Mary Ann Glynn's Conceptualization of Culture.

Culture exists any time people come together. Mary Ann Glynn and colleagues provide a framework anchored by values and toolkits. **Values** are what we prefer, hold dear, or desire. They imbue behavior with meaning. **Toolkits** are the behavioral repertoire we draw on when interacting with others, and are a necessary condition for action. Stories, frames and categories are expressions of culture.

If you think culture might be underlying an ongoing conflict or lack of progress, gather colleagues and try this:

- Capture examples of rituals, stories, artifacts, or practices that express the current culture.

- What do you notice as the similarities and differences in the examples offered?

- How might the differences account for roadblocks, conflict and lack of progress on goals or initiatives?

- What small changes could you make to lessen cultural impediments to progress?

Bonus: Try this in functional groups.
- How would you describe the culture of the other group?
- How would they describe the culture in your group?

Mary Ann Glynn's Conceptualization of Culture: Focusing on Culture as Frames.
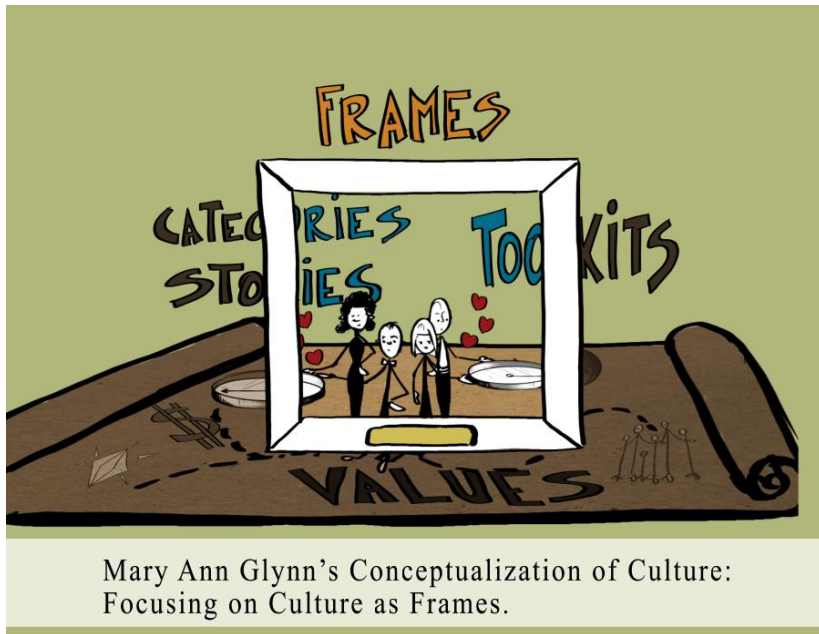
Our cultural frames are the implicit filters that limit our attention and define our situation. We only pay attention to what is "in the picture", filtering out all else. Frames also define what the acceptable behaviors look like. For instance, R&D folks might frame product development as refining an innovative idea while customer service might be focused solely on product reliability.
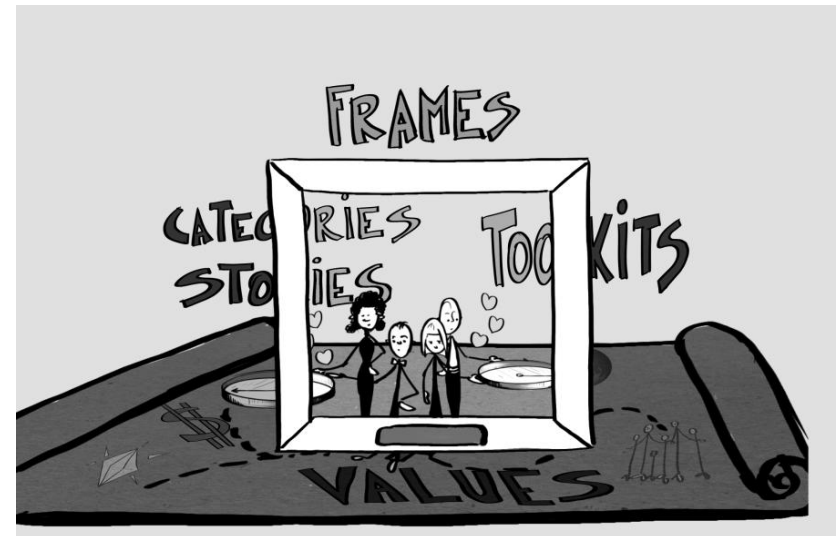
When experiencing a conflict ask yourself:

• What is the frame through which I view this challenge?

