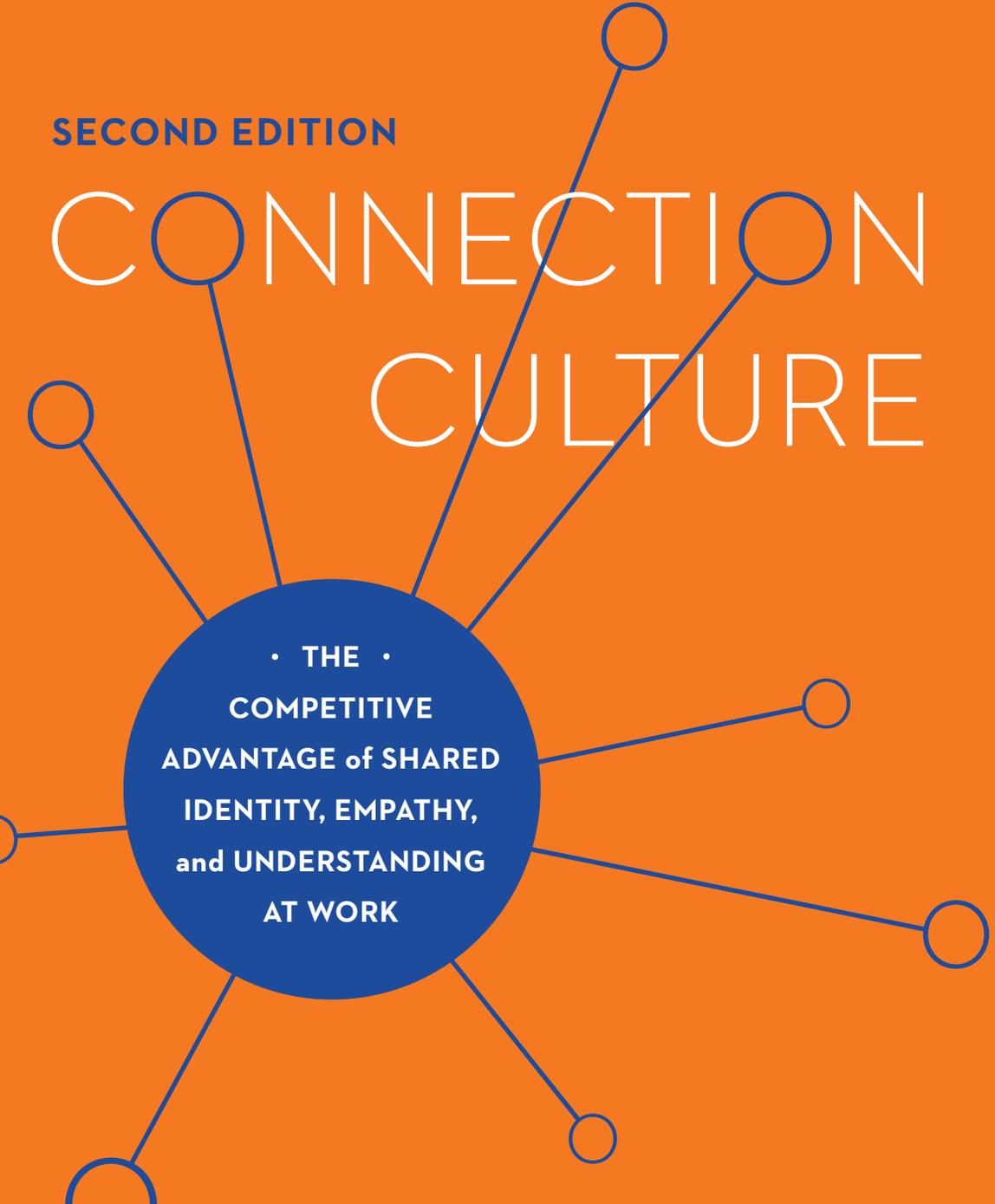# MICHAEL LEE STALLARD

TODD W. HALL, KATHARINE P. STALLARD, AND JASON PANKAU

SECOND EDITION

# CONNECTION CULTURE

· THE ·
COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE of SHARED
IDENTITY, EMPATHY,
and UNDERSTANDING
AT WORK

## More Praise for the First Edition

"Packed with rock-solid evidence, disturbing statistics and moving stories, this short but passionate plea for connectedness at work and in life delivers a wake-up call. How connected you feel to other people at work turns out to be the primary driver of your sense of engagement as an employee, but Americans in particular have let relationships and community suffer. Experts Michael Lee Stallard, Jason Pankau and Katharine P. Stallard explain why people need to connect. getAbstract recommends this quick read to leaders who want to build places where the best people want to work and connect." —*getAbstract*

"*Connection Culture* really captures the why and how to mobilize an organization to work together toward a compelling vision. The insights about the unique contributions of the leader and the leadership team are especially useful." —Alan Mulally, Retired CEO, Boeing Commercial Airplanes and The Ford Motor Company

"Every manager needs to read this book—it will foster healthier work environments and make my job a lot easier!" —Ted George, MD, Clinical Professor, George Washington University School of Medicine; Senior Investigator, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

"Our organization has benefited greatly from the principles in *Connection Culture*. The book creates an engaging framework for leaders who want more for their businesses and employees. It is a must read for anyone leading an organization." —Mike Cunnion, Chief Executive Officer, Remedy Health Media

"*Connection Culture* lays out a compelling case for a culture of connection in every organization and provides a framework for leaders who want to apply positive personal values in practice in their organizations and teams." —John Young, Group President, Chief Business Officer, Pfizer

"*Connection Culture* captures the profound truth that people come first and provides the framework, language, and practices every leader needs to achieve a sustainable, superior performance. A great leadership guide for leaders at every level." —Frances Hesselbein, President and CEO, The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute

"A wonderful book . . . *Connection Culture* isn't a very long or wordy book, but it's loaded with lessons." —*Small Business Trends*

"At the end of the day leadership is all about the human experience. *Connection Culture* provides ideas, actions, and pathways that servant leaders can use to not only enhance performance, but more importantly to build a strong culture." —Howard Behar, Former President, Starbucks International

