



BOARDROOM STRATEGY

MIKE DESJARDINS

Corporate culture is critical to implementing business strategy

As you start to develop your business strategy for the new year, look at all of the factors that can support it, one of which you might not have linked directly to your strategic initiatives in past years: your company culture.

Strategy and culture both affect a company's bottom line. While a strong culture can't replace or act in lieu of a strong strategy, there are several ways that you can leverage your culture to support and drive strategic initiatives.

Here are nine ways you can leverage corporate culture to drive strategy.

Employee engagement

Engaged employees have higher commitment levels. They're willing to go the extra mile, are consistent performers and are more likely to buy in and commit to the strategy and long-term goals of the company. Improve engagement to achieve your strategic initiatives by ensuring that you're providing employees a direct line of sight to how their work contributes to the company's growth.

Accountability

This is a key factor in the successful execution of strategy. The critical first step in leveraging a culture of accountability: translate strategic initiatives into objectives and actions, make sure all your staff members know what's expected of them and hold their feet to the fire from the word go. Being able to hold others accountable is tougher than it sounds, especially since the first step is to lead

by example: do what you say you were going to do, when you said you would do it.

Values, vision and mission

We all know that our company values, vision and mission are only as valuable as they are easy to understand, remember and repeat. Spend some time ensuring that leaders not only know the values, vision and mission of the company, but that they understand what they mean and how they connect with strategy. Here's a great way to leverage a strong vision and mission: start looking for, talking about and rewarding real examples of employees living out the vision and mission.

Performance management and rewards

Your strategic plan for the year is full of initiatives and actions designed to take you where you need to go. What gets measured gets done, so use current performance-management practices to influence how corporate business objectives get translated into action across departments or business and involve each department in creating performance measures to generate buy-in and increase accountability and success.

Physical space

We don't often consider how things like office space contribute to the bottom line, but it could be worth your while to note how your physical environment supports or contradicts your strategy. Does your office space reflect the innovative, forward-thinking ideas repre-

sented in your plan? Does your plan encourage or even require a flattened organizational structure, when all of your upper-level executives, including the CEO, have offices on the same floor, away from all others? Examine how you can rework your physical space to encourage successful execution of your strategy.

Decisions and authority

How easy is it for employees to navigate the levels of official and unofficial power in your organization. Are the people responsible for doing the work empowered with decision-making authority? Do the unspoken behavioural norms make it difficult to get things done or approved before the "by when" dates? Increase the chances of achieving objectives on time by aligning lines of authority with strategic initiatives.

Counter-culture

With every culture there is a counter-culture – a group within the organization that opposes or is critical of the organization's norms and values. Be aware of these counter-cultures and leverage them by allowing them a voice that holds you to a higher standard of performance. Learn the lesson from Toyota and reward employees who find problems, announce them to everyone and work toward a solution that works consistently.

Leadership

When it comes to buying into strategic direction, employees will always look to their managers to lead by example. Leverage this oppor-

tunity by acting with discipline and following through on your commitments. Take performance management seriously, hold others accountable and make sure you're focusing on the priorities you and your teams have agreed on.

Communication

The way we think we should communicate and the way we actually communicate are key to your company's culture. Leverage the communication norms of your culture by using the mediums that people really respond to. Make sure the emphasis is on the actions

expected from what's being communicated. Clarify goals and provide consistent updates on outcomes.

The best strategy without the right cultural platform

Translate strategic

initiatives into

objectives and actions

to executive upon it is simply an intellectual exercise. If you're the CEO of a large company you're probably far away from the reality of the culture of your business. Start by asking your front-

line staff, "What is the culture of our business?" And then work your way back up the hierarchy. ■

Mike Desjardins is the driver (CEO) at ViRTUS (www.virtusinc.com), an organizational development consulting firm with expertise in strategic planning and implementation, leadership development, change management and succession planning for medium to large organizations. He regularly blogs at www.mikedesjardins.com. This column was co-written by Shannon Lawder, a certified coach and the content director at ViRTUS.

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Profile

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BUSINESS LINES

Business/Organization Name: Adaptive Technical Inc

Business Focus/Specialty: IT systems management/network audits & consultation / hardware and software sales

Business Advantage: We're not the typical nerds or geeks you might be used to. We don't confuse our clients with a bunch of techno-mumbo-jumbo; our technicians use plain English when discussing computer related issues

Website: www.beadaptive.ca

FOUNDATION

Name: Stefan Neuberg

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Occupation/Position/Title: Computer Systems Analyst/Partner/COO

What I do: MCP, CCNA, A+, N+

Credentials: Masters in Business Administration (MBA), Graduate Certificate in Executive Coaching (CEC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC), Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP)

Professional Background: Over 12 years of managing, designing and implementing computer networks and related technologies

FAVOURITE STUFF

Favourite Achievements: Starting Adaptive and watching it grow

Goals: To travel to all 7 continents

Passions and Interests: Enjoying a great white wine, fishing on a secluded lake

Current Read, Author: *The Mountain and the City*, Francis Mansbridge

Someone I Admire/Why: My parents and their unwavering support

Two people (of all time) I would invite to my dinner gathering: Bill Gates and Steve Jobs

Business Tip or Motto: Never shy away from saying it like it is!

Favourite TV Show: *Seinfeld*

Favourite Holiