

# Broken Hill City Council

A MAJOR REGIONAL COUNCIL'S  
COMMITMENT TO CONSTRUCTIVE CULTURE  
CHANGE



# Overview

A deep commitment to investing and collaborating with their people at every organisational level during volatile, complex, and uncertain times, saw Broken Hill City Council (BHCC) make a vital and impressive change towards a constructive and empowered culture.

In 2018 Dattner Group commenced the development and delivery of a long-term leadership and cultural development program for BHCC aimed at galvanizing Executive team support for organisational culture transformation.

This case study shows that over four years Dattner Group worked with leaders at all levels and engaged everyone from Elected Councilors to frontline staff to design and develop the culture they aspired to using a range of interventions introduced by Dattner Group and captained by BHCC leaders





# The Challenge

As one of Australia's most vibrant rural centres, with a strong mining tradition, supported by cultural tourism, Broken Hill was recognised in 2015 as Australia's first heritage-listed city.

Prior to this in 2013, the NSW Treasury Corporation assessed Broken Hill City Council (BHCC) as being financially unstable and unsustainable with key performance indicators below acceptable benchmarks.

A series of interventions were put in place to return BHCC to financial viability including a 2014 restructure which saw almost 50 positions made redundant and 30 new roles created. Over the course of three years, staff and Councillors made a lot of tough decisions and successfully reduced a \$7 million operating deficit to a \$3.07 million surplus by the 2016 financial year.

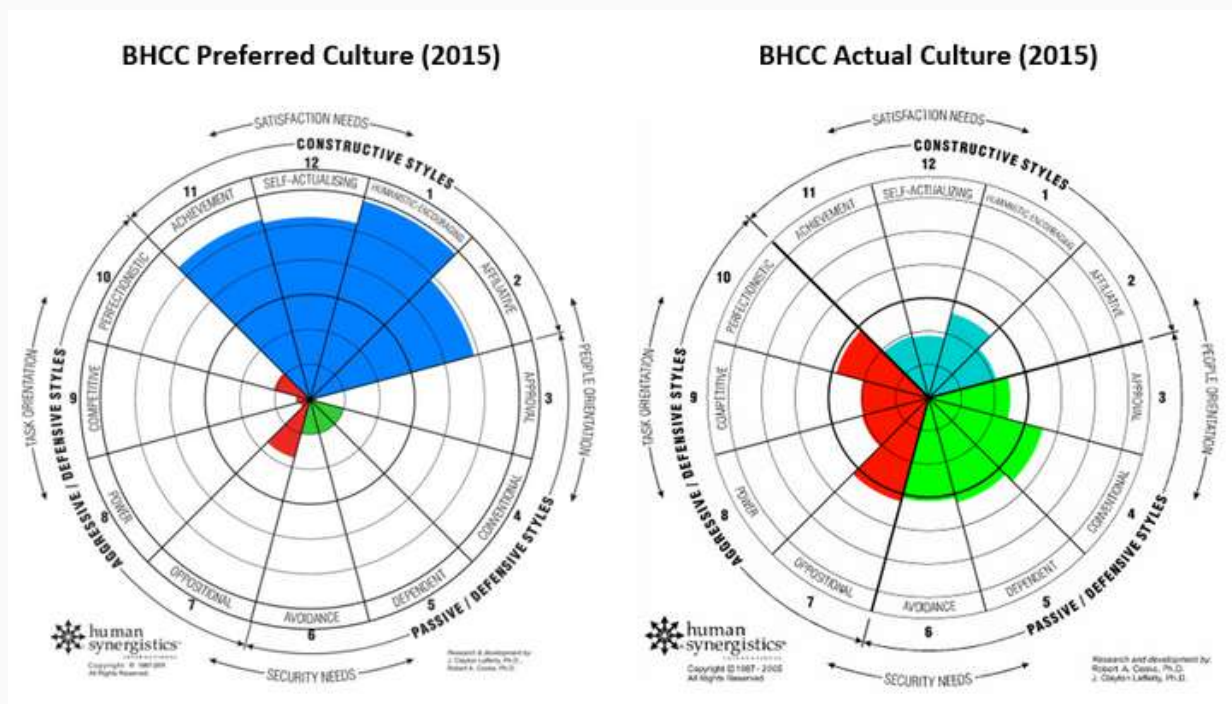
Throughout this period however, Council leadership underwent significant changes including three General Managers, three interim or acting General Managers plus a 75% turnover within the Executive Leadership Team.