"The message of *Connection Culture* is profoundly personal yet ultimately universal. If you think you know what connection really means, you'll come away with a whole new perspective once you have read this gracefully written book." —Bruce Rosenstein, Managing Editor, *Leader to Leader*, Author, *Create Your Future the Peter Drucker Way*

"Leadership is about relationships. *Connection Culture* reveals the art and science of creating a culture that builds relationships and drives performance." —David Burkus, Author, *The Myths of Creativity* and *Under New Management*

"Engaging, while offering real solutions to human challenges that occur in the workplace! As someone who has researched and published in the field of organizational psychology, I can honestly say that *Connection Culture* is right on target and a book that every leader should race to get their hands on." —Karla R. Peters-Van Havel, Chief Operating Officer, The Institute for Management Studies

"Thank you, Michael, for reminding us again that people—customers and employees—are the most important ingredient of any business. Leaders place so much emphasis on the operations and financials, but people connecting and working together is the key to success." —Jay Morris, Vice President, Education, Executive Director, Institute for Excellence, Yale New Haven Health

"*Connection Culture* grabbed my attention from the beginning and had me jumping on the phone to share its ideas with friends and colleagues. We have to do better as leaders and as teachers of leadership development to be intentional in creating and sustaining connection cultures. Even when you think you've got it all in place (the surveys, training, recognition awards, and celebrations), disconnection creeps in. You must read this book." —Janis Apted, Associate Vice President, Faculty and Academic Development, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

"Too many leadership books focus on developing work experience without acknowledging the rest of our lives. *Connection Culture* demonstrates how the positive habits, relationships, and character we've developed in the workplace can serve us well at home and in our communities. Not only does this deep exploration of connection culture explain the positive effects of using these skills, it also offers ways to get started on the journey." —James daSilva, Senior Editor, SmartBrief on Leadership

"Connection works when we work on connection. Michael Stallard draws us in with his stories, convinces us with his evidence, and guides us with his recommendations. He concludes by inviting us to mark the day we finish the book as the start of a new outlook, focused on establishing a thriving work culture through freshly enlivened, engaged, and enriched connections." —David Zinger, Founder, Employee Engagement Network

# Contents

# Foreword

*Connection Culture* presents a new way of thinking about leadership, employee engagement, and organizational health. It shares the stories of many different organizations that found tremendous success by nurturing connections—from Costco to the U.S. Navy to the Duke University men's basketball team. Combining an array of data and research findings as well as examples from real-life experiences, Michael Lee Stallard makes the compelling case that a culture of connection provides a clear competitive advantage for organizations and individuals. *Connection Culture* provides powerful tools for enriching and transforming organizations.

Texas Christian University (TCU) is proud to be one of the organizations profiled in *Connection Culture*. At TCU, our goal is to produce graduates who can deal with change, motivate others, and think and act responsibly in a global community. These are the qualities most needed for leadership and thriving in the future.

And we want to do more.

Some years ago, I was intrigued to learn that Stallard, the father of two of our students, was an expert on leadership and organizational culture. What he wrote on connection culture resonated with me. During my career in higher education, I've seen students thrive when supportive relationships make them feel connected, and I've seen how they struggle when they feel lonely. I was pleased to see how TCU's culture resonated with Stallard's connection culture theory—the university's culture is rooted in a long history of valuing service to others and inclusiveness, both of which increase connection.

TCU's connection culture has always been led by the people who become part of the TCU community. This focus on personal connectivity is modeled at all levels of faculty, staff, and student leadership—on campus and around the globe.

In an effort to strengthen our culture of connection even further, TCU has partnered with Stallard to create the TCU Center for Connection Culture. It begins at home as we equip our faculty, staff, and students with the skills to be

more intentional about connection. We are committed to embracing connection programs and activities for our entire university as well as for community participants. We desire to be a beacon of connection and a model for other institutions that strive for community, inclusion, and ethical leadership.

While reading *Connection Culture*, I was reminded of Moore's Law, which states that the processing power of computers will double every two years. I find this to be an apt metaphor for the rapidly evolving environment—one for which we must prepare our TCU graduates. This book provides positive ways of thinking and acting that can help them—and us all—navigate the future.

## Our World Has Changed and Our Perspectives Have Broadened

Even now, as I write this update to the foreword for the second edition, a worldwide pandemic is unfurling and information on COVID-19 is spreading as quickly as the virus itself. We are in the midst of enacting sweeping measures: distance learning, working remotely, and the cancellation of gatherings that make being a Horned Frog so meaningful.

This historic season has tested not only life here at Texas Christian University, but life as we know it everywhere. The global COVID-19 pandemic suddenly challenged the way we live and learn, radically altering the way we relate to one another.

Or did it?

When our beautiful campus resembled a ghost town, the tulips kept right on blooming, and the sharing of ideas and resources flourished right along with them. I watched with gratitude as a new normal unfolded for a spirited Horned Frog family that can never truly be separated, even when apart.

What we are experiencing right now makes the elements of this book even more relevant. Because TCU has long fostered a sense of community, our emotional connection is strong and we were able to build upon those relationships for the betterment of our students.

Our rallying cry is #TCUTogether, a campaign launched to share the many stories of Frogs Helping Frogs. Almost immediately, student affairs began hosting virtual events to bring students closer together and combat feelings of isolation. I launched a video series direct to students and receive (and respond to) hundreds of emails per week. I can't count the number of

live online events, Zoom calls, and touchpoints TCU has created to grow our connection and support our community, even in this time of social distance.

These unprecedented times have taught us all that although we are apart, a Horned Frog will never be alone.

Victor J. Boschini Jr.
Chancellor, Texas Christian University
April 2020

# Introduction
# to the Second Edition

My interest in workplace culture sprang from a desire to understand what was going on in my own work life and to discern what I should do as a leader to establish and maintain an environment in which the people I led could consistently do their best work. I took a break from working on Wall Street so I could focus on studying and addressing the widespread problem of employee disengagement and workplace burnout. Gathering and assimilating research and the perspectives of academics and experts, and conducting research on people in the trenches of modern organizational life led me to write and speak about what I discovered, and eventually to found a company to bring these insights to organizations.

