

Turn culture into a productive force

Use these 10 tips to create a culture that takes your company forward and upward.

Oleg Kononov



the excellence of corporate cultures and their productivity. The reason is simple – no company can move further than its employees' competencies. It is no secret that companies like Microsoft, Starbucks, Google and others are successful because of their strong cultures. They have shown that strategic development begins with developing their people.

However, a clear understanding of corporate culture, its roles and functions for company growth still remain a puzzle for the vast majority of businesses. Confidence in the enormous power of corporate culture and mastery in its management still eludes the majority of businesses.

Artfully managing an organisation is absolutely necessary in today's environment. This demands constant learning and adjustment to the changing needs of customers and employees. A lack of ability in this area will cripple the culture and business as a whole.

New paradigm of understanding culture

Not long ago, we found ourselves in a new paradigm – today's businesses need to develop a strong culture or be outperformed by competitors with stronger cultures. Former giants such as Borders (USA), RadioShack (USA) and Comet (UK) represent only a fraction of the long list of companies which have failed to adapt, and paid the price.

The barriers to turning culture into a productive force most often reside in the minds of modern leaders. Old-fashioned approaches and management practices born in the Industrial Revolution are barriers to growth.

Culture is the result of the actions of management and employees together. Employees' engagement should not be taken for granted. It is the result of positive engagement from management. For most managers, this will demand a new understanding of their responsibilities.

Who is responsible for cultivating a productive culture?

Cultivating a strong culture is a leadership function which relies on not just a set of soft skills but on a high degree of competence. The state of the culture reflects the state of leadership. A leader adds necessary elements to the culture by injecting clarity, confidence, involvement and care of people. Without these ingredients, a company will struggle under a mountain of false assumptions, unrealistic expectations and misleading actions.

We can look at the role of leaders from another angle. Culture is the soul of an organisation. Maintaining the body of the organisation means maintaining its soul. However, no one can maintain full control of something as complex as a culture while bogged down in daily routines that keep one isolated from others. Focusing only on reports and meetings isolates leaders and is often the first sign of a dying culture.

Care of culture places great responsibility on employees as well. There are no mere spectators in any company. Employees are its stakeholders and have a vital role as maintainers, developers and consumers of culture. It is impossible to build a productive culture without employees being fully engaged in this vital process.

Here, then, are ten tips on how to turn culture into a productive force:

1. Culture is about people. It is about adding value to people around us. We have to understand our individual roles in building the necessary trust and support to achieve the company's goals.
2. Culture is the soul of any organisation. Would you treat your own soul poorly? Think of treating your company's soul appropriately and tune your mind to heal and strengthen that soul, which will then strengthen the whole body.
3. Strengthening culture is an everyday duty of leaders. An encouraging word from a leader today will lead to stronger engagement

tomorrow. Support and appreciation today will become the norm for an entire company tomorrow. Today's actions in caring for, and encouraging, people will be reflected in the next financial report with much better results.

4. Rising from yesterday's mistakes is mandatory. Dragging along old mistakes from the past is a sure recipe for disaster in the future. Constantly revisiting past mistakes makes it harder to build something new and better.
5. There are no small or unimportant things in culture management. Even a small thing can have a huge impact on the future. A small gleam of light drives darkness out. Keep asking yourself and employees: what have you done to brighten the company from inside and make it visible to others?
6. The state of a culture, whether positive or negative, can be judged against its impact on the main stakeholders – employees, customers and owners. A strong culture makes a huge difference in terms of people's growth and satisfaction in the long run.
7. Maintaining a productive culture means building a better future for everyone involved. Therefore, it is important to realise that this future is not distant but already here today, at your workplace, right now.
8. Cultivation of productive culture demands full focus on people, control over the process and appreciation of the employees' effort. The leader should be skilful in reading the signs of growth and sensing changes whether positive or negative.
9. No one can build a strong culture without sincerity, positivity and a strong will to add value to people. No one is able to build a strong culture without believing in it.
10. Culture brings life and a sense of reality to an organisation. Thus, culture must be purposeful, making every day enjoyable, enhancing and revealing the best psychological and professional qualities of people. ■

Oleg Kononov is a UK-based Global Thought Leader on Culture, the author of *Corporate Superpower and Organizational Anatomy*, and has been recognised by Thinkers50 as one of the top 30 new leadership thinkers to watch in 2019.

All leaders search for the magic key that will unlock the ultimate performance and secure sustainable growth of their companies. Where this key is hidden remains a crucial question for many. The Knowledge Era has made it clear that culture is key. The focus has shifted from processes to