

# CREATING A SUSTAINABLE/ENDURING ORGANISATION THROUGH CULTURE CHANGE

Leading culture transformation through strategy, renewed purpose, culture, developing leaders and empowering employees.

## Background

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) Central Operations provides extensive primary health care and 24-hour emergency aeromedical services to people who live, work, and play across South Australia and the Northern Territory. It has a proud 90-year history of saving lives, and today comprises a 370+ strong workforce that delivers the finest care to someone every 10 minutes.

“As an organisation with a rich history, great brand and reputation we can get a bit too comfortable. Our progress will only occur outside the comfort zone.”

**Tony Vaughan – Chief Executive.**

## Need for Change

The RFDS Central Operations Board and Executive Leadership Team recognised that one of the keys to its future success was building a culture that could assist the organisation transition from its proud history to a more competitive sector that was changing rapidly through government tendering and more private sector competition and involvement. There was a critical need for change to ensure the RFDS could not only survive but thrive through these changing times.

This change was critical not only due to the more competitive landscape but also due to the feedback from employees on the need for more constructive leadership and a renewed focus on attraction and retention strategies for staff. This was in the environment of having staff across a range of bases.



## Challenge

RFDS Central Operations started using the Human Synergistics suite of diagnostics in 2019. At the time, the organisation had recently transitioned to a new Chief Executive and was also coming into a period of having to retender for a range of services it had provided for decades prior.

### 1 **Commitment to building a constructive culture.**

Ensuring all leaders understood RFDS Central Operations commitment to building a desired culture and their role in it.

### 2 **Attraction and Retention of Staff.**

Given the health and aviation sectors that RFDS Central Operations operates in, it was critical that there was a focus on its people.

### 3 **Development of People**

Putting a strong focus on developing people at all levels.

### 4 **Empowerment of Staff**

Moving from managing and controlling to empowering staff at all levels through the facilitation of a safe and constructive environment.

The other major challenge was looking to change the culture through COVID-19.

## Solutions

There was a need to invest significantly in a range of initiatives centred around the following key areas:

### 1 **Develop our leaders.**

Focus on developing our leaders to be constructive role models across the organisation.

### 2 **Improve communication.**

Work as one team and work collaboratively across teams, bases, disciplines and functions.

### 3 **Improve equity, transparency and fairness.**

Work hard to ensure employees had the same opportunities and that it was transparent in how these were communicated and applied.

### 4 **Increase employee involvement**

A real shift from a dependent to an achievement oriented and empowered culture that involves all employees.

### 5 **Training and development.**

Invest in training and development to improve the capability and confidence of its people.

Initiatives under each of these areas were significant leading to outstanding results being achieved as part of the remeasure results.

“Leadership and culture aren’t about being the boss or being in control; it is about creating a shared vision and goals, and then inspiring, empowering and influencing others to achieve more than they ever thought possible.”

**Tony Vaughan – Chief Executive.**



## Results

RFDS Central Operations results speak for themselves. What makes them more outstanding is achieving these remeasure results through COVID-19 which was particularly challenging given the industry and environment that the RFDS Central Operations operates in.

**+36%** Employee Empowerment  
**+29%** Feedback  
**+26%** Fairness of Appraisals

“As we know ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’ and by clarifying and supporting a constructive culture we are setting our people and organization up for success.”

**Laura Sarich – Executive General Manager People and Culture.**

Over the time, changes in the RFDS operating culture show 120% improvement in the Constructive behavioural norms, 35% reduction in Passive/Defensive norms and 41% reduction in Aggressive/Defensive norms. This represents a significant shift to norms that reinforce Constructive behaviours.

The most important shifts have been in more emphasis on norms that create expectations for involving others, speaking up and sharing ideas.

This has resulted in increases in all outcomes at the Individual, Group and Organisational levels, with particularly strong improvement in motivation, clarity and teamwork/coordination.

This culture change has been achieved through greater emphasis on certain Causal Factors – in this case empowerment, leadership, communication and a shift from more ‘blame’ oriented supervision to a more ‘learning’ one. Whilst there are many other significant changes in causal factors, these are the ones that stand out.

Whilst there is still a long way to go to achieve their ideal culture, this remeasure shows they are certainly on their way. The key now is to continue their current improvement direction and grow more of the Causal Factors which will lead to an even more Constructive culture and stronger outcomes.

