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03



WHAT MATTERS

- 6 Power Up: Salads
- 7 What is the Biggest Problem Facing HR Today?
- 8 The Future of Work
- 9 Walk More
- 9 Flexible Work Booming, but Manager Skills Lacking
- 10 A Solid Retention Strategy

THE EXPERTS

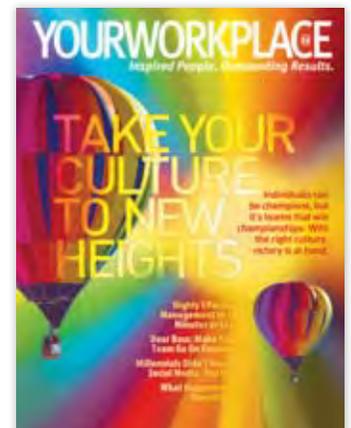
- 12 **Training Your Unconscious Mind**
The unconscious is a vast supercomputer that's able to process information quickly, efficiently and in a way that makes happiness at work more likely
- 14 **What Happened to Downtime?**
The perils of our "on-call" work culture
- 16 **Case Study: The Overwhelmed Manager**
When work feels unbearable, providing support with an open heart and an listening ear may be all that is required

FEATURES

- 18 **Dear Boss: Make Your Team Go On Vacation**
Work performance plummets when we work prolonged periods without a break
- 20 **Managing the Push-Pull of Pressure in Today's Workplace**
Even Doctor Dolittle was challenged
- 21 **An Insidious Source of Social Pain**
How to avoid the negative outcomes associated with social exclusion
- 22 **Millennials Didn't Invent Social Media. You Did.**
Social media platforms enable leaders and managers to listen to their workforce
- 27 **Take Your Culture to New Heights**
The competitive differentiator is not the talent you have, rather, what you do with your talent once you have it
- 33 **Highly Effective Management in 10 Minutes or Less**
Master the technique of "Coaching Bookends" to create a habit of long-term success with your team

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 4 UP FRONT
- 5 YOUR SHOUTOUTS
- 36 CONVERSATIONS
Shaking the Way We Think about Leadership
- 40 YW PROFILE
LGM Financial Services Inc.
- 44 THE BUSINESS-MINDED READER
- 46 WHAT I THINK
A Visit with Junko



ON THE COVER Story on Page 27

Create a Winning Culture

Like northern forest fires during dry, hot summers, the conversation about culture at work is running rampant. Conceptually most people know what culture is, but impacting it, especially for the better, is where the waters begin to muddy.

The conversation is tantamount to talking personality. We all have one, but they differ from person to person, and when you ask a person to define his or her personality, seldom do you receive more than a “duh” look or a “you know” quib. We find it difficult to be objective. We each live within our own self making everything we do, think and say so common that it defies definition. It just is, as it is with culture in your workplace.

We are thrilled that Dave Ulrich, PhD, took on the challenge of putting context around culture in this issue. Starting on page 27, he discusses how individuals can be champions—but it is a team that wins championships, and to win, the culture of the team must make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. He demonstrates that when organizations create the right culture, it turns external promises into internal employee engagement and organization actions. HR professionals who understand the why, what and how of culture will complement a talent agenda with a more sustainable winning organization.

Michael Bungay Stanier contributes a simple, yet profound article revolving around the two key questions that should bookend your employee interactions. In addition, he claims that you only need 10 minutes to coach your staff. Ten minutes? Goodness, even that is achievable for even the most rigorous schedules. Check out page 33.

Doesn't it feel like our whole economy is built around the notion of doing more with less? In some organizations there are even awards for implementing ideas to achieve this goals. A new contributor, Sara Ross, has a different opinion on this matter. She argues that, while the organization may be rewarding this goal, the employee experience is very different. Employees are stressed with too much to do without enough resources, and this reality is creating havoc. But there are solutions. Enjoy her contribution, “Managing the Push-Pull of Pressure in Today's Workplace”, on page 20.

In this brave new world of social media, we often find ourselves uncertain of how to incorporate it (or not) into our workplaces. In her article on page 22, “Millennials Didn't Invent Social Media. You Did.”, Elizabeth Williams discusses how social media platforms enable HR leaders and other executives to listen to their workforce. It doesn't get any better than that.