Not surprisingly, when BHCC assessed its organisational culture in 2015 using the Human Synergistics Organisational Culture Inventory (OCI) and Organisational Effectiveness Inventory (OEI), they found that while the financial accounts had been brought back into the black, their culture was not able to support the aspirations of the organisation, or able to sustain its financial viability.



**The desired culture included:**

- Focused on Achieving outcomes
- Personal learning & growth driving Self-Actualisation
- Collaboration, empowerment, and development creating a Humanistic-Encouraging environment
- Affiliation focused on building relationships based on trust and respect

**The actual culture was characterised as:**

- Conventional and conforming
- Dependent, lacking initiative
- Avoidant, not dealing with tough issues
- Oppositional, resorting to conflict
- Perfectionistic, intolerant of mistakes



# The Solution

In 2018 Dattner Group commenced development and delivery of a long-term leadership and cultural development program for BHCC aimed at galvanizing Executive team support for organisational culture transformation.

Over four years Dattner Group worked with leaders at all levels and engaged everyone from Elected Councilors to frontline staff to design and develop the culture they aspired to. Interventions introduced by Dattner Group and captained by BHCC leaders included:

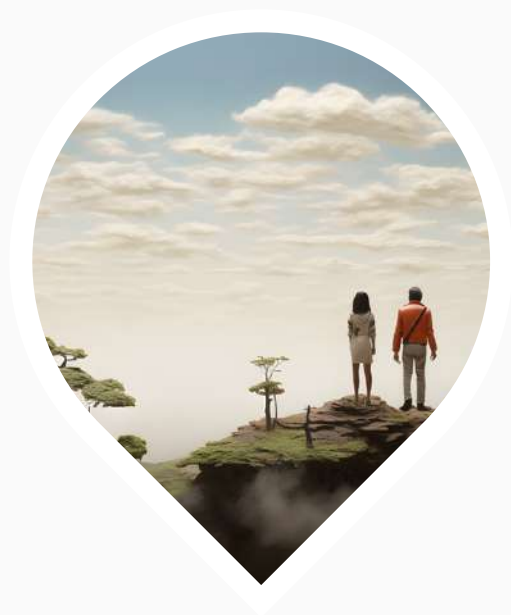
## 2018: Engaging Leaders as stewards of culture

- **Executive Team Development:** Engaging the Executive to their role as stewards for Cultural Development for the entire organisation
- **Development of BHCC Values and Behaviours:** Articulating the Values and observable Behaviours as the foundation for Cultural Development
- **Launch of Values 360 Assessment:** Individual data on demonstration of behaviours associated with each of BHCC's values. Commencing with Executive then cascaded to Senior Management Team (SMT)



## 2019: Aligning strategy, people, and culture

- **Executive and SMT Development:** Building leadership bench strength and self-awareness in key leaders at BHCC. Doing this collaboratively across Executive and SMT to build cabinet solidarity on cultural ambitions (3 Modules including Life Styles Inventory – LSI 360 Feedback and Emotional and Social Competence Inventory -ESCI)
- **Development of BHCC Strategy:** A Strategic Plan, not for the infrastructure and assets of the community, its economic or cultural growth, but for BHCC – the organisation itself, to ensure it grows its capability and effectiveness in line with the needs of Broken Hill. This included an introduction to a comprehensive strategy development process that was translated into clear initiatives that everyone had a hand in, led by a high-quality governance team.
- **OCI/OEI Surveying and Action Planning:** Retesting of the culture, including Departmental and Team level snapshots of actual culture. Extensive team-based action planning on results, passing the baton of growing culture to the frontline. The results are overleaf:

