

The 5Cs

An Evidence-Based Framework for High-Performing, Connected Teams and Cultures

CO-WRITTEN BY  CONNECTEDIEC AND  Principles

The Problem Leaders Can't Ignore

Culture remains one of the most strategic but misunderstood levers in modern organizations. Even the most capable teams stall because leaders lack a clear, actionable way to understand why performance dips, where trust is breaking down, and how to fix it.

MOST ATTEMPTS FAIL FOR PREDICTABLE REASONS

- ▶ Leaders default to surface-level solutions—offsites, values posters, pulse surveys.
- ▶ Teams feel the symptoms but can't pinpoint what's missing.
- ▶ Organizations rely on siloed data or one-off frameworks that don't connect the dots.

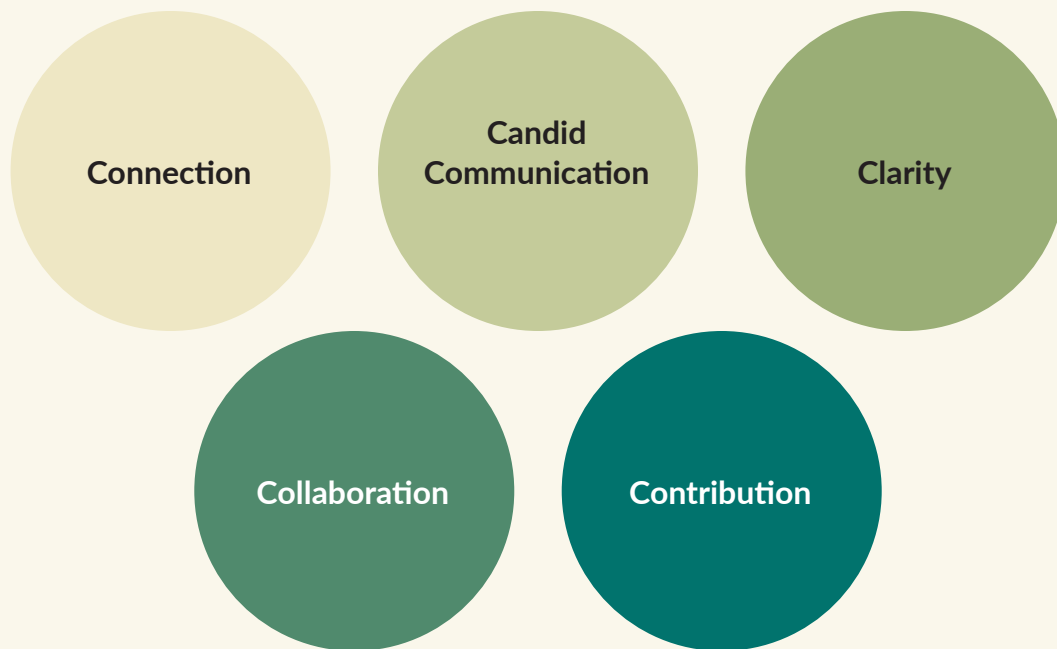
Tested across global teams, executive leadership environments, and high-pressure organizations where culture directly impacts performance, the 5Cs offer a research-backed approach that makes culture measurable, actionable, and sustainable.

Without an integrated, evidence-based approach, progress fragments. Momentum fades. Even highperforming teams begin to struggle when the underlying system of culture is not understood or measured. What organizations need isn't another initiative.

They need a framework they can trust—one grounded in research, validated across complex environments, and built for real-world leadership.

Executive Summary

The 5Cs Model—developed by Connected EC in partnership with Principles—is an evidence-based framework that helps organizations measure, improve, and sustain high-performing, connected teams and cultures. It identifies the five behavioral elements that drive cultural and performance outcomes.



This white paper outlines the core business challenges the 5Cs address—from fragmentation and misalignment to trust erosion—and introduces a model designed for real-world application. Grounded in organizational psychology, the 5Cs provide leaders with actionable insights, a practical roadmap, and a consistent foundation for decision-making and development.

When organizations focus on the 5Cs, people become more connected, aligned, and capable of delivering shared outcomes. The model moves culture work from “soft” and abstract to concrete and measurable—giving leaders a system they can strengthen on purpose.

What the 5Cs Model Is

The **5Cs Model** is Connected EC's evidence-based framework—co-developed with Principles—for measuring, evaluating, and improving both team performance and organizational culture.