• How might I "step into" another's frame to understand the potential source of the conflict?

• Would expanding, changing or simplifying the frame address the conflict?

• What insights did you gain that enable you to take action?

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**TRANSMISSION + VARIATION + SELECTION = EVOLUTION**

HOW DO CULTURES ADAPT?

Michael Muthukrishna on Cultural Evolution.

A provocative perspective on culture is that it evolved in the human species though social learning, particularly our capacity to pass skills & knowledge across generations. The same key elements that make biological evolution possible also enable cultural evolution: tranmission, variation, & selection. Since cultural knowledge is mostly tacit it takes effort to surface our underlying assumptions & implicit beliefs, as these often reveal themselves only at times of instability.

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TRANSMISSION + VARIATION + SELECTION = EVOLUTION
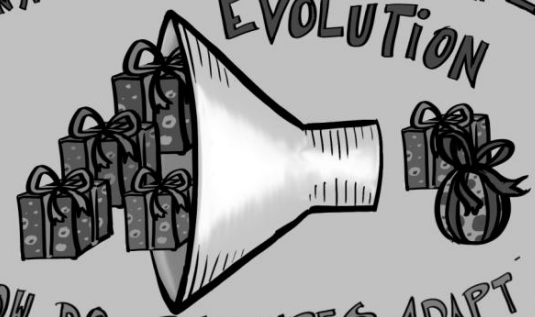
HOW DO CULTURES ADAPT?

Gather a group of colleagues to reflect on your organization's culture:

- What norms, practices, and routines appear to be **transmitted** "across generations" in your organization?
- How does your culture respond to **variation** in those unwritten conventions?
- What kinds of **selective** pressures are influencing what "sticks" within your organization?
- How might these questions illuminate ways to cultivate an **adaptative culture**?

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How do cultures adapt?
Transmission + Variation + Selection = Evolution
Copying without knowing why

Michael Muthukrishna on Cultural Evolution:
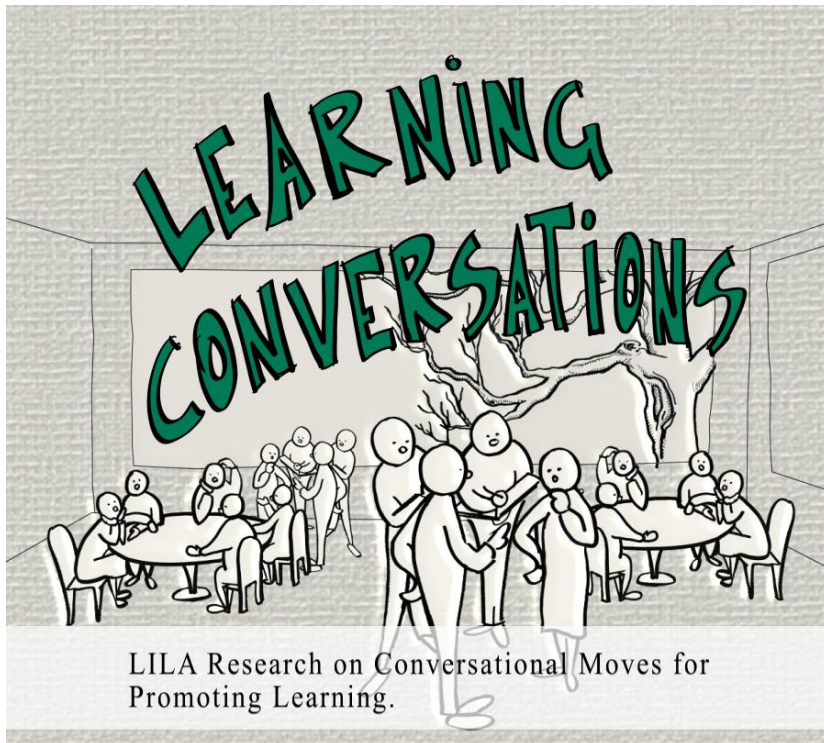Amping Up Smart Imitation

The human tendency to instinctively imitate others without understanding why provides a way to transmit cultural learning across generations. But we don't just copy everyone and everything – we tend to copy those who have skills we want, who are successful or prestigious, or what the majority of people are doing. How might we leverage this tendency towards imitation in organizational settings?