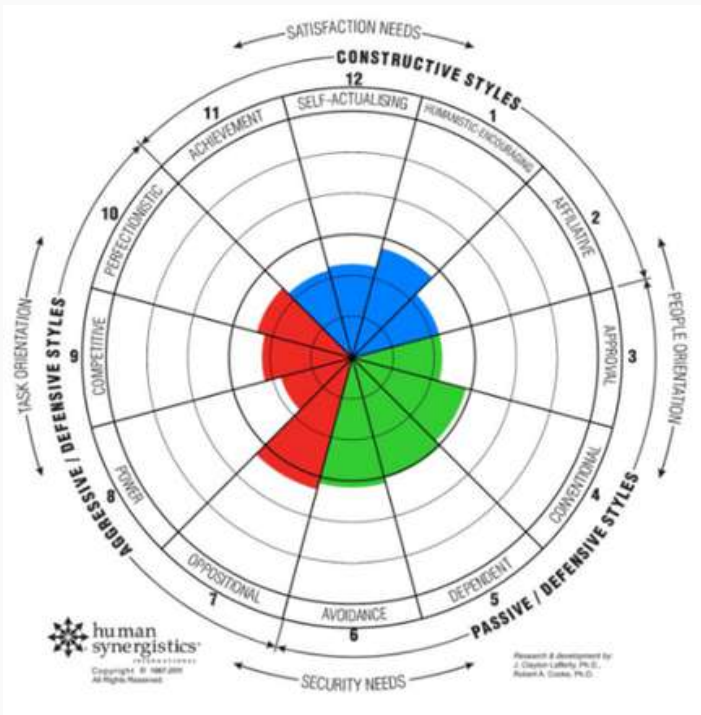






## 2020: Extending reach and building momentum

- **Executive Team Development:** Maintaining momentum and lifting the bar on Executive leaders as role models of the leadership required to bring about cultural change
- **SMT Team Development:** Deepening the skills at the next level where much of the heavy lifting in bringing teams on the journey takes place (3 Modules – aligned to LGNSW Leadership Competency Framework)
- **Frontline Leaders Development:** (LSI 360 feedback) Increased self-awareness on individual behaviour that generates Constructive or Defensive behaviour in their team.
- **Frontline Leaders Embedding Values:** (360 Feedback) Individual data on demonstration of behaviours associated with each of BHCC’s values.



### BHCC Actual Culture (2019)

#### The 2019 interim retest result showed:

- Small but significant improvements
- A reduction in the strongest defensive (red and green) styles
- Modest growth in the constructive (blue) styles, heading in the right direction



- **Development of BHCC Balanced Scorecard:** To support the execution of the BHCC Strategy Map – creation of measures/metrics/targets for each strategic objective and initiatives to achieve them, with Theme Teams set up to support strategic governance.
- **Development of Cascading Engagement Plan:** Leveraging enhanced leadership skills already built, clearer mechanisms for leaders at each level to do their part in engaging their teams to new plans, projects, policies, and other changes.

### 2021: Engaging Elected Representatives

- Using individual beliefs and behaviour 360-degree feedback data (LSI 1 & 2) in workshops and 1:1 coaching to create shared intention 'How we want to work together as a team'

- Developing principles and methodologies for managing constructive relationships
- Integrate this with Executive team, articulate clear mutual expectations:
  - Councilors of Executive
  - Executive of Councilors

### Culture Pulse Check:

Update on six key metrics – interim trends on factors that predict culture, renewing focus on work done at Departmental/Team level to shift culture in their patch, and putting in place simple governance framework to ensure this continues





## 2021: Maintaining momentum

- **Re-testing LSI 360 Feedback** (with 1:1 coaching) done across all Leadership levels, pulse-checking personal progress on building behaviours that create a constructive culture. Sharing results, renewing conversations between leaders and direct reports, building individual accountability for behaviour.
- **Emerging Leaders program:** Building the pipeline of leaders, building self-awareness using tools such as LSI and ESCI
- **Team Workshops:** Tailored interventions for individual teams with long standing morale and engagement issues

## 2022: Bringing everyone on the journey, measuring progress

- **World Café:** In a one-day whole-of-organisation process, harnessing the collective intelligence of the whole Council and key external stakeholders to generate collaborative answers to three key strategic questions for BHCC. The World Café's enabled people to have fun together, break down the barriers AND collaboratively contribute ideas.
- **Wellbeing Workshop:** Post-Covid, with Council at the epicenter of the Community response, asking ourselves 'RUOK?' – using GLWS Wellbeing framework.
- **Re-testing Values alignment:** Executive and SMT Leaders processing 360-degree values feedback together (including 1:1 coaching).
- **OCI/OEI Surveying and Action Planning:** Measuring shift to a constructive culture for whole-of-Council: results broken down to smallest team/unit (5 or more people).



# The Result

The discipline and commitment demonstrated by BHCC leaders was evidenced in the latest OCI/OEI survey results, with the shift to a constructive culture clearly visible.