We've also got our usual featured case study, some expert opinions to provoke thought and conversation, and our beloved book reviews, which coincidentally includes a review of a book from a contributor in this issue. Enjoy this issue and please do get in touch with your musings and thoughts: editorial@yourworkplace.ca. 

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Emails from the 2015 Your Workplace Reader Survey

mcherry@ writes: In my opinion, we all face similar issues in the workplace. What I have enjoyed about *Your Workplace* is reading engaging articles on how to deal with some of these common problems and the different perspective that is often written about.... I work at a charitable organization so the culture is different than in mainstream corporations. I find the articles in *Your Workplace* quite relevant to my environment.

helen.smith@ writes: I like that you cover a variety of topics, most of them relevant to our office — and I do share the articles [with] colleagues as a way of generating discussions.

Sam.rebol@ writes: Every month the content is topical — with new and “current” issues addressed in a variety of ways. I like that.

dora.pender@ writes: I say a gratitude prayer and pass your magazine on to the manager of my department after reading it.

jblackman@ writes: I enjoy the magazine thoroughly. The topics keeps me informed and the recipes are used.

greg.gillette@ writes: Typically most problems that a person encounters in the workplace have

been encountered by someone else already. It is helpful to read about how he or she went about solving a problem that is similar to what [others] are going through.

lleblanc@ writes: I am the accountant in our organization and as the administrator of our long-term benefits plan I receive the magazine. I take it home for a few days and read several articles that interest me, and then bring it in to the Executive Director, as that is the person able to effect change.

Horst.werner@ writes: I appreciate the wide variety of topics that are covered in the magazine; I feel like I’m getting a good perspective on what’s happening in workplaces in Canada... I especially appreciate the Canadian content.

dora.pender@ writes: As a health and safety professional, the topics in this magazine speak to the very heart of what drives health and safety in any organization.

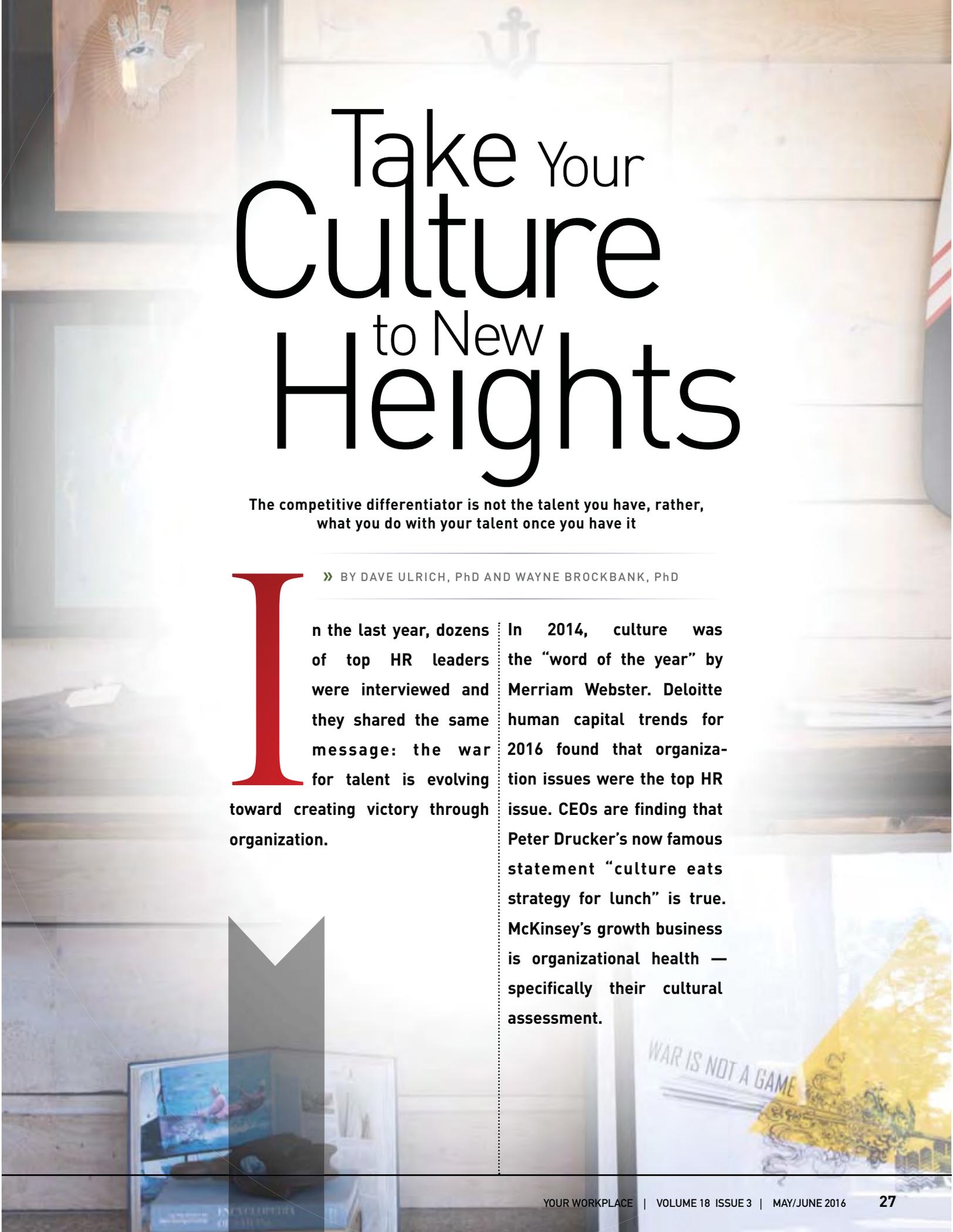
heni.nadel@ writes: I read all of the articles. I really appreciate articles about organizational well-being versus personal wellness. Anything that can relate to working within the federal public service is useful too. **W**