How do cultures adapt?
Transmission + Variation + Selection = Evolution
Copying without knowing why

Schedule time with colleagues and use these suggestions to brainstorm practices for amping up *smart imitation.*

- Create opportunities to try out copying others in real time: videos, shadowing, mentoring, open work spaces, job rotation, reverse mentoring.

- Make what's worth imitating more conspicuous: rewards, status, sharing stories, videos.

- Make imitation a low-risk activity: establish communities of practice, inviting new people to participate while learning from experienced members.

Make a plan to implement and iterate on your ideas.

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LILA Research on Conversational Moves for Promoting Learning.

Research at LILA has shown that professionals learn a lot from everyday conversations by using three types of moves:
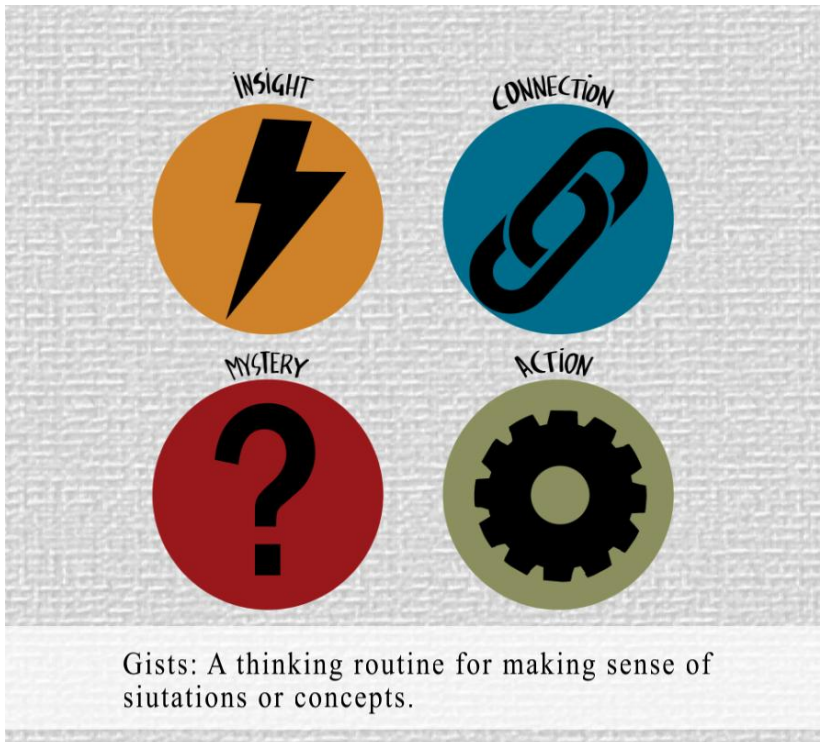
• Telling stories

• Eliciting and asking questions

• Provoking the thinking of others

These moves boost learning information, concepts, and strategies.

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When you are in a conversation, try these moves to promote learning:

• Tell a personal story that is related to the topic. "Something that happened to me was…"

• Ask a question that elicits information and brings in other's perspectives. "Tell me more about …", or turn to someone who has been quiet and ask "What do you think about this?"

• Invite provocative points of view on the topic. "What's your strong belief about this?"

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Gists: A thinking routine for making sense of siutations or concepts.

Finding time for reflection and sensemaking is often difficult in today's fast paced, outcome-oriented environment. To address this need, LILA has developed the "Gist" - a personal thinking routine. Thinking routines are patterns of action that can be integrated and used in a variety of contexts to promote generative understanding of situations or concepts.

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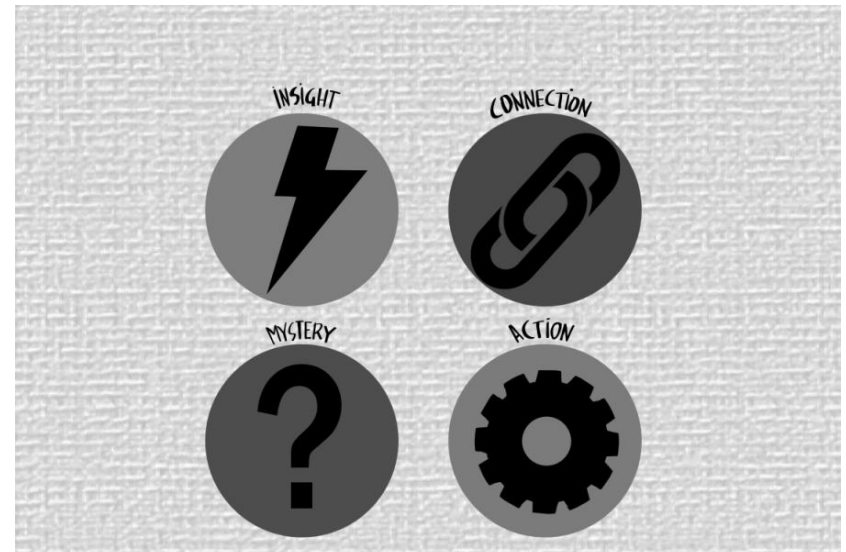
Use this routine with a group to make sense of a situation or concept, inviting them to ponder these questions and noting their thoughts on individual post-it notes.