Now, almost 20 years later, my colleagues and I have had the privilege of sharing our work with groups ranging in size from a medical software start-up of fewer than 20 employees to every Costco warehouse manager worldwide. Early on we worked with the engineering section of the NASA Johnson Space Center. More recently, we've spoken to leaders at the U.S. Air Force, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and Yale New Haven Health. In education, we've worked with Utah's largest public school district and have an ongoing relationship with Texas Christian University (TCU), which established the TCU Center for Connection Culture. Other clients have been centered in the technology, construction, and finance industries.

What I've learned about connection applies beyond the realm of our work lives. The principles are relevant for individuals, families, community groups, sports teams, and even nations. Knowing that a connection deficit negatively affects our own health and well-being, the health of organizations, and the health of society, I've become concerned observing how the pace and stress of life threaten to squeeze out time for supportive, lifegiving relationships and endeavors. The United States and countries around the world are experiencing

an epidemic of loneliness. In recent years, the news has been full of reports of incivility and active shooter incidents. There has been a rise in suicide rates, even in those as young as elementary school age. As I update this introduction, protests are taking place across the United States calling out systemic racism. It is a time of entering into honest, open, and productive dialogue that is very necessary if we are to be a country that values the dignity and inherent value of each individual. In all of these social issues, we must go beyond just talking and take action to make lasting change. I believe we can collectively turn the tide if we are willing to be intentional about connection.

## New Research, Case Studies, and Connection Practices

This updated and expanded edition of *Connection Culture* builds on our understanding since the first edition was published in 2015 and since our book that introduced connection culture, *Fired Up or Burned Out: How to Reignite Your Team's Passion, Creativity, and Productivity*, was published in 2007. For instance, recent research has found that:

- Individuals with stronger social connections were associated with a 50 percent reduced risk of early death, whereas individuals who were lonely or socially isolated were associated with a risk of early death that is equivalent to the risk from smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010; Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015).
- America and many other nations are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness, with three in five (61 percent) American adults self-reporting loneliness (Holt-Lunstad 2017; Cigna 2020).
- Greater loneliness in the workplace results in poorer task, team role, and relational performance (Ozelik and Barsade 2017).

You'll find new practices that boost connection and a five-step process to operationalize connection culture. You'll learn about common obstacles that get in the way of cultivating a connection culture and how to overcome them. This edition also broadens the diversity of leaders and types of groups highlighted, including Lin-Manuel Miranda and the team that developed the award-winning Broadway musical *Hamilton*, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Steph Curry and the Golden State Warriors basketball team, the Mayo Clinic, Oprah Winfrey, and Tricia Griffith of Progressive Insurance. We've also added features that encourage you to pause and

reflect on your own experience and how the material applies to your life and work environment.

In chapters 1 and 2 you will learn about the three cultures of connection, control, and indifference, and why a culture of connection helps individuals and organizations thrive.

In chapter 3 you will learn the Vision + Value + Voice model that is essential to create and sustain a connection culture.

At the close of parts I and II, you'll find a section we call Profiles in Connection. Here you'll read about leaders and groups that dramatically differ in the nature of the tasks they perform yet share commonalities in their social cultures. Perhaps you'll spot some best practices of connection in action that you can implement.

Chapters 4 and 5 will arm you with interesting and relevant research supporting the case for connection from a wide variety of fields, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and organizational behavior. You will also see how a lack of connection affects wellness, well-being, and longevity, and how connection provides six specific benefits to teams and organizations that add up to a powerful performance and competitive advantage.

Chapters 6 and 7 will equip you with a process to operationalize connection culture, including specific, practical, and actionable ways to boost connection in your group's culture.

## The Perfect Storm: Stress, Loneliness, and the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the editing process for this second edition of *Connection Culture* neared completion, a novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19 emerged in the city of Wuhan in China. As the highly transmissible virus began to spread worldwide in the early months of 2020, life as we had known it abruptly changed. On July 16, 2020, as I revise this introduction one final time, the statistics are sobering. To date, the virus has been found in nearly every country in the world, 13.7 million positive cases of COVID-19 have been publicly reported, and 588,023 individuals have died. In the United States alone, at least 138,255 people have died (*New York Times* 2020a, 2020b). The numbers continue to rise. Thankfully, the majority of people who contract COVID-19 are able to recover.

Because there wasn't (and as of this writing still isn't) a vaccine to protect people from contracting the virus, public health and government officials began to focus on strategies to slow the spread of transmission and "flatten the curve" so as not to overwhelm health systems. Many different strategies were used, including "social distancing," wearing face masks while in public, and quarantining at home (which could be voluntary or mandated by law, depending on where you lived). The social distancing strategy called for people to maintain a physical distance of at least six feet in an effort to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Additionally, many local governments put restrictions on the number of people who could be together at one time, which meant that people could no longer gather as they would have for weddings, funerals, worship services, or birthday parties. Because of social distancing restrictions, public spaces were closed, and conventions, vacations, and live performances were canceled or moved into the virtual space. In addition, school buildings and college campuses closed, and education moved to being delivered through distance learning. School plays, spring sports, and the prom were canceled, and students couldn't walk across the podium to receive their diplomas in a graduation ceremony.

Office workers became remote workers, doing their jobs from home. Other employees were furloughed or let go as organizations were forced to adapt to a sudden drop in activity. The millions of people who rely on income from gig work or having a side hustle were especially hit hard. According to an article in the *New York Times* on May 8, "The Labor Department said the economy shed more than 20.5 million jobs in April, sending the unemployment rate to 14.7 percent as the coronavirus pandemic took a devastating toll" (Schwartz et al. 2020). This was the highest U.S. unemployment rate since the Great Depression.

Alongside the feelings of loss and disappointment were feelings of fear and anxiety. Many worried that they or a loved one would contract COVID-19, they would lose their job due to the economic recession, they would be financially vulnerable due to the declining value of their savings, or that they would be unable to pay their bills.

