

# How to Build a Resilient Culture

## Presentation commentary for web page publication

Delivered at the National Federation of ALMOs conference on 4 June 2026 by Tracey McEachran, Campbell Tickell.

Tracey McEachran's work focuses on leadership, culture and behaviour. Her areas of expertise include designing and delivering leadership programmes, coaching leaders and teams, and helping organisations develop intentional cultures through the CultureScan approach.

CultureScan work across many organisations has shown a consistent pattern in what matters most to colleagues. When staff are asked what is most important to them in their role, the answers repeatedly centre on colleagues, teamwork, customer focus and making a difference. Across thousands of responses, the message is clear: this is a people-oriented sector, and frontline colleagues are often driven by a strong desire to help residents and contribute positively.

Alongside CultureScan, this presentation also draws on insights from the Me.Scan psychometric instrument. Me.Scan is designed to reveal the unconscious drivers of conscious behaviour, using a combination of image and text to get beneath the surface of how people act at work.

The model uses four colours. Green represents a natural talent that is recognised, developed and used well. Orange represents a natural talent with potential that is not yet fully recognised or developed. Both green and orange do not drain energy and generally remain helpful under pressure. Red represents a learnt strength: something a person has worked hard to develop and may value highly, but which can become a blocker to performance under stress. Grey signals a potential sensitivity that may become fragile under pressure.

A sample of 35 frontline workers used in the presentation offers a useful picture of common patterns in the sector. The people-oriented archetype shows up strongly, often as a natural and well-developed talent. Responsibility is also highly present, showing that many frontline colleagues are inclined to take ownership and act responsibly. Visionary capability is present too, but often less developed, suggesting that seeing wider possibilities and taking a broader strategic view may need more support and cultivation.

Two areas stand out as especially important when pressure rises: solution-oriented behaviour and contact-oriented behaviour. In this sample, both appear far more often as developed strengths than as

natural talents. That matters because developed strengths often cost more energy to maintain, and under stress they are more likely to become blockers to performance.

### **Solution-oriented behaviour under pressure**

Solution-oriented colleagues tend to think in logic and workable solutions. They value intellectual freedom, need space to think, and often try to regain control by analysing and fixing problems quickly.

At their best, these qualities are immensely valuable. These colleagues are practical, focused and motivated to solve problems. Yet under pressure, the same strengths can become liabilities. If they feel constrained or misunderstood, they may become argumentative, rebellious, self-important or explosive. In quieter ways, they may withdraw, become vague or seem hard to reach.

The underlying fear in this pattern is often exclusion, lack of belonging, or a loss of autonomy and freedom of thought. What helps is clear context, simple decision-making processes, room for their own ideas within a light framework, and explicit clarity about role, contribution and place in the group.

### **Contact-oriented behaviour under pressure**

Contact-oriented colleagues are typically highly customer-focused and relationship-led. They try to stay connected, responsive and attuned to others. They adapt through flexibility, relationship-building and maintaining contact, and they want to be seen, heard and understood.

Again, this is a real strength. But under pressure, communication can become excessive, unclear or over-explained. Some colleagues may begin pleasing others rather than speaking plainly and truthfully. Behaviour can also swing between over-contact and total withdrawal.

The underlying fear here is being rejected, left alone, or not being seen, heard or valued. What helps is regular contact, clear expectations, visible relevance, explicit acknowledgement, and steady boundaries with reassurance. This is one reason one-to-one conversations are so important for frontline teams.

### **What stress does to people**

The presentation uses visual models to show how pressure affects behaviour. When people are in a more open and flexible state, they are more creative, compassionate and able to respond well to what is in front of them. Under greater stress, they can shift into fear, rigidity, overthinking, frustration, anger and self-criticism.

This matters because these states take more energy. When colleagues are stuck in stress, everyday work feels harder, options feel narrower, and reactions become more immediate and less thoughtful. Instead of

self-awareness, people can move into self-absorption, becoming more preoccupied with fixing, controlling or defending.

The leadership task, therefore, is not simply to ask people to cope better. It is to create the conditions that move people from fear to clarity, from reaction to response, and from rigidity to openness.

## **The role of leaders**

The presentation argues that leaders need to build a clear vision, role clarity and strong but usable structures around their teams. In environments full of ambiguity, clarity becomes essential.

One of the most important leadership skills in this context is listening. Not just factual listening that looks for confirmation of what is already believed, but deeper listening that creates space for something new to emerge and helps the other person feel genuinely seen and valued.

Listening matters because fear closes people down, while courage opens them up. Leaders who model calm curiosity, clarity and reflective conversation make it easier for others to do the same.

## **Circle of control, influence and concern**

A central framework in the presentation is Stephen Covey's model of control, influence and concern. It offers a practical way for leaders and frontline staff to think about boundaries, pressure and role clarity.

The circle of control includes what is directly within a person's control: thinking and interpretation, emotional regulation, tone, words, behaviour, boundaries, choices, priorities and escalation decisions. For a frontline colleague, that means they may not control a resident's crisis, but they can control how they respond, what they promise, and whether they step into rescue mode.

The circle of influence includes things a person cannot directly control but can still shape. This includes the quality of conversations, clarity of expectations, referrals and signposting, partnership working, escalation, coaching and the likelihood of agreement or understanding. A housing colleague may not be able to solve a welfare crisis, but they can influence whether a resident reaches the right service and whether the team holds consistent boundaries.

The circle of concern includes the wider pressures that matter deeply but sit outside direct control. These may include poverty, cost-of-living pressures, shrinking external services, residents' life circumstances, policy constraints, funding limits and public expectations. These concerns are real, but when people spend too much time trying to control them, they lose energy and any sense of agency.

The practical task is to help colleagues recognise the difference between control, influence and concern. That shift helps them move away from exhausting over-responsibility and towards grounded, effective action.

### **What this means for frontline teams**

For customer-facing housing roles, the goal is to help people move from reaction to response, and from vague expectations to clear agreements. This means building cultures where boundaries are understood, support is visible, and communication is genuinely two-way.

The presentation concludes that stress feeds stress, often through people's own thinking patterns. Frontline colleagues are frequently deeply motivated, people-oriented and driven to fix problems. But when they move into the red zone, those same strengths can turn into argument, withdrawal, over-explaining or emotional reactivity.

This is why "do as I say, not as I do" does not work. In a pressured environment, leaders need to model the behaviours they want to see: clarity, curiosity, listening, emotional steadiness and coaching conversations. One-to-ones are vital, not as routine check-ins but as meaningful conversations that create agreement, maintain connection and reduce ambiguity.

Finally, communication must be understood as a two-way process. Frontline staff often say that nobody tells them anything, while senior leaders may believe they are communicating constantly. But communication has only happened when there is a feedback loop: when people have understood what was meant, reflected it back, and had space to respond. Without that, the organisation may be transmitting messages, but it is not truly communicating.