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The Unwritten Laws of Information Flow: Why Culture is the Hardest System to Scale

Every tech leader recognizes the symptoms: talented teams working at cross-purposes, reinventing solutions to problems solved a month ago, fighting fires that were preventable. We often treat these as process failures. They aren't. They are symptoms of a deeper issue: a culture struggling with the physics of its own growth. As an organization scales, it generates a kind of organizational entropy—a natural drift toward disorder. Information becomes siloed, context gets lost, and a hidden

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tax of redundant effort grinds down productivity. Many leaders try to fight this entropy with process. They implement complex ticketing systems, mandate new communication protocols, and assign roles. But in my experience, this approach is doomed from the start. You cannot bolt a process onto a culture that isn't ready for it. The tools will be ignored, the mandates will be routed around, and the friction will only increase. The solution isn't a new set of rules. It's a shared understanding, a set of internalized values that become the organization's natural, default state. True scalability comes from a cultural shift, not a technical fix. It's about adopting a few core principles that, once they become part of a team's DNA, make effective information flow an unconscious, automatic reflex. Creating this shift is not particularly easy. It can take time. And the shift can't be "mandated", people have to enroll themselves in the principles, not just being coerced by management. Often, the most effective way is to find one or two team members who are already practicing this culture and showcase their success, not from "you need to be like this" but from, look how smoothly things run with the tasks they are accountable for. Show that they are winning. At some point, members of this "tiger team" can reach out or drop into other teams to infuse the culture into these groups. Don't try to convince the resistant members; focus on the team members that are excited to embrace the cultural shift, and the others will eventually come along as they can see the others "having fun". The diehard resisters will likely opt out

The Core Principles of a Scalable Culture

This isn't a checklist; it's a mindset. These are the foundational values that must be cultivated before any tool or process can make a meaningful difference.

- **Discipline, Not Dogma.** This isn't about rigid, top-down enforcement. It's about a shared, professional commitment to consistency. It's the understanding that the few extra moments spent documenting an action, sharing a finding, or updating a

ticket are an investment in the collective's future sanity. When this discipline is internalized, it doesn't feel like overhead; it feels like the only logical way to work. It's the quiet dedication that frees the entire organization from the tyranny of unplanned work.

- **Systemic Awareness.** This is about seeing beyond your immediate task and understanding its ripple effects. It requires being mindful of two things simultaneously: how your actions will affect the workflow of other teams, and how they will ultimately impact the customer experience. An engineer with systemic awareness doesn't just push a fix; they consider who needs to know about it. A support specialist doesn't just close a ticket; they consider whether the underlying issue points to a larger pattern. It's about recognizing that you're not just a node on a network, but an integral part of a complex, interconnected system.
- **Building a Permanent Record.** Every organization has a memory. The question is whether it's locked in the minds of a few key people or codified into a durable, accessible form. Documenting techniques, solutions, and processes isn't about creating bureaucracy. It's about building institutional knowledge—the one asset that truly compounds over time. It ensures that when you move on to other duties, your insights don't leave with you. This practice transforms transient solutions into permanent wisdom, enabling the organization to learn from its past and avoid repeating the same mistakes.

When Culture Creates Process

Once these values take root, something powerful happens: the right processes begin to emerge organically. You don't need to mandate a "single source of truth"; the team's commitment to building a permanent record will naturally lead them to create and maintain one. You don't need to assign a "Directly Responsible Individual"; the culture of discipline and awareness will compel people to take ownership. The process becomes a reflection of the culture, not a substitute for it.

This entire mindset is simply an extension of SRE culture beyond the realm of machines and into the human systems of the organization. SREs use data to reduce toil and mitigate unexpected outcomes. A culture built on these principles does the same for communication and collaboration. It makes information flow observable, reliable, and resilient.

As leaders, the question we should be asking isn't "What tool should we implement?" but "Are we fostering a culture of discipline, awareness, and permanence?" Because in the end, the most complex and critical system we're responsible for isn't the code—it's the culture.