Get in Touch

Got something to say? We’d love to hear from you. Tweet to us @yourworkplace, send your letters to **Your Workplace, 23 Queen Street, Kingston, ON, K7K 1A1** or email letters to editorial@yourworkplace.ca. Please include your name, address and telephone number. Letters and email may be edited for length, grammar and clarity.

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Take Your Culture to New Heights

The competitive differentiator is not the talent you have, rather, what you do with your talent once you have it

» BY DAVE ULRICH, PhD AND WAYNE BROCKBANK, PhD

In the last year, dozens of top HR leaders were interviewed and they shared the same message: the war for talent is evolving toward creating victory through organization.

In 2014, culture was the “word of the year” by Merriam Webster. Deloitte human capital trends for 2016 found that organization issues were the top HR issue. CEOs are finding that Peter Drucker’s now famous statement “culture eats strategy for lunch” is true. McKinsey’s growth business is organizational health — specifically their cultural assessment.

Over time, the competitive differentiator is not the talent you have, rather, what you do with your talent once you have it. And that is an organizational issue.



Earlier research in labour economics suggests that over time, major competitors will have about the same talent. In the hiring process, you win some and you lose some. Over time, the competitive differentiator is not the talent you have, rather, what you do with your talent once you have it. And that is an organizational issue. In this article, we answer the why, what, and how of culture as an emerging HR agenda.

Why Culture Matters

Individuals can be champions, but it's teams that win championships. As noted, culture makes the whole greater than the parts. In addition:

- Culture is also more difficult to copy than access to financial capital, implementing a new technology system, or even crafting a strategic plan
- Culture ensures sustainability that outlives any one individual
- Culture ensures that employee engagement is not an isolated event, but a sustained pattern
- Culture does not just eat strategy for breakfast, but it serves strategy as an on-going diet

We all experience an organization's culture when we go to a restaurant, shop at a store, stay in a hotel, go to work, or even have dinner at a friend's. Culture is top of mind for CEOs who want to adapt their organization, hire future high-potential employees who are looking for a cultural fit, and even for the Chartered Institute of Auditors who have prepared recent documentation to help auditors monitor culture. Culture is centre stage

for business success and is becoming an HR priority.

There are relatively few research studies of the impact of organization versus individuals on firm performance. At the RBL Group we recently conducted research on competencies of HR professionals (individuals) and capabilities of HR departments (organizations) and their relative impact on business performance.

We found that across 1,500 organizations, organization level activities explained twice as much of the variance in business performance than the knowledge and skills of individuals. The impact of key stakeholders based on individual competence versus organization capabilities was even more profound, with the organization level issues explaining three to seven times as much stakeholder value as individual competencies (see Table 1).

HR professionals who help organizations create culture add enormous competitive value to their organization's long-term success.