- **Insight**– What is an idea that struck you as particularly interesting?

- **Connection** - How might this insight connect to other ideas?

- **Mystery** - What gaps & puzzles come up?

- **Action** - How might you translate your insight into action on the ground.

Make the post-it visible to all and review them looking for clusters that might prompt further conversation, action, or exploration.

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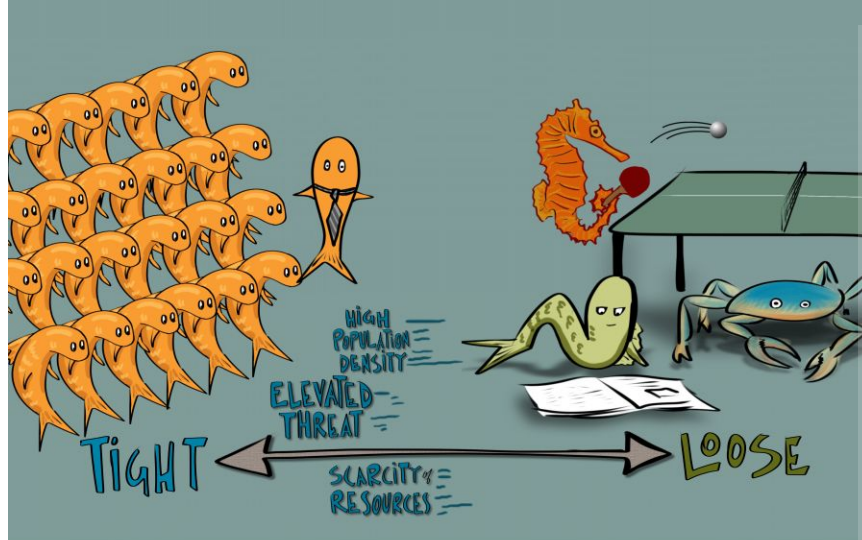
Michele Gelfand on Tight Loose Cultures

Is your culturing clenching?

Cultures with a high degree of formality, discipline, and low tolerance for deviance can be placed at the tight end of a tight-loose continuum. Adaptive cultures operate somewhere between too tight and too loose.

When facing scarcity of resources or elevated threat, cultures tend to *clench*, becoming tighter and tighter. How helpful this is depends on whether tightness gets us closer to our goals -- something we can't know without examination.
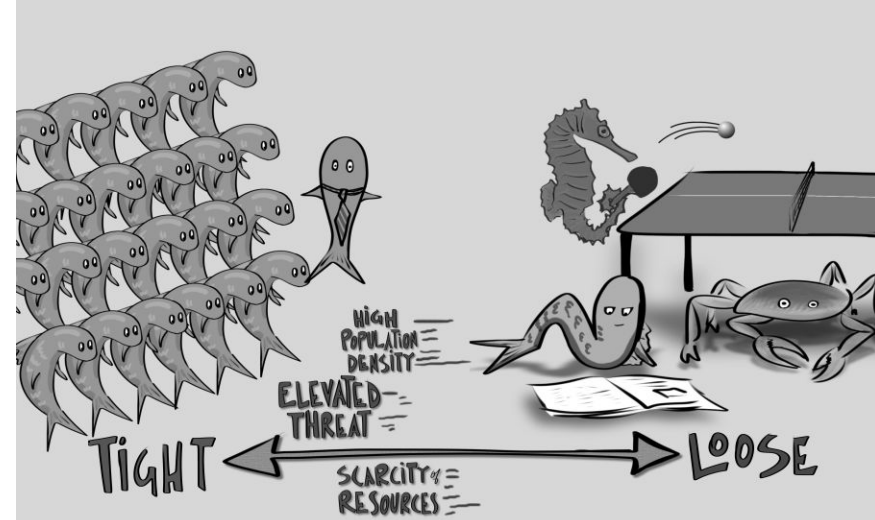
Explore these questions with colleagues when your group or organization seems to be unconsciously tightening:

• Brainstorm on what might be triggering the clenching, e.g. a lack of resources, or a perceived threat. What's the nature of the apparent trigger?