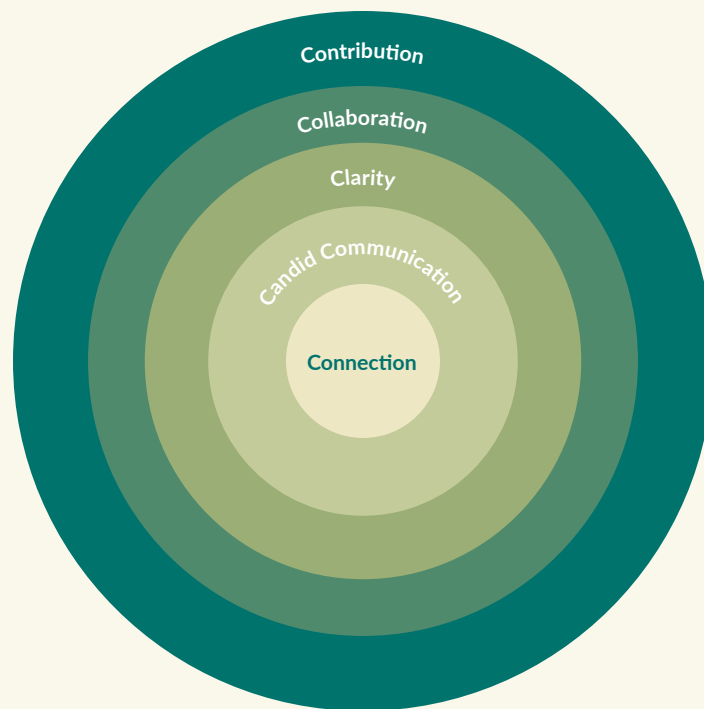
Culture transformations often break down because:

- ▶ Leaders cannot see how behaviors and dynamics interconnect.
- ▶ Teams struggle to identify missing elements—not just what's wrong, but why.
- ▶ Early gains fade without a structured, measurable system behind them.

The 5Cs Model makes the intangible tangible.

It clarifies what drives high-performing cultures through five essential elements.

Each element influences the others, forming a comprehensive system leaders can act on.



The Gaps the 5Cs Were Designed to Solve

Two persistent gaps showed up across years of leadership and organizational research:

GAP 1

Fragmented, non-evidence-based approaches

Most culture efforts are well intended but incomplete. They target isolated symptoms (morale, communication, engagement) without addressing the deeper dynamics that shape performance.

GAP 2

No simple, research-based model leaders can apply

Leaders had individual insights—trust, psychological safety, engagement—but no integrated model to connect these insights into a coherent roadmap. Existing tools were often too narrow or too complex for practical executive use.

To close these gaps, Connected EC's **LOV Center**, in collaboration with Principles, conducted extensive research to build a **validated, scalable, and practical model** grounded in organizational psychology.

The result: **The 5Cs**.

Why Engagement Surveys Fall Short

Engagement surveys measure outcomes, not causes. While helpful to measure motivation, satisfaction, willingness to recommend the workplace, these metrics don't tell leaders what's driving engagement—or disengagement.

Outcome data = the smoke.

The 5Cs = the fire underneath.

Leaders who rely only on engagement metrics end up chasing scores instead of addressing root causes. True transformation requires diagnosing *why* people feel what they feel, and which levers will actually improve performance and well-being.

The Hidden Costs of Cultural Fracture

When the foundational elements of healthy teams are weak, organizations experience predictable fallout:

- ▶ Trust erodes.
- ▶ Communication becomes strained or filtered.
- ▶ Clarity evaporates, slowing decision-making.
- ▶ Collaboration breaks down.
- ▶ People lose meaning and momentum.

The organization shifts from intentional to reactive—spending energy on friction instead of impact.

Why Current Solutions Don't Deliver

Most culture solutions fail because they:

- ▶ Focus on individual behaviors instead of systemic dynamics
- ▶ Rely on episodic training rather than continuous measurement
- ▶ Address symptoms rather than root causes
- ▶ Lack an integrated framework that unites leadership, teams, and culture

Without a cohesive, evidence-based model, organizations remain stuck in cycles of short-term awareness followed by long-term stagnation.