Individuals worldwide were already struggling with high levels of stress and loneliness before the pandemic arrived. The physical distancing required

to reduce virus transmission only add to our social isolation, contributing to a perfect storm of factors that increase physical and emotional health problems. A Kaiser Family Foundation poll of American adults conducted a few months after the COVID-19 outbreak began found the mental health of nearly half (45 percent) of respondents was negatively affected due to worry and stress over the virus (Kirzinger et al. 2020).

To help individuals and organizations, Katharine Stallard and I wrote "Connection Is Critical During the Coronavirus Pandemic," which was published in a number of media outlets in late March. In that article, we shared key points about connection: Social connection makes us smarter, happier, and more productive; makes us more resilient to cope with stress; and appears to improve cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune system performance, which may provide physical and emotional resources to fight the virus. We observed that the convergence of factors—high stress, the current loneliness epidemic, and increased social isolation from the COVID-19 pandemic—made boosting connection an even more urgent matter. Acknowledging that the need for physical distancing makes it more difficult to connect in conventional ways, we recommended a number of practices to boost human connection under these conditions.

How long increased social isolation from COVID-19 will last is difficult to tell. It likely won't end until a vaccine is developed, which may take one or more years. And once that happens, what will the lingering effects of having faced this traumatic event be? In the years immediately following the Spanish Flu, a particularly deadly pandemic that swept the globe in 1918–1919, there continued to be a fear of social connection when having done so in the midst of the prolonged crisis proved fatal for more than 600,000 individuals in the United States alone (Kenner 2018).

And how will the way we work change? For one, I expect to see a larger percentage of individuals working remotely, no longer benefiting from social connection in a shared workplace. In addition, many social distancing practices—such as wearing masks, plexiglass sneeze shields, and workstations that are more physically spread out—will likely continue, which will make connection in the workplace more challenging.

## Going Forward, Together

Despite these concerns, I'm optimistic that the COVID-19 pandemic will bring about the post-traumatic growth that often comes after people experience times of adversity. This growth could come in the form of a renewed appreciation for human connection. If I'm right, we could see the emergence of a new anthropomorphic age that ushers in greater creativity, productivity, and well-being as the trials we face lead to greater human connection and a renaissance of the human spirit.

Getting through the COVID-19 pandemic and minimizing the loss of human life will require unprecedented levels of connection. Not only will connection be necessary to protect people until a vaccine is developed, it will also fuel the collaboration and creativity needed to crack the code and identify that vaccine. This became clear to me after I read a *New Yorker* article by Dr. Atul Gawande (2020), the noted surgeon and author. Gawande's hospital system, Mass General Brigham, was able to keep COVID-19 cases at a minimum among its 75,000 employees despite being in Boston, which was a hot spot for the disease. In the article he observed that in addition to his hospital's four pillar combination strategy—hygiene, distancing, screening, and masks— it was a fifth element, culture, that moved people who knew what to do, to actually do it.

Now more than ever, it is an essential time in history to cultivate cultures of connection. I hope you will join me by taking action to increase connection in your home, your workplace, and your community. As you will learn through reading this book, our future depends on it.

Michael Lee Stallard
July 2020
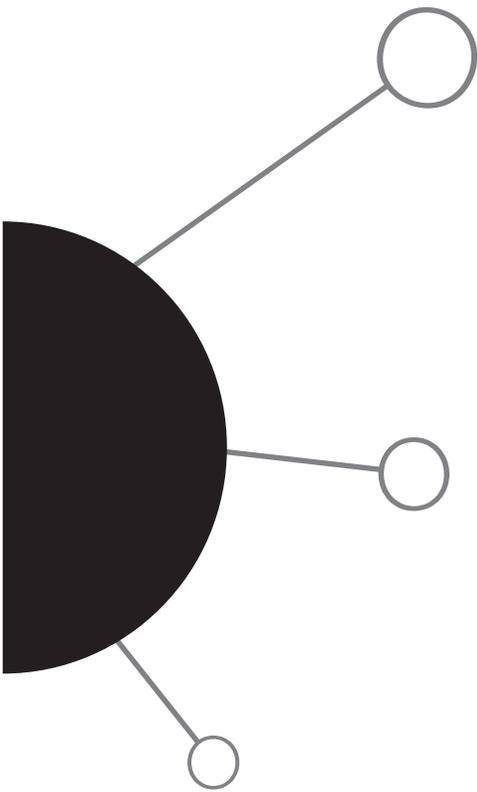
# PART I
# A New View of Leadership and Organizational Culture

If a leader's sole focus is on seeing that tasks are accomplished, then success will be unsustainable. Leaders must create an environment where people thrive. What does it take for you to thrive at work, and what is the role that culture plays in whether or not you are able to give your best effort?

In part I, you will learn about seven universal human needs required for people to thrive at work and three types of culture everyone should know about, including the type of culture that best promotes the health and productivity of individuals and organizations. You will learn a vocabulary of culture and a simple, memorable, and actionable model to create the best culture. This knowledge will help you understand what type of culture you need to thrive, and it will begin to equip you to cultivate a workplace culture that brings out the best in the people you are responsible for leading or whom you lead through your influence. Part I concludes with eight profiles of diverse individuals and organizations that are cultivating cultures of connection.

# 1
# The X Factor

Is there a "best" team and organizational culture? Is there an X factor in cultures that brings out the best in people and propels the success of groups? Countless books, podcasts, webinars, and workshops offer dos and don'ts for leading people. The sheer volume of opinions and approaches available reinforces the lack of consensus on the definitions or a general model for leadership or organizational culture despite a century of scientific inquiry.

In recent years, however, two trends have emerged. The first is that scholars are finding organizations comprise a web of relationships best captured by theories of complexity. The second trend is that effective leaders care about people and foster positive relationships. "Connection" is cited as an emerging general theory of leadership and organizational culture that integrates these trends, according to "The Connection Value Chain: Impact of Connection Culture and Employee Motivation on Perceived Team Performance," a published doctoral dissertation by Jon Rugg (2018).