What Culture Means

One of the challenges of managing culture is that it has become a Rorschach psychological test for those interested in organizations; there are related concepts, terms and prescriptions that require clarity. Are organizational cultures to be thought of as resources, core competencies, health, climate, processes, values, shared mindsets, organization types or systems? With these confusing concepts it is no wonder HR professionals have difficulty creating competitive



TABLE 1:

Impact of individual competencies vs. whole departments on business results and value created for key stakeholders

	Overall Business Results	1 External Customers	2 Investors/ Owners	3 Communities	4 Regulators	5 Line Managers	6 Employees
HR Professional Competencies	22.3	24.8	15.3	22.0	22.3	10.0	7.6
Activities of HR Departments	41.7	59.1	69.2	76.6	39.5	89.2	89.6
Other Variables (e.g. strategy, culture)	36.0	16.1	15.5	1.5	27.0	0.8	2.8
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

organizations. The concept of culture clearly matters, but it seems impossible to articulate or define with any unified precision.

We propose a three-stage evolution of defining what culture means:

PHASE 1, “Symbols”: is culture as seen through symbols, rituals, stories and other organization events. We experience or see these cultural artifacts when we enter or join an organization.

PHASE 2, “Values”: is culture as seen through how it shapes how people think, behave and feel in the organization. Culture shows up in the values, norms, unwritten rules, emotional responses to, or flows out of how things are done in a company. Most of the above current definitions of culture follow this logic.

PHASE 3, “Outside-in”: defines culture as the identity of a company. In this phase, culture is the identity

of a company in the mind of the best customers, made real to all employees throughout a company.

Each of these phases of cultural definition affect employee engagement. In Phase 1 (symbols), employee affect comes from the organizational events. In Phase 2 (values, beliefs), employee engagement comes from enacting the organization’s values. In Phase 3 (outside-in), employees are engaged in the right things.

By moving to the outside-in, customer centric view of culture, we create a winning culture. The words that are used to describe culture represent categories of behaviours as they are experienced and perceived by observers. In the business setting, customers tend to be the most relevant observers. Thus, Southwest Airlines wants to be known for low price with a fun experience; Marriott for exceptional service; Apple for

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31



CASE STUDY

In the last year the authors visited some of the leading organizations in the world to discover how they anticipate HR adding value. This is a report of one of those visits.

One of the world's most successful high-tech firms is seeking to enhance its competitiveness by conceptualizing its organization as an integrated institution — by winning through organization. The firm was traditionally segmented into distinct and autonomous sectors. Talent was owned by the sectors and the collective HR and

leadership practices were generally run on a sector basis.

In the last six years, three factors have driven the firm to focus on becoming a more integrated institution:

- (1)** Customers wanted greater simplicity in working across sectors
- (2)** Process and technology redundancies created costly infrastructures
- (3)** The head of HR recognized that her job was to make the institutional whole worth more than the sum of the parts.

TO IMPLEMENT THE ORGANIZATION FOCUS, NINE INTEGRATING PRACTICES WERE LEVERAGED:

- 1** The overarching corporate mission was given priority over sector mandates. Communicating the mission and reinforcing it in hiring and leadership development initiatives received greater emphasis.
- 2** Underlying economics and customer requirements were consolidated into a few, but critical, business imperatives that directly reflected the corporate mission.
- 3** The mission and business imperatives became the basis for defining the required culture of “one company” with global integration and technological leadership through people.
- 4** A greater portion of compensation became based on corporate versus sector performance and on the basis of compliance with the desired corporate culture.
- 5** Uniformly elevated hiring criteria were mandated including state-of-the-art technical requirements and the ability to collaborate across sectors as needed.
- 6** The senior leadership made it clear that technical talent would be allocated based on corporate priorities.
- 7** Sectors would have a strong voice but corporate considerations would come first.
- 8** Legacy benefit plans from within sectors were substantially consolidated to reduce costs and provide greater ease in moving individuals across sectors.
- 9** Forums were developed for senior leaders from sectors and functions to make decisions on corporate wide matters relative to capital deployment, marketing strategies and portfolio alignment.

Thus, the full range of HR and leadership structures and practices were designed and implemented to create and sustain

the desired organizational culture that reinforces the collective business mandates and corporate mission.

design and simplicity; Google for innovation. These firm brands or identities should then become infused through the company.