• In what ways is clenching helping the organization cope, and in what ways has it gone too far?

• What are specific ways of loosening up you will prototype?

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Seeking Synergy Between Tight and Loose

Norms, discipline, and tolerance for deviance characterize an organization's culture on a spectrum from tight to loose. Evidence suggests both extremes are correlated with elevated health issues such as depression.

That might be reason enough to aim for the middle, but organizations with a balance of tight & loose are also better equipped to weather big disruptions. We can take this even further by reaching beyond balance to *synergy:* getting the upsides of tight *and* loose while amplifying both.

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To seek a synergistic combination of tight and loose, consider the following moves:

• Set up practices for structured looseness, orderly procedures that deliberately explore creative possibilities and perspectives.

• Establish **looser islands** within a tighter culture – exploration teams, skunk works, temporary task forces, etc.

• Establish a **lifeboat culture** in a group of key individuals, much looser than the surrounding culture, but deliberately temporary to address an urgent mission.

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Michele Gelfand's Tight Loose Lens

Experiencing conflict? It might be due to contrasts in tightness/looseness between groups.

Tight groups have strong norms which lead to greater order, coordination, structure, and predictability. They tend to have more monitoring and less tolerance for deviation from rules.

Loose groups have weak norms and greater tolerance for deviance, which lead to more variety, openness, and creativity. They tend to have more disorder and less coordination.

Diagnosing Tight-Loose in your Organization

You might need to tighten up the culture if...
• New employees don't feel optimally oriented after the onboarding process.
• A higher degree of alignment between functions would be helpful in achieving goals.

You might need to loosen up the culture if...
• The organization needs more experimentation and innovation.
• Employees feel they're being micromanaged and don't have a say in decisions that directly impact their work.

What are other ways you might be sensitive to the need for a tight-loose course correction?

COMPLEX CONTAGIONS SPREAD via WIDE BRIDGES

Damon Centola on Cultural Contagions
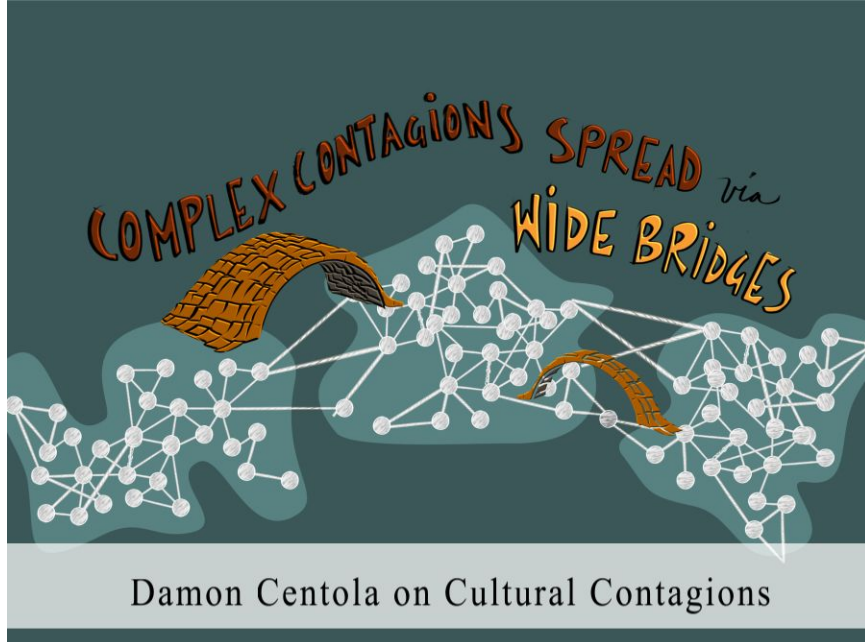
Trying to get others to adopt something new?

Cultural contagions are ideas and behaviors that spread through social networks. While *simple contagion*s, such as the flu or gossip, spread like wildfire, those that feel risky, costly, or controversial are *complex* and require more than just a single exposure.

A *complex contagion*, e.g. committing to a wellness program, spreads faster when clusters of people are connected via *wide bridges* -- a pattern of connections that lends itself to social reinforcement from multiple people.