Applying a one-size-fits-all culture isn't realistic in today's increasingly diverse and global working world. That said, organizations that have sustainable high performance will have common elements to their culture that enable them to be their best. Although the tasks will differ depending on the industry, when it comes to the relational aspects, there is a best culture: *a culture that has a high degree of human connection.*

To understand the power of human connection in a team and organizational culture, it helps to see examples of leaders who care about people and cultivate connection in their group's culture. Let's begin by looking behind the scenes at the group that created a groundbreaking Broadway musical. Meet Lin-Manuel Miranda and his key collaborators, and notice how their manner

of working together brought out the best in each of them and together they brought something remarkable to the world of musical theater.

## How "Harmony" Sparked *Hamilton*

*Hamilton* took Broadway by storm when it opened on August 6, 2015, and has not let go. What makes this show a must-see? *Hamilton* recounts the American Revolution through the life of Alexander Hamilton via a hip-hop mash-up that includes rap, R&B, jazz, and pop, depending on the character or the message of the song. It casts a multiethnic group of actors dressed in 18th-century attire to portray historical characters, most of whom were white. In 2018, the annual Kennedy Center Honors departed from its tradition of solely recognizing individual artists or bands for their contributions over their careers and gave a special award to *Hamilton* as a piece of work. The four key collaborators who brought the show into being were celebrated as "trailblazing creators of a transformative work that defies category." Introducing the award, Gloria Estefan proclaimed, "*Hamilton* turned the conventions of musical theater upside down, forever changing the look and sound of Broadway" (Jensen 2018).

### Early Connections

Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote the music, lyrics, and script of *Hamilton* as well as originated the role of Alexander Hamilton, is a MacArthur Fellowship Genius Grant recipient and has also been honored with Grammy, Emmy, Drama League, and Drama Desk awards. Clearly, Miranda is extraordinarily talented. What many people may not know is that he is also an outstanding connector with his family, community, and artistic collaborators; connection enhances his life and work.

Miranda was raised in New York City by parents who immigrated from Puerto Rico. Considered highly empathetic from a young age, he attuned to the emotions conveyed in songs like Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You," Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water," and "Feed the Birds" from *Mary Poppins*. Today, Miranda credits his ability to connect by empathizing with characters as key to his success as a writer and actor. Empathy, he says, is "the number 1 tool in an artist's tool box" (Winfrey 2017b).

Miranda attended Wesleyan College in Connecticut and majored in theater. Early on at Wesleyan, he met Anthony Venazile, and together with

other friends they founded an improvisation hip-hop group named Freestyle Love Supreme, which still performs periodically and was on Broadway for a limited engagement in fall 2019. Every performance is one of a kind as the performers react to audience suggestions and work them into riffs and musical numbers created on the spot. Think of how quick and clever and fearless you would need to be to do that!

While a college student, Miranda began writing a musical about the community around Washington Heights in northern Manhattan. True to the sounds of the streets, he wove in hip-hop, freestyle rap, merengue, and salsa numbers. Miranda said his intention in making *In the Heights* was that it would be a "love letter" to the community he grew up in, a musical that shows the hopes and dreams, the work ethic, and sacrifices of immigrant parents for their children rather than the stereotypical portrayal of drugs and violence (Ball and Read 2016). Miranda has said, "The overwhelming majority of residents in Washington Heights are not involved with crime or drugs. It would be inauthentic for me to write about drug deals and domestic abuse. It wasn't my experience" (Low 2007).

Instead, he was motivated by fond memories he had of growing up, including his relationship with Edmunda Claudio, whom he called *abuela* (grandmother), and walking with her through the neighborhood, hearing Latin music, and visiting the bodega. Although she was not his biological grandmother, Abuela Mundi looked after Miranda and his sister while their mother and father worked, just as she had looked after Miranda's father when he was a boy growing up in Puerto Rico. About her, Miranda says, "I could do no wrong in her eyes, she gave me unconditional love" (Low 2007). He based the *In the Heights* character Abuela Claudia on her.

*In the Heights* opened off-Broadway in 2005 and had its Broadway debut in 2008, with Miranda in a leading role. The show earned 13 Tony nominations and won four, most noticeably Best Musical. At 28, Miranda was the youngest person to ever win a Tony for Best Original Score. The cast recording of *In the Heights* took home the Grammy for Best Musical Show Album that year.

Miranda's vision for his next Broadway musical of original material came from reading Ron Chernow's bestselling biography *Alexander Hamilton*, a book he picked up to read while on vacation. The story goes that as he was

reading poolside in Mexico, he was hooked. He felt the emotions in hip-hop expressed the relentless energy of the immigrant striver Hamilton, who had come alone to New York as a teenager and rose to become an aide to General George Washington in the Revolutionary War and served as the first secretary of the treasury of the United States. Here was another immigrant story to shine a light on.

As a start, Miranda composed a song he called "The Hamilton Mixtape." When he performed it at the White House in 2009, rather than a song from *In the Heights* that was probably expected, the video of Miranda's perfor-mance went viral. For the next two years, Miranda primarily worked on proj-ects related to other musicals and movies, and he married Vanessa Nadal, a scientist and lawyer he first met when they were in high school. In 2011, when Freestyle Love Supreme performed at a benefit concert, Miranda sang another song he had written based on Alexander Hamilton titled, "My Shot." Thomas Kail, a co-founder and the director of Freestyle Love Supreme, noticed the audience's enthusiastic reaction. Miranda had been talking with Kail about Hamilton for three years. Following Miranda's performance, Kail approached him and said they both needed to start working regularly on the "Hamilton" project. They agreed to a schedule in which Miranda would write and Kail would provide feedback.

## Connecting With Vision, Value, and Voice

Great leaders connect with people when they communicate an inspiring vision, value people as human beings rather than treating them as means to an end, and give them a voice to express their ideas and opinions. Vision, value, and voice create connection.

Miranda has a group of close collaborators he has known for years and worked with on *In the Heights, Hamilton*, and other projects: direc-tor Thomas Kail, music director Alex Lacamoire, and choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler. He enjoys interacting with them, trusts them, and respects their talents. Miranda says the group has been through a lot of experiences together. He says it's like a marriage or band, and that his favorite thing to do is to bring a new song to the group because he knows they're going to make it better.