The Five Predictable Pain Points

Nearly every underperforming team experiences these five issues—each tied to a missing or weakened C:

- 1. Lack of unity and connection (Connection)**
People feel isolated—from each other, their leaders, or the organization. Low connection undermines trust, alignment, and performance.
- 2. Poor communication across teams (Candid Communication)**
Employees don't feel safe speaking openly. Leaders get filtered information. Transparency erodes. Alignment becomes nearly impossible.
- 3. Unclear roles and priorities (Clarity)**
Ambiguity causes hesitation, inefficiency, and slow execution. Teams waste energy navigating confusion instead of driving outcomes.
- 4. Ineffective collaboration (Collaboration)**
Teams work in silos, struggle to hold each other accountable, and fail to operate as cohesive units—even when individual talent is strong.
- 5. Limited recognition and meaning (Contribution)**
People question whether their work matters and how it connects to the impact the organization is trying to make. Over time, this leads to disengagement and attrition.

A Research Foundation Leaders Can Trust

The 5Cs Model was built through a **rigorous, multi-method research process** integrating organizational psychology, team science, and years of executive coaching. It was tested across industries and refined to ensure validity, reliability, and real-world applicability.



The 5Cs collectively explain about **half of the variance in overall job satisfaction**.



They account for nearly **80% of satisfaction with organizational culture**.



Candid Communication is the **best predictor of performance**.



Connection is the **strongest predictor of job satisfaction**.



The 5Cs explain roughly **25–33% of the variance in organizational commitment**.

Culture is measurable—and the 5Cs show exactly what to measure.

The 5Cs give leaders a **measurable roadmap**.

With detailed subfactors under each C, organizations gain insight into:

- ▶ What is strong
- ▶ What is stretched
- ▶ Where to focus
- ▶ How aligned the team truly is

Because the model is interconnected, leaders can see how improvements in one area influence the others— turning culture into a **performance system** rather than a series of disconnected initiatives.

The Five Elements of the Model

A concise overview of each C:

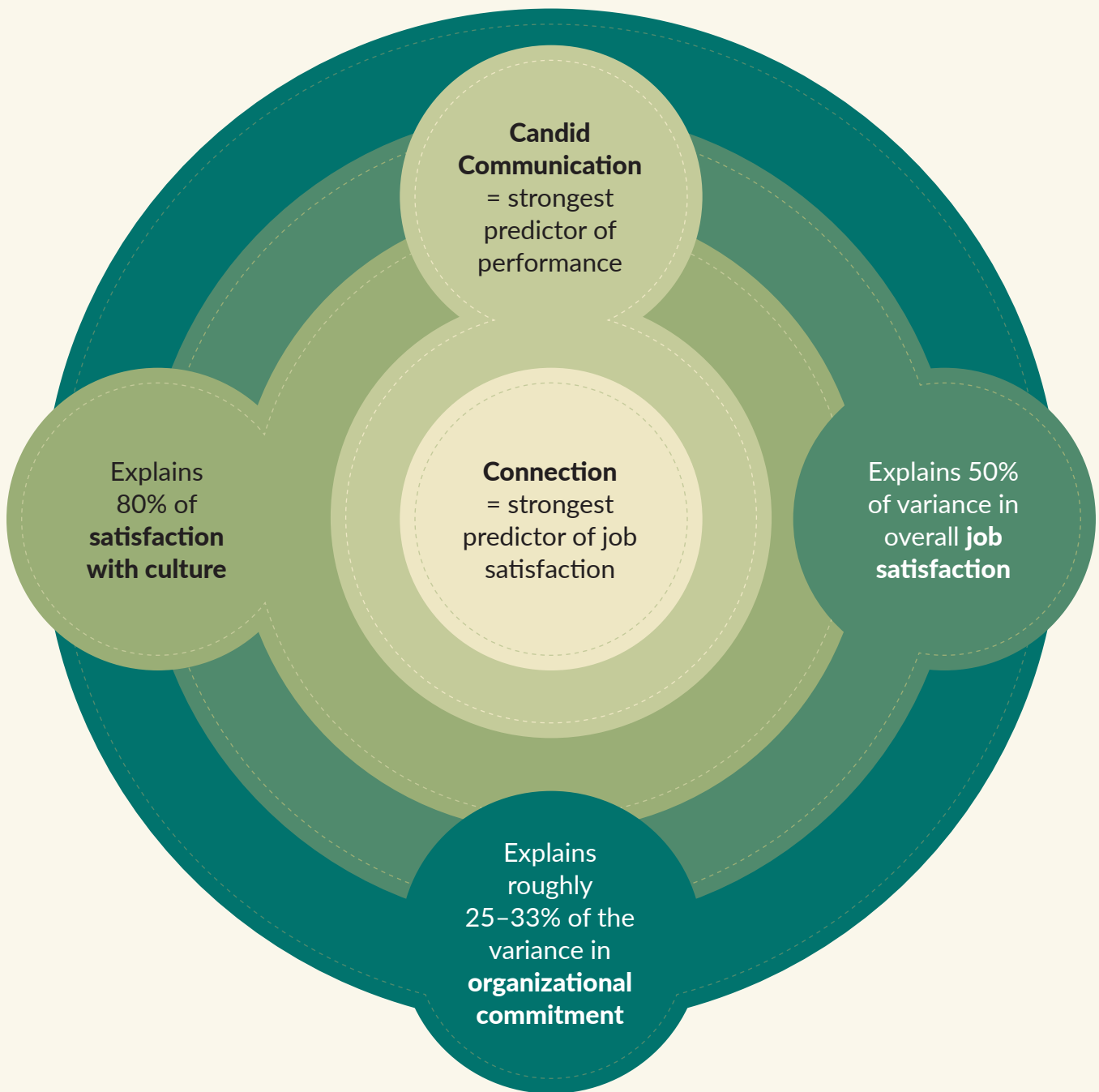
- 1. CONNECTION**
Trust, care, and well-being that allow people to show up fully and strengthen every other part of the system.
- 2. CANDID COMMUNICATION**
Straightforward, respectful candor supported by psychological safety, healthy conflict, feedback loops, transparency, and openness.
- 3. CLARITY**
Clear roles, responsibilities, workflows, and shared goals so everyone knows what matters and how to deliver it.
- 4. COLLABORATION**
Mutual support, shared accountability, and a collective drive toward excellence.
- 5. CONTRIBUTION**
Alignment of work with values, vision, and impact—ensuring people see meaning and mattering in their efforts.