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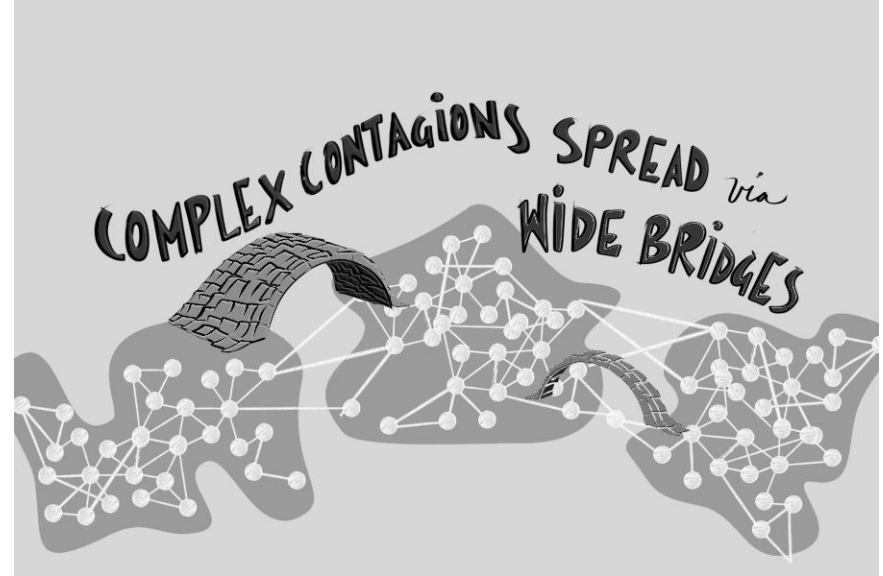
If your contagion isn't as contagious as you'd like, it's probably *complex*.

- Understand that social structure is more important than the quality of the idea.

- Don't rely on one champion to spread the idea (no matter how powerful). Instead, try to expand people's networks to build contagion bridges.

- Create opportunities, such as intramural sports, ski clubs, and communities of practice, to connect people who might not otherwise interact.

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SALEM WITCH TRIALS

WHOSE idea was THIS?

Damon Centola on Critical Mass for Culture Change

Whose idea was this anyway?

Some cultural practices are passed down from leaders, but others emerge spontaneously by the desire to sync up when two people interact. There is no guarantee that a group will converge on "the best" convention, in fact, groups can adopt a norm that no one likes!

The good news is that culture change speeds up once the number of people adopting a new convention reaches a critical mass. A key ingredient for global adoption is *homogenous mixing,* without which new practices might only take root in isolated pockets.

MIXING THINGS UP

● EXECS
● R&D
● HR
● SALES
● LEGAL
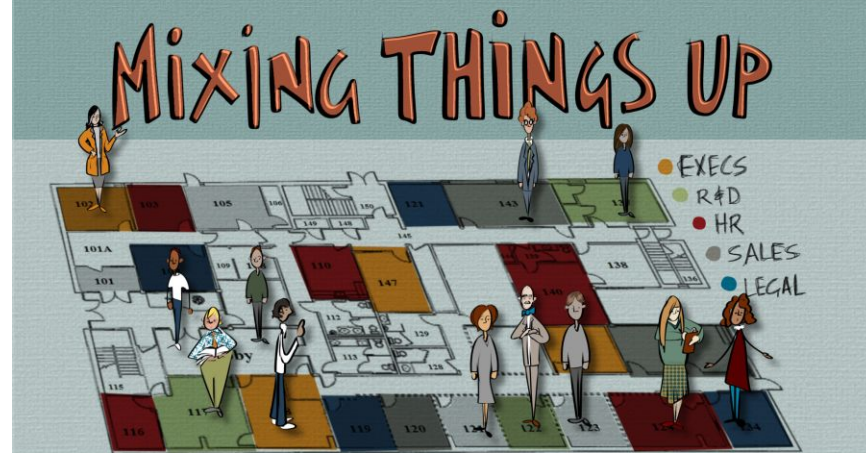
If you want to change a cultural convention:

Research suggests it takes just 25% of people using a new convention for it to be on its way to wide-spread adoption. Before you reach this tipping point it might not look like changes are happening at all!

• Speed up the process by fostering *homogenous mixing*, in other words, make it possible for any two people -- no matter their role or level-- to interact.

• Promote serendipitous contact between people who might not otherwise be in conversation by experimenting with changes to organizational structure, or the spatial layout of people & departments.