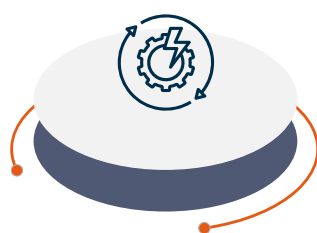
THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE HACKING

In a world of high competition, tough challenges, increased risks and so on, it is not uncommon to see teams feeling demotivated and in need of a shot of morale. Senior management often needs to rally employees to carry the enterprise through perhaps the most challenging business conditions they have ever encountered. In this situation, management must be careful not to add to employees' stress, which could overwhelm and render them less productive. Instead, leaders should encourage and reassure workers by appealing to positive emotions, such as pride, belonging, and hope. Management can use culture hacks — quick, meaningful actions that signal change instantly — to evoke these emotions. Even the simplest of hacks such as changing the way you end or start the gatherings, instituting a team ritual to celebrate a win with your people can have a lasting impact. The good thing about culture hacking is that it is a quick, low-effort way to engage on-the-ground change which ultimately has a compound effect.

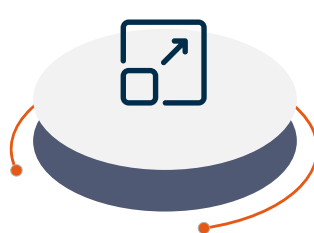## An actionable cultural hack will have a few common traits

Easy to execute

The hack will go viral organically and not have to be pushed. It will be designed in a way that people across the organizations will find it easily usable and the uptick will be spontaneous.

Fast action

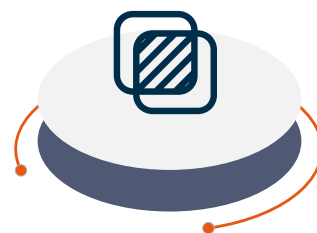A good hack cannot take weeks or months to demonstrate action or take effect.

Minimal Viable

It should be simple, and not take more than 2 days to plan and execute. Do note that minimal effort does not equate to low substance.

Transparency

The hack must make it very clear to the intended audience that there has been a cultural shift. All attendees at a gathering should be able to see the change.

SIMPLIFICATION IS
KEY

Culture hacking should be followed consciously to reduce complexity and unnecessary stress. There are various ways to identify hacks and run them.

For example, one easy way to bring down unnecessary work is by playing the children's game - red light, green light - where one person acts like a stop light. When they say green light, everyone can run towards them. When they say red light, everyone needs to stop. Discuss as a team on what should have a red light (stop), green light (start) and yellow light (continue).

Avoid innovating ideas without a sponsor: "that sounds interesting" doesn't necessarily mean a business decider will want to pay for it when the time comes. Test commitment with real money, and if it's not there, stop working on it immediately.

Hold weekly "break the rules" meeting which can be a weekly special hacking meeting where the team breaks the rules - revisits or scraps policies, cancels old procedures, empowers people, provides budget to new ideas, connects people and so on. This hack challenges toxic cultural behaviors that are deeply distrustful and disagreeable, such as "I can't", "I don't have budget", "and I'm not allowed".

Work routines and processes tend to become more complicated over time to accommodate more "requirements". It is assumed that more complicated the work is, more value it creates. But this is often false. For example, an analytics team takes extra days to prepare a monthly report because one small department wants a complicated data cut. Meanwhile, the larger departments can't make decisions while they're waiting for the report. Simpler is better in many cases, but oddly, it takes active work to keep things simple. Leaders can simplify work by adopting a zero-based starting point.

Look at the tasks that must be done and ask - what is the simplest and fastest way to get the work done? For any routine process, start with the simplest possible approach even if it is not comprehensive. Using a root cause analysis is not always the best or the only way forward, especially for organizations that want more agility. Setting a time limit of 24 hours to create a first draft or prototype can simplify work limit time.

HOW CAN CULTURE HACKS BENEFIT

Let's look at a few areas where culture hacking significantly improves various aspects of an organizational culture and injects efficiencies.

Making the culture more agile and autonomous

PROBLEM	HACK	BENEFIT
When working virtually, teams tend to receive an overload of pings & phone calls during the day. These distractions can prevent deep concentration on critical tasks, which decreases performance and increases stress levels.	Introduce do not disturb (DND) option.	By decreasing the number of disturbance that people experience on a weekly basis, performance levels will increase, and burnout will be reduced as well.
People can find it challenging to sign off after normal business hours while working from home. They also tend to sign on more frequently after meeting home and family obligations, preventing them from experiencing an adequate amount of downtime. As such, they're more likely to burn out, which minimizes their productivity and wellness.	Write down activity lists and set out-of-office calendar.	These simple actions trigger your employees to disconnect after normal working hours, which will decrease burnout potential. This hack also reinforces the autonomy that people need to have in defining their workday, as well as enhances your brand as a leader who cares about the team's well-being.
Many leaders choose to keep team sizes the same in a hybrid model as they were when on-site. The number of people per team can be too large to yield productive discussions and can decrease employee engagement because there are too many voices at play.	Shrink your team sizes.	This is a simple way for you to ensure that your teams have more efficient, targeted discussions. In turn, this will improve the organization's productivity.