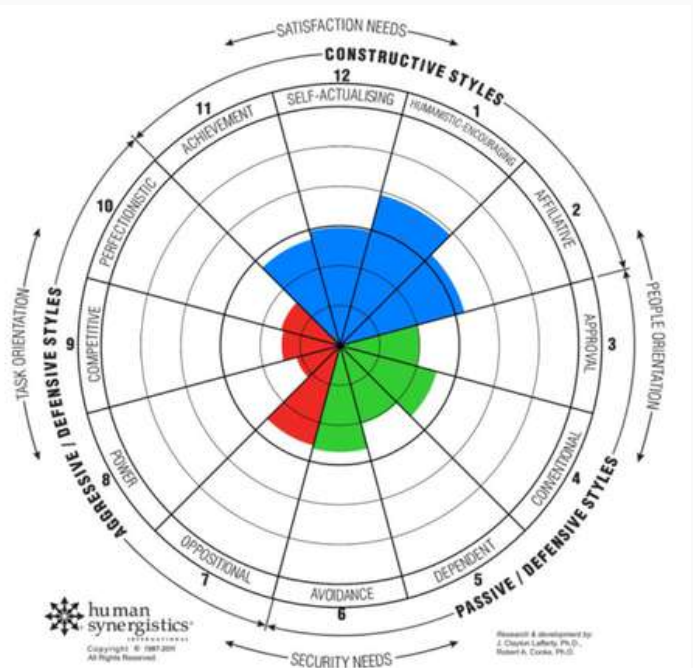
BHCC embodies the notion that culture change is a marathon, not a sprint, embedding cultural change over the long haul, making it collectively owned and resilient.

## Actual Culture 2022

The 2022 retest result showed (as compared to 2019):

- Strong increases in all constructive (blue) styles (Average increase 63%)

- Strong reductions in all defensive (red and green) styles (Average decrease 33%) There were strong improvements across the board in BHCC’s ‘Causal Factors,’ these are the things that leaders do, that define ‘the way we do things around here,’ the practices which create and predict culture.





## 2019 Causal Factors vs 2022 Causal Factors

Some of the **most notable improvements** in Causal Factors (shown as increase in percentile ranking, as compared to norm group of over 1,000 other organisations) included:

- Employee involvement in decisions ↑ 40%
- Selection and Placement ↑ 38%
- Downward Communication ↑ 38%
- Upward Communication ↑ 35%
- Training and Development ↑ 32%
- Empowerment ↑ 25%
- Goal Clarity ↑ 25%

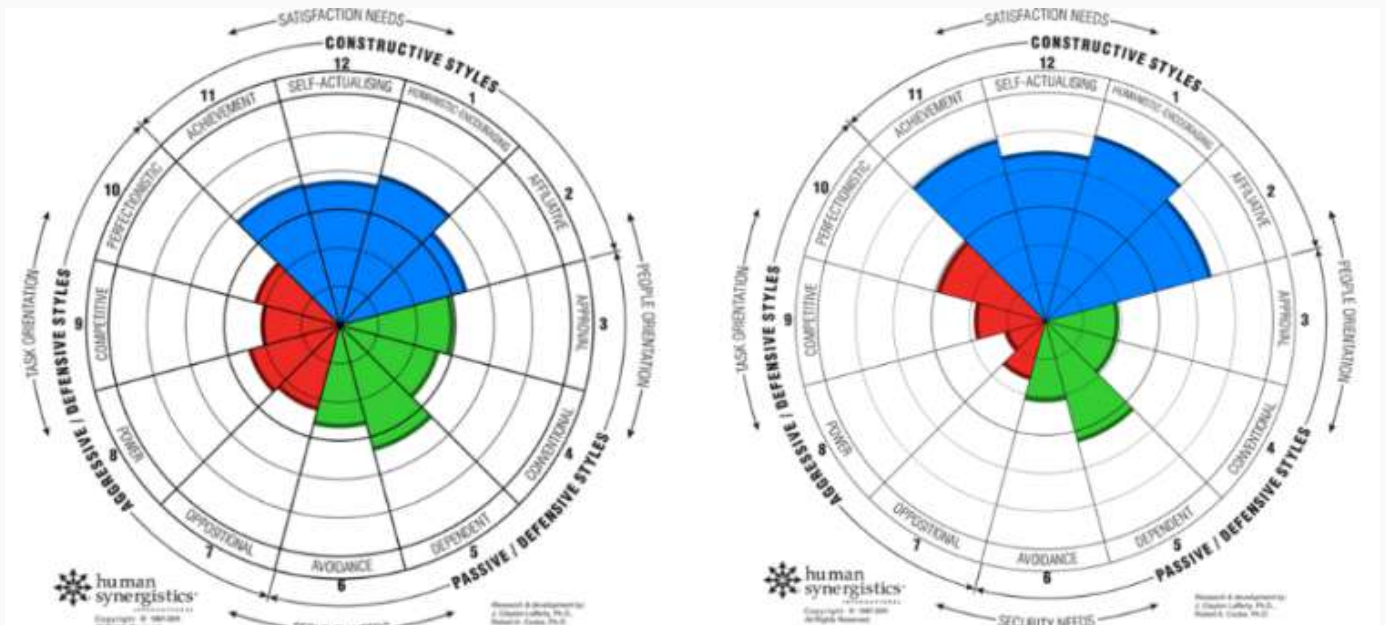
These shifts in Causal Factors do not materialise without significant input and effort on behalf of leaders within the organisation, reflecting the evolving leadership consciousness of the leaders themselves.