How the 5Cs Drive Real-World Results

The model delivers measurable change across five essential areas:

- 1. STRENGTHEN CONNECTION**
Build trust and care that unlock engagement, openness, and collective achievement.
- 2. FOSTER CANDID COMMUNICATION**
Enable psychological safety, transparency, and feedback that drive innovation and execution.
- 3. INCREASE CLARITY**
Eliminate ambiguity so teams operate with calm, focus, and aligned purpose.
- 4. DEEPEN COLLABORATION**
Create supportive, accountable environments where performance and well-being reinforce each other.
- 5. ELEVATE CONTRIBUTION**
Help people see how their work matters—fueling motivation, retention, and alignment.

Key Results



Turning Insight into Action

Each 5Cs element and subfactor is measured on a 1–100 scale with distribution data.

This allows leaders to:

- ▶ Identify strengths and blind spots
- ▶ Understand alignment (or misalignment) across teams
- ▶ Target specific behavioral changes
- ▶ Track progress over time

It is a practical, scalable roadmap that supports continuous learning and organizational alignment.

A Diagnostic and Developmental Tool

The 5Cs function as both:

A diagnostic tool – revealing the current state

A developmental tool – guiding where and how to intervene

By revisiting the model over time, leaders maintain momentum and ensure progress is not only achieved but sustained.

Conclusion

The 5Cs are not a checklist—they represent a shift in how organizations understand culture.

EACH C STRENGTHENS THE OTHERS, CREATING A SYSTEM WHERE:

- ▶ Connection fuels Candid Communication
- ▶ Candid Communication enables Clarity
- ▶ Clarity strengthens Collaboration
- ▶ Collaboration amplifies Contribution

When these dynamics are in place, culture becomes a competitive advantage and leaders gain a clear pathway to building teams capable of extraordinary outcomes.

Take the First Step

Culture work never ends—but the starting point matters. Most organizations begin not by redesigning outcomes, but by understanding the root system beneath them. Leaders typically start here to get the clarity they need before investing time, energy, or resources into change.

If you're ready to understand your culture with evidence, align your team with precision, and move from insight to action...

▶ Start with the Principles 5Cs Assessment

Get a measurable snapshot of how your team connects, communicates, and collaborates—so you can see exactly where to focus first.



▶ Schedule a conversation with Connected EC

A brief conversation helps clarify your goals and determine the most practical next step for your team or organization. Most leadership teams begin here to translate insight into action with confidence.





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