HOW CAN CULTURE HACKS BENEFIT

Creating an open culture

PROBLEM	HACK	BENEFIT
Generally, members are not transparent when in meeting or when camera is on. Virtual attendees might feel awkward starting at the on-site interaction and shut down even more, not wanting to interrupt any in-person dialogue.	Find influencers to break the ice in meetings.	You'll see an increase in team engagement and an increase in productive dialogue over time. This hack also boosts your brand as a leader that encourages authenticity and values all perspectives.
Leaders working in a hybrid model tend to join more meetings than when they worked on-site full-time. These "helicopter leaders" think that their team will be unproductive without them, have anxiety about missing a meeting and so on. The result is increased fatigue and a deficit in inter team relationship building.	Start chats and meetings that don't include you, and self-filter before joining any interaction.	Not only does this hack enable people to stay connected with one another and build relationships, but it also enhances trust in you as your team won't view you as a helicopter leader. This also creates another outlet for employees to brainstorm new ideas that could benefit your organization.
It can be challenging to create moments where teams can come together and celebrate each other while working remotely. If left unchecked, teams can become isolated, and collaboration can suffer.	Manufacture meaningful moments.	Honest moments like these allow people to reconnect, which ultimately builds team spirit and can improve collaboration. It also shows that you're a leader who cares about the team beyond the typical management expectation.

HOW CAN CULTURE HACKS BENEFIT

Building a culture of psychological safety

PROBLEM

It's unlikely that your employees will call out cultural deficits, as they either don't realize that the deficits exist, or they don't want to say anything to avoid repercussions from you and/or their peers. This lack of direct insight prevents you from getting the full perspective on the behavioral changes that your team could benefit from.

People continue to feel pressure both at work and at home, which raises fatigue and burnout levels, as well as decreases productivity and employee retention rates.

HACK

Send anonymous team culture polls.

Make yourself vulnerable and create the option to schedule "safety cone" 1:1s.

BENEFIT

Randomly asking these short, important questions causes a temporary break in any ongoing team patterns and reminds people to think about whether their group dynamic is allowing them to be successful. It can also be an outlet for those who have wanted to share their thoughts to do so without compromising their brand. You use these results to continuously identify and improve team behaviors.

The benefit of demonstrating your susceptibility and providing the option for safe conversations is that your team dynamic can shift toward accessibility and understanding. In cases where people open-up during the 1:1's, you'll then be equipped with knowledge on how to contextualize their work experience so that they can be productive and successful.

HOW CAN CULTURE HACKS BENEFIT

Driving innovation

PROBLEM	HACK	BENEFIT
Many people still believe that innovation is impossible, or at least much more difficult, in a hybrid environment where everyone isn't face to face.	Set up offline content breaks.	This allows your employees to disconnect in a way that's not a traditional built-in break. People can produce the greatest ideas from the most unlikely of sources, and usually those sources are rooted in topics that interest them. As such, your team's capacity for innovation significantly increases with this hack, as it addresses both time and creativity challenges. You're also generating an additional way for your team to relate to each other, as they'll learn about their peers' interests. Both the asynchronous work (the content breaks) and the synchronous work (the team meetings) can be done in any location.
Business units tend to operate independently from the rest of the enterprise. This inhibits the formation of relationships with other functions, as well as visibility into these functions' needs and goals. As a result, your team has a limited range for innovative solutions, and any ideas they come up with might be irrelevant to the company's success.	Create a cross-functional innovation networking program.	Not only are you creating a cross-enterprise innovation network, but you're also positioning your organization's brand as being collaborative and company-focused.
It can be hard for people to communicate their ideas in innovation meetings. They either misconstrue their true vision or sit back and let others have the spotlight, because they don't have the confidence in how they'll communicate their ideas.	Use background pictures to expose and learn individuals' communication styles.	This is a low-effort way for you to build awareness of each person's communication styles, which will enable you to facilitate more productive discussions. It's also a simple warmup that gets your teams into a creative mindset from the get-go.

CONCLUSION

One should understand that culture hacks are suitable means to prevent the pitfall of traditional organizational change management which are constructed with long and exhausting upfront planning. Also, culture hacks are not goal-oriented interventions where the target state is planned upfront in great detail. Instead, the hack is a systemic trigger to the system to change itself.

> "Culture hacks are discrete, counter-cultural interventions aimed at changing how people interact with each other.
>
> When they work, they can have a big impact. When they don't — no big deal, we can try something else."
>
> — Carrie Bedingfield.

| WE COME TOGETHER | WE WORK TOGETHER | WE WIN TOGETHER |

Handy tips

1. Make your cultural hacks brief and direct. The best ones connect with the audience emotionally.

2. Design hacks that create visible change quickly and with low effort. Avoid trying to hack big areas, such as overhauling all your enterprise architecture.

3. Have a plan in place in case the hack backfires. Be clear about the change you seek — or risk a sort of cultural schizophrenia setting in.

4. Don't ask permission, ask for forgiveness instead.

About Altimetrik

Altimetrik is a data and digital engineering services company focused on delivering business outcomes with an agile, product-oriented approach. Our digital business methodology provides a blueprint to develop, scale, and launch new products to market faster. Our team of 5,500+ practitioners with software, data, cloud engineering skills help create a culture of innovation and agility that optimizes team performance, modernizes technology, and builds new business models. As a strategic partner and catalyst, Altimetrik quickly delivers results without disruption to the business.