



April 2019

The Importance of a Culture Strategy

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“Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast”

You may have heard the phrase, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” which has often, although unofficially, been attributed to Peter Drucker. As outlined by Joe Tye from Values Coach Inc., the need for organizations to have a formal and well-communicated culture plan, in addition to a strategic plan, include the following:

- People are loyal to culture, not strategy.
- Culture provides resilience in tough times.
- Culture is more efficient than strategy.
- Culture creates competitive differentiation.
- Strategies can be copied, but no one can copy your culture.
- Culture provides greater discipline than disciplinary action.

- Culture provides a level of risk prevention that cannot be attained with strategy alone.
- Culture will have a significant impact on your future bottom line.¹

Strategy and values don’t drive employee engagement – only culture can do that. If employees in an organization are not engaged, you are most likely receiving much less than 100 percent of their minds and efforts, which may cost an organization financially by means of productivity, sick leave and wasted time at work.

Organizations should look for ways to articulate their culture – notice this is different than to create culture. Cultures are hard to create and harder to change; fortunately, if an organization already possesses a strong culture, chances are that culture simply needs some clear and concise articulation and a plan to manage the culture

¹Tye, Joe. *The Cultural Blueprinting Toolkit*. 2013.

systemically. A great place to begin is by determining your employee value proposition (EVP) – in essence, what is unique and special about your organization that not only makes employees want to join you, but stay with you. For all intents and purposes, the employee value proposition is what defines the culture of many organizations. EVPs can be evaluated by engaging in interviews, hosting numerous focus groups with a diverse cross section of employees and conducting employee satisfaction surveys. This is valuable data that can help drive the intentional articulation of your culture.

Considerations for Building a Better Culture

Whether your organization already has a strong culture, or you are looking to foster and improve your organization's culture, the following considerations can be helpful along the way.

- **Do your research** – Determine your organization's own EVP through interviews, focus groups and surveys, then look for trends in your collected data. What makes employees want to stay with your organization? What makes them consider moving on to other ventures? Through a SWOT analysis, determine where you have areas of strength and areas of opportunity to build your culture strategy.
- **Define a clear culture strategy that is easy to communicate** – Culture strategy should include key concepts that can be defined in detail, yet simultaneously used to easily communicate to employees what matters and shapes your culture. (For example, DHG's "Life Beyond Numbers" culture strategy includes three key concepts – flexibility, careers and people.) Look for any opportunity to discuss with your employees your culture strategy. Simply stated, define the story you want to tell to internal and external stakeholders, then create concepts that make it easy to tell that story to others. But remember – the story needs to be based on what is actually happening in your organization. It may be damaging to an organization's employee base for you to craft a culture based on fiction, rather than fact.

- **Focus externally** – Look for opportunities to share the story of your culture with your clients and peers. One practical effort is through the Great Place to Work Institute, which recognizes high trust, high performing organizations that represent optimal workplace culture. Being certified as a Great Place to Work® carries a significant amount of credibility, as well as offers great potential to build morale internally.
- **Evaluate and continually assess** – Targeted and continued improvements must take place over time in order to continually make an organization's culture relevant and great for their people. Consider how often your organization should gather new data and set new goals for your culture. Over time you can better identify your key concepts within your organizational culture, and also be able to tweak and adjust as your culture continues to cultivate and develop.

Defined Value

The value of an organization's culture is far-reaching in this century, especially when such culture determines engagement on a multitude of levels, including employees, customers/clients, investors, vendors, etc. People seek to work with organizations and individuals that demonstrate a "personality" and values that align with their own. If you have not already, proactively positioning your organization to shine with a strong culture strategy will certainly boost your competitive advantage within the marketplace.