This can be seen in movements in the aggregated Lifestyles Inventory (LSI) results for the Executive and Senior Management Teams. When compared from 2019 to 2021 the aggregate/combined 360-degree LSI results for senior leaders show strong shifts to more constructive styles of leadership.





Below: Executive & SMT Combined Aggregate LSI 360 survey result 2019 (left) | Executive & SMT Combined Aggregate LSI 360 survey result 2021 (right)



# Conclusion

The results achieved by Broken Hill City Council are impressive and put them in the exclusive company of organisations that have envisioned and then delivered on intentionally changing their culture to support their strategy and aspirations.



Causal Factors are lead indicators of culture, so strong increases reliably predict culture will continue shifting to Constructive (blue) behaviours i.e., it is via these factors (reinforced through consistent development of leaders) that cultural change is sustained.

The culture itself (represented by the blue, red, and green 'Circumplex' graph) is also strongly predictive of the outcome measures, suggesting that improvements will continue to increase over time.

**In delivering these shifts in culture, a number of important learnings emerged for BHCC:**

- **Staying the Course:** When BHCC first tendered for a partner to collaborate with them on leadership and culture their intention was clear – to invest in a multi-year program to create cumulative shifts in culture and embed these in business as usual
- **Good process informed by good data:** BHCC made regular individual (LSI) and organisational pulse checks (OCI/OEI) a vital part of their approach, ensuring interventions were always based on up to date, objective data
- **Ownership of culture at the team level:** All organisational feedback was disaggregated to the smallest organisational unit possible (5 people or less), making it personally relevant to people at the frontline. The question posed in OCI/OEI debriefs was not ‘What will *they* do to build the culture that *they* want?’ but rather “What can we do to create the culture that we want?”
- **Leadership Commitment:** Leaders at BHCC were uncompromising on their expectation that all leaders (including Executive members) would individually commit to and demonstrate values-based behaviours, there were no exceptions



- **Passing the baton:** The commitment to long-term change was reinforced when selecting a new GM (2021 – an internal appointment) and inducting new Councilors (2022) to ensure those leading the organisation became stewards of a process that transcended their own tenure, creating continuity that is now paying dividends
- **No one left behind:** Meeting teams where they are, some had further to travel to a constructive culture than others. Each received the focused attention required to come to a shared vision of ‘the way we do things around here.’

These impressive and vital shifts in culture occurred through a period where BHCC was also meeting the unprecedented challenges of managing a local response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Delivering essential services under lock-down conditions, working remotely and other challenges didn’t stall, but galvanized their efforts as they worked together to keep their people and community safe.

To find out more about how Dattner Group can help you with your organisational culture and change strategies, [get in touch today](#).



# DATTNER GROUP IS COMMITTED TO CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF LEADERSHIP, FOR THE GREATER GOOD.



## CONSULTING

We support leaders at all levels in a time of significant transformation in the practice of leadership.

We build a deeper sense of self, a considered perspective of others and a comprehensive sense of the context in which the practice of leadership operates.



## COMPASS

Women leading in significant numbers may be the single most sustainable proposition we have for the future.

We build courage in women to be visible for a sustainable world.



## COACHING

We unlock skills in leaders to become deeply self-aware, guided by values, driving purpose and sustaining constructive relationships.

To understand what we do at Dattner Group, please look at our website  
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