Vision, value, and voice are clearly at work in the culture that these collaborators have established and in which they are able to do great work together. Kail refers to the dynamic among the group as "harmony," evoking the blending of individual voices into one in a way that results in a fullness and richness that a solo line does not have. He also observed that the way the group operates is that they collaborate yet each individual has autonomy to run his own department where he has specialized expertise. The show, he says, is a sum of their parts. Kail says he hopes the resulting harmony among the people involved in *Hamilton* becomes part of the show's legacy. Miranda has said *Hamilton* is "a culmination of . . . a lot of people putting a lot of hard work in, and particularly Tommy Kail, who got all of the art forms involved in making a musical and made them into one cohesive thing called *Hamilton*" (Espana 2017).

Lacamoire has stated, "I never worked with [Lin-Manuel, Tom, and Andy] because 'I want to make art and I want to make something that's going to be really important.' I just wanted to hang out with these guys and do what I feel I do best . . . and have some fun and have a dialogue . . . and contribute" (Kail et al. 2018). After hearing the songs Miranda was writing, Lacamoire shared that it began to fill him with pride in America and that the energy, passion, and perseverance of the Founding Fathers awakened his understanding of American history.

Miranda has explained that the creative team was very deliberate about choices made: "Our goal in every aspect of the production from costumes to choreography is to eliminate any distance between a contemporary audience and the story which took place [more than 200] years ago. So to that end, casting the show the way our country looks today helps" (Low 2015). As Kail says, "This is a story about America then, told by America now" (Miranda and McCarter 2016).

When asked about the casting choices in an interview, Miranda replied: "When I started reading [Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*], I was picturing hip-hop and R&B artists singing these songs. So they were always people of color. It's the most natural fit for this genre of music. So part of it stems from the initial impulse of writing the show, and Tommy continued the impulse" (Low 2015). On another occasion Miranda said, "We have every color represented on that stage. It eliminates distance between us and the

story of our founders. It helps them feel more human to us, because it's what our country looks like now" (Ball and Reed 2016). The actor Daveed Diggs, who originated the dual roles of Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette and won a Tony Award for his performances, explains, "*Hamilton* allows us to see ourselves as part of history that we always thought we were excluded from. . . . Rap is the voice of the people of our generation, and of people of color, and just the fact that it exists in this piece, and is not commented upon, gives us a sense of ownership" (Mead 2015).

To convey the vision of *Hamilton* to a new company that will perform the show around the world, Kail said that by helping the cast members understand the storytelling—the where and why of a certain idea—they catch the vision and bring their A game to the performance: "Everybody onstage and offstage in this company is working at the absolute top of their game" (Espana 2017).

Valuing one another is an element of the group's culture. It's been observed about Kail that he cares about people. It comes through in many ways. He gets to know the actors offstage so he can adapt to the way each actor is wired. Kail has said, "My job is to try to create an environment where the writer can feel nurtured and supported and alive . . . and find other people . . . to try to realize the show" (Espana 2017). He refuses to work with people who are not kind. He has said, "There are a lot of talented people in the world" and "you can find talented people who are kind and good and decent" (Jennings 2015). He observed how respectful the people he works with are to one another and that each of them believes "you can develop something of high quality without acrimony or raising your voice" (Kail et al. 2018). One of Kail's rules is he doesn't raise his voice. "I'm gonna ask [actors] to do things they don't wanna do," he says. "So I'm gonna be transparent with them. I'm in the business of really sensitive people with a lot of feelings. If I can make them feel safe, I can make them feel their best" (Jennings 2015).

Making sure everyone has a voice to express their opinions and ideas is another essential element of the culture cultivated by Kail as director. Miranda has stated about their meetings, "I'm more the editor than the writer—Alex will have 50 musical ideas, Andy will have 50 staging ideas, and Tommy and I will sift [through them]" (Miranda and McCarter 2016). He says, "We respond to each other's energy in a way that's really positive" (Kail et al. 2018). Kail has a way of cultivating an environment where the best ideas emerge.

The group also recognizes that their best work is influenced by a wide variety of ideas. Their attitude is to bring in all the ideas and then sort through them together to find the best. Some of the many influences reflected in *Hamilton* include lyrics from hip-hop numbers; the works of Stephen Sondheim and Rodgers and Hammerstein; elements of choreography by Jerome Robbins; Broadway shows including *Rent*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Evita*, *Chicago*, *Gypsy*, and *Oklahoma*; and films like *The Matrix* and *Ratatouille*.

Reflecting on giving people a voice, Kail said that it's important to make people feel safe so they will share their ideas, and then to consider everyone's ideas. He pointed out that collaboration has much to do with having a person's contribution recognized and heard, adopting a posture of "Maybe. Let me see [what you had in mind]" rather than "No." Doing so "opens the door to possibility that doesn't exist when you already have the idea locked in your mind as to what it has to be" (Kail et al. 2018). He believes that giving people a voice is what *Hamilton* does for everyone involved.

Lacamoire summed up the contrast between isolation and connection, and how connection affects him: "A lot of what we do can be so solitary . . . When we get in a room and they finally get to hear [what I've been working on] and it sparks something . . . even if it starts that dialogue, that's what I live for . . . that's why I do theater, it's to be able to get in a room with other people and not be alone, and to be able to talk and have that link" (Kail et al. 2018).

## Connection and Sustainable Superior Performance

Connection among the group of individuals who brought *Hamilton* to life sparked a creative energy that propelled the show to the pinnacle of success. It is now recognized as the most successful musical of the modern Broadway era.

*Hamilton* received a record 16 Tony Award nominations and won the categories Best Book of a Musical, Best Score, Best Orchestrations, Best Choreography, Best Costume Design of a Musical, Best Lighting Design of a Musical, Best Leading Actor in a Musical, Best Featured Actor in a Musical, Best Featured Actress in a Musical, Best Direction of a Musical, and, the most coveted award, Best Musical. It also received the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Grammy for Best Musical Theater Album.

*Hamilton* is connecting with people across differences of race and age. Kail has spoken of being surprised at how young the fans can be. I've seen

that too. A Korean-American friend told us that when her son was nine years old, he would spend school recess with his friends learning and memorizing lyrics to some of the songs. Soon his six-year-old brother was singing along.

