



A STRUCTURED SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Mattering Deficit Diagnostic

Nine questions. Three minutes. One place to start.

People by Design

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Culture work stalls most often because organizations spend on the wrong practice. This instrument tells you which of three you are weakest at, so the next dollar and the next hour go where they will do the most.

How to use it

Score your organization, not yourself. That is what makes it a diagnostic rather than a survey. Go fast, because your first instinct is the accurate one, and answer all nine.

Run it across a leadership team and compare. The gap between what executives score and what frontline managers score is usually the most interesting conversation in the building, and it is frequently larger than the gap between any two items.

Nobody has to share their sheet. Collect only the three column totals if you want group data. The individual answers are more honest when they stay private.

A note on what this is. This is a structured self-assessment and a facilitation instrument. It is built on a forty-year research base on mattering and its items are behavioral rather than attitudinal, but it has not been psychometrically normed and should not be described as a validated measure.

The Mattering Deficit Diagnostic

You are scoring your organization, not yourself.

There is no right answer. Nobody will see this. Your first instinct is the accurate one, so go fast.

1 = almost never true here · 3 = sometimes true here · 5 = consistently true here

SCORING YOUR ORGANIZATION	SCORE
1 A manager here could describe what is currently going on in a team member's life without looking anything up.	
2 Recognition here names the specific thing a person did and the specific effect it had.	
3 People here can name a real person who is better off because of the work they do.	
4 When someone's energy or behavior changes here, somebody says something to them about it within a week.	
5 People here hear what their strengths are from someone, at a time that is not a performance review.	
6 When someone is out, the gap they leave is visible, and somebody says so when they get back.	
7 People here are asked what they think before decisions that affect them are made.	
8 Appreciation here travels sideways between peers, not only downward from managers.	
9 New people here are told why their role exists, not only what the role does.	

Which practice is weakest here?

Copy your answers into the columns below and add each one up. Each total will fall between 3 and 15.

NOTICING	AFFIRMING	NEEDED
Item 1 _____	Item 2 _____	Item 3 _____
Item 4 _____	Item 5 _____	Item 6 _____
Item 7 _____	Item 8 _____	Item 9 _____
TOTAL _____	TOTAL _____	TOTAL _____

Circle your lowest total.
If two tie, circle the one that bothers you more.

TOTAL	WHAT IT MEANS
3 to 7	Deficit. This is not a gap, it is an absence, and it is where every dollar you spend on culture should go first.
8 to 11	Inconsistent. It happens here when an individual chooses it. It does not happen because anything in your system produces it. That means it leaves when they do.
12 to 15	Strength. Protect it, and find out exactly how it works, because you are going to need to copy it into the other two columns.

Your lowest column is your highest-leverage move. Not your lowest single score. Your lowest column. Work the weakest practice first and the other two get easier, because all three run on the same underlying skill, which is paying attention to a specific person on purpose.

Where to start, by practice

If your lowest column is NOTICING

Noticing is attention paid to a specific person on purpose. It is the practice everything else runs on, because you cannot affirm what you have not observed and you cannot show someone they are needed if you do not know what they are actually doing.

Start here. One five-minute conversation per week with one person, about something that is not the work. Scheduled, expected, and never reported upward. That last constraint is not optional. The moment the content gets summarized for someone else, it stops being a conversation.

If your lowest column is AFFIRMING

Affirming is naming the specific effect a person's work had, and why it had to be them. Most organizations have plenty of recognition and almost no affirmation. The difference is that recognition is about output and affirmation is about the person.

Start here. One sentence a day, three parts, about eleven seconds. The specific thing they did, the specific effect it had, and why it had to be them. Write it the night before if you need to. Do not build a program around it.

Where to start, continued

If your lowest column is NEEDED

Being needed is the practice almost nobody works, and in HR-heavy groups it is usually the lowest. People stay when they know who is better off because of their work, and most people have never been shown where it lands.

Start here. Trace one person's work down three links until you reach a beneficiary, then go tell them what you found. Do not ask them. Tell them.

If all three came out level

That is its own finding, and what it usually means is that the gap is structural rather than located in any one practice. Look at what your systems hand a manager on the day they take a new team. An org chart, a job description, a personnel file, and a review form all tell a manager what a person *is*. Almost none of them tell a manager what that person's work *reaches*.

An online version scores instantly and stores nothing. Share it with a leadership team and compare the three totals. pplbydesign.com/every-piece-matters · QR code on the back page.

*The three-practice framework is Dr. Zach Mercurio's, from *The Power of Mattering: How Leaders Can Create a Culture of Significance* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2025). The Puzzle Philosophy, the Mattering Deficit Diagnostic, and the exercises are People by Design originals.*



Everything from Every Piece Matters is free and online.

The Matting Deficit Diagnostic, the full workbook, both case studies, complete facilitation guides for all three exercises, and every research citation. No email required for any of it.

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