A company's ideal culture should be defined by its desired external firm brand or identity. The collective way of thinking, behaving, and feeling (employee engagement) within the company is the internal cultural manifestation of external (branding) promises. For HR professionals to leverage culture, it is not enough to have or recognize cultural artifacts (Phase 1) or to shape how people feel, think, and act (Phase 2), but to ensure that people feel, think and act consistent with promises made to customers and other key stakeholders. As cultural stewards, HR professionals need to have an outside-in perspective where they make sure that the internal culture and the HR processes through which the ideal culture is created and sustained directly reflect the external brand promise.

How to Create or Change the Culture

Defining culture — from the outside-in and made real to employees — enables HR professionals to audit the extent to which an organization has the right culture that will add to most value. We have identified five steps HR professionals can follow to create and sustain the ideal culture:

STEP 1: DEFINE THE RIGHT CULTURE

HR professionals begin to define the firm's ideal culture by discussing with the senior leadership team, "What are the top three things we want to be known for by our best customers (or investors) in the future?" They can facilitate clarity for this discussion by referencing

quantitative market research data. The key is to ensure unity with the management team (we like to see at least 80% consensus) for the top three answers and then to ensure that these three are consistent with customer and shareholder requirements. Creating unity between those outside the company (customers and shareholders) and those on the inside (members of the senior management team) can be a powerful base from which to define the right — or winning — culture.

STEP 2: CREATE AN INTELLECTUAL AGENDA

Intellectual agendas ensure that managers create a shared culture inside and outside the organization. The intellectual agenda for the ideal culture can be communicated by executives throughout the organization in speeches, town halls, emails and social media. Employees assimilate these messages so they become conceptually engaged to the right message. For Lexus, the pursuit of perfection is not just an advertising tag line, but also an internal employee mantra. At Walmart the pursuit of low costs is repeatedly shared with employees in speeches and executive presentations.

STEP 3: INSTILL A BEHAVIOURAL AGENDA

The ideal culture needs to be translated into specific behavioural descriptions. The issues need to be addressed by answering the following question: "If this were our ideal culture, then how would they behave so that the company's brand is reinforced in the perceptions of customers and shareholders?" The behavioural agenda shows the extent to which all employees behave consistently with the desired culture.

Creating unity between those outside the company and those on the inside can be a powerful base from which to define the right, or winning, culture.



“If this were our ideal culture, then how would they behave so that the company’s brand is reinforced in the perceptions of customers and shareholders?”

Employee behavioural engagement increases when behaviours are aligned with the desired culture, when employees are empowered to act consistently with customer expectations, when employees are licensed by senior management to change their daily actions, or when employees are encouraged to offer suggestions on how to make the new culture real to them. As one great leader taught, “we teach people correct principles, we let them govern themselves.”

STEP 4: DESIGN AND DELIVER KEY PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

Process and structures institutionalize the culture through management and organization practices like staffing, training, promotion, measurement, compensation, organization design, information management, physical arrangements and leadership development. These activities should reinforce that employee actions align with customer expectations. Employee engagement is encouraged and sustained through these processes.

HR professionals can lead the discussion with the senior leadership team that asks the questions: “Which of our processes and structures are most out of alignment with the desired culture and which would have greatest impact if we brought them into alignment?”

STEP 5: DEFINE AND IMPLEMENT A LEADERSHIP BRAND

When intellectual, behavioural and process agendas align around a desired culture, leadership brand follows. Leadership brand occurs when leaders inside a company behave consistently with customer expectations outside the company.

Leadership competency models should overlap with firm brand statements. Leadership brand also occurs when leaders successfully transfer their own customer-

centric behaviours to employees and embed them in employees throughout the company.

Defining effective leadership through a customer-focused culture lens ensures that leaders do the right things in the right ways. Embedding the leadership brand originates in the selection, development, evaluation and promotion of leaders who reflect the desired culture. Leadership brand leads to an employee brand where employee engagement becomes the norm.

When organizations create the right culture, it turns external promises into internal employee engagement and organization actions. HR professionals who understand the why, what and how of culture will complement a talent agenda with a more sustainable winning organization. While many companies are 60 to 70% up the “s-curve” on talent, many are just embarking on the value created by building winning organizations. 

Dave Ulrich, PhD is a co-founder of the RBL Group, a leadership development and human resource education consultancy, in Provo, Utah. He works with Wayne Brockbank on projects and they are the co-authors of numerous renowned leadership books and articles.