Another indicator of the broad appeal of *Hamilton*, the kindness of the people in the cast, and the type of connector Lin-Manuel Miranda is came in early spring 2020. As Americans were coming to grips with how social distancing measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 had upended normal life and upcoming plans they may have had, actor John Krasinski started recording a weekly 15-minute show from his home called "SGN" (short for Some Good News). He described the show, which he posted on YouTube, as "a news show dedicated entirely to good news" at a time when "somehow the human spirit came through and found a way to blow us all away" despite people going through so much change, anxiety, and isolation (Krasinski 2020a).

Krasinski had learned of a nine-year-old girl named Aubrey whose exciting birthday plans to see a performance of *Hamilton* in Florida had been dashed. And so, in SGN's second episode, Krasinski and his wife, actress Emily Blunt, surprised her with a video call. When asked how much of a *Hamilton* fan she was on a scale of 1 to 10, Aubrey answered, "a million." They promised to send the superfan and her mom to New York City to see *Hamilton* when it reopened on Broadway (Krasinski 2020b).

But the biggest surprise was still to come when Lin-Manuel Miranda popped onto the screen. The young girl's response was priceless: her eyes opened extra wide and her hands flew up to her face covering her mouth, which had dropped open in shock.

"Hi, Aubrey. How are you?" said Miranda. "I'm sorry you didn't get to see *Hamilton*. I'm so glad to meet you." She was too stunned to reply.

Soon more members of *Hamilton*'s original Broadway cast joined the video call, serenading her with the opening number from their own homes. Since Aubrey couldn't go to the theater to see the show, they brought a bit of the show to her. As the song finished, performers called out "Happy Birthday, Aubrey. We love you!" In the first month, that episode had more than 12 million views on YouTube (Krasinski 2020b).

Extending *Hamilton* out to young people who might not have the opportunity to see the show otherwise, Miranda and *Hamilton* producer Jeffrey Seller

partnered with the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and the Rockefeller Foundation in 2015 to create the *Hamilton* Education Program (often referred to as "EduHam"). The program, designed to integrate the study of American history with the performing arts, incorporates material about Alexander Hamilton and America's founding into classroom studies and culminates in students going to the theater for a special performance of the show. Begun in New York City, to date, more than 160,000 students from almost 2,000 Title I-eligible high schools across the United States have taken part in the program (Dembin 2017; American Theatre Editors 2020).

Even the temporary closure of theaters due to the COVID-19 pandemic did not slow down *Hamilton*'s momentum and continued success. In June 2016, director Tom Kail spent three days filming the show's original Broadway cast: Two full performances were recorded in front of a live audience; 13 additional audience-less numbers were captured via Steadicam, crane, and dolly (Lee 2020). The resulting film was then acquired by the Disney corporation and initially intended to release in October 2021 in movie theaters. However, in light of the pandemic, Disney moved the release date up dramatically—to July 3, 2020—and made the decision to release it digitally, on the Disney+ platform. On the movie's opening weekend, there were more than 2 million tweets about *Hamilton* and U.S. downloads of the Disney+ app increased by 72 percent (Katz 2020). About the film, Disney executive chairman Bob Iger said, "In this very difficult time, this story of leadership, tenacity, hope, love, and the power of people to unite against adversity is both relevant and inspiring" (Paulson 2020).

The leaders who developed *Hamilton* care about people and cultivated a culture of connection. In examining how the team members communicate, collaborate, and cooperate, we see the influence a connection culture can have in bringing out the best in individuals, as well as the group as a whole.

## Connection: The X Factor That Brings Out the Best

Group cultures, including the cultures of teams, departments, and organizations, can be viewed as either having the effect of connecting people or isolating them. Why do leaders need to care whether the individuals they are responsible for leading are connected? Research has found that social connection is a primal human need that appears to improve the

performance of the body's cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems (Uchino et al. 1996). Viewed from the opposite side, research has shown that lacking sufficient connection is associated with a host of negative outcomes including poorer cognitive performance, impaired executive control and self-regulation, decreased sleep quality, lower levels of self-rated physical health, more intense reactions to negatives and less uplift from positives, greater feelings of helplessness and threat, substance abuse, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation (reviewed in Cacioppo and Patrick 2008). Employees who feel regularly left out, lonely, or out of the loop are not going to be able to do their best work and may not wish to.

In the research my colleagues and I conducted, we found that isolation typically results from excessive control behaviors or from excessive busyness and indifference to the human need for connection. Cultures that connect people (which we have termed "connection cultures" or "cultures of connection") are best for individual well-being and for helping organizations thrive. Specifically, cultures that intentionally connect people to their work, their colleagues, and the organization as a whole convey several performance advantages upon those organizations, including a cognitive advantage that makes people smarter and more creative, higher employee engagement, tighter strategic alignment, better decision making, a higher rate of innovation, and greater agility and adaptability to cope with faster changes taking place today. These benefits combine to provide a significant performance and competitive advantage.

## How About You?

To appreciate the importance of culture in the workplace, consider your own experiences. During the course of your career, have you experienced times when you were eager to get to work in the morning, you were so immersed in your work that the hours flew by, and by the end of the day you didn't want to stop working? What was it about the job that made you feel that way?

How about the opposite? Have you experienced times when you struggled to get to work in the morning, the hours passed ever so slowly, and by the end of the day you were exhausted? Again, what was it about the job that made you feel that way?

If you are like most people, you've experienced those extremes during your career. I have too. As I reflected on my experiences, I realized I hadn't

changed—the culture I was in was either energizing me or draining the life out of me.

Thus, I began a quest to identify the elements of workplace cultures that help people and organizations thrive for sustained periods of time. When the practices my team and I developed to boost employee engagement contributed to doubling our business's revenues during the course of two and a half years, I knew we were on to something. A few years later, I left a career on Wall Street to devote my full attention to understanding group culture so I could help others improve the cultures they were in. In this book, I'll share what my colleagues and I have learned during nearly 20 years focusing on this topic.

*Connection Culture* provides a new way of thinking about leadership and organizational culture. In the pages ahead, you will learn about this new approach and discover how to tap into the power of human connection.

## Making It Personal

✓ Reflect on a time when you were energized by your work. What factors were present that contributed to your energy?

✓ Reflect on a time when your work felt draining. What factors were present that contributed to your fatigue or your feelings of being burned out?

✓ How would you describe the current culture you're in? Does it draw you in and connect you with your colleagues and the organization, or does it push you away and leave you feeling disconnected? Have changes occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic began that have affected your energy?

# Index

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# About the Author and Contributors

**Michael Lee Stallard** is co-founder and president of E Pluribus Partners and Connection Culture Group. He is a keynote speaker, workshop leader, coach, and consultant for a wide variety of organizations, including Costco, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, NASA, Texas Christian University, Turner Construction, the U.S. Air Force, Qualcomm, the U.S. Department of Treasury, and Yale New Haven Health. He is the author of *Connection Culture*, the primary author of *Fired Up or Burned Out: How to Reignite Your Team's Passion, Creativity, and Productivity*, and a contributor to several books including *What Managers Say, What Employees Hear: Connecting with Your Front Line (So They'll Connect With Customers)* and the *ASTD Management Development Handbook*.

Articles written by Michael or about his work have appeared in *Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Leader to Leader, HR Magazine, Human Resource Executive, Leadership Excellence,* FoxBusiness.com, *Training Industry Quarterly, Training Magazine, Capital* (Dubai), *Rotman* (Canada), *Economic Times* (India), *Developing HR Strategy* (UK), *Shukan Diayamondo* (Japan), and *Outlook Business or Decision Makers* (India). He has spoken at conferences organized by the Association for Talent Development, Conference Board, the Corporate Executive Board, the Human Capital Institute, *Fortune* magazine, the Innovation Council, and the World Presidents Organization. He is a faculty member of the Institute for Management Studies (IMS), and he has been a guest lecturer at many universities including the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business, Texas Christian University, and University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

Prior to founding E Pluribus Partners and Connection Culture Group, Michael was chief marketing officer for businesses at Morgan Stanley and Charles Schwab. The programs his team identified and implemented at Morgan Stanley contributed to doubling a business unit's revenues during a two-and-a-half year period. The practices he and his team developed became the genesis for his approach to elevating the productivity and innovation of individuals and organizations. Michael has also worked as an executive in marketing and finance positions at Texas Instruments, Van Kampen Investments, and Barclays Bank, PLC. He received a bachelor's degree in marketing from Illinois State University, a master's degree in business administration from the University of Texas, Permian Basin, and a JD from DePaul University Law School. He was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1991. Michael is married and has two daughters.



**Todd W. Hall, PhD,** is co-founder and chief scientist of Connection Culture Group and a professor of psychology at Biola University. He has more than 25 years' experience helping individuals and teams thrive. Todd's consulting work focuses on helping leaders build a connection culture and leverage people's core motivations to elevate engagement and performance. He is a regular contributor to the Human Capital Institute, and his writing and work have been featured by *Entrepreneur*, Execunet.com, the Association for Talent Development, and AppreciationAtWork.com.

Todd has consulted with universities, start-ups, government agencies, nonprofits, and for-profit organizations, including the National Institute for Mental Health, Northwestern Medicine, McDonald's, and the New York City Leadership Center. He earned a bachelor's and master's degree from Biola University, a master's degree from UCLA, and a doctorate in clinical psychology from Biola University, as well as a doctoral specialization in measurement and psychometrics from UCLA. He is a licensed psychologist in California.

Prior to teaching and consulting, Todd served on active duty in the army as a clinical psychologist. He is married and has two sons.

**Katharine P. Stallard** is a partner at E Pluribus Partners and Connection Culture Group. She is a gifted connector, speaker, and teacher who brings diverse experience in marketing, administration, business, and nonprofit organizations to her role. Audiences and seminar participants enjoy her sense of humor and practical advice. She has co-authored articles appearing in *Leader to Leader* and *HR Magazine*. Katie has worked in marketing for Tyndale House Publishers, a leading global Christian book publisher; for a Forbes 400 family helping to manage their diverse holdings; and for a highly regarded church in Connecticut in the area of communications. She also has extensive experience helping and serving on the boards of education and social sector organizations. Katie has a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Illinois. She is married and has two daughters.

**Jason Pankau** is a co-founder and partner at E Pluribus Partners. He speaks, teaches, coaches, and consults for the firm's clients. He has also guest lectured at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business and has spoken or taught seminars at a wide variety of organizations, including Arkansas Electric, General Dynamics, Gen Re, Johnson & Johnson, the MD Anderson Cancer Center, NASA, and Scotiabank. He wrote *Beyond Self Help* and contributed to *Fired Up or Burned Out: How to Reignite Your Team's Passion, Creativity, and Productivity* and *What Managers Say, What Employees Hear: Connecting With Your Front Line (So They'll Connect With Customers)*, as well as articles for *Leader to Leader* and *Leadership Excellence*.

Jason is also the president of Life Spring Network, a Christian organization that trains and coaches pastors and church leaders. He teaches seminars on leadership, marriage, and discipleship throughout North America and has started churches and served as a pastor focused on mentoring and leadership development. He currently leads Hope Church in inner city Chicago.

Jason has a bachelor's degree from Brown University in business economics and organizational behavior/management. While there, he was captain and pre-season All-American linebacker in football, school record holder in discus, and national qualifier in track. Jason has a master's of divinity from Southern Theological Seminary and has completed the required coursework for a doctorate in leadership at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is married and has two daughters and two sons.

# TAP INTO THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTION

Creating a thriving organization where employees feel valued, the environment is energized, and high productivity and innovation are the norm requires a new kind of leader who fosters a culture of connection within the organization. *Connection Culture*, 2nd edition, is your game-changing opportunity to become that leader and to begin fostering a connection culture in your organization. Stop undermining performance and take the first step toward change that will give your organization, your team, and everyone you lead a true competitive advantage. Inspiring and practical, this book challenges you to set the performance bar high and keep reaching. Learn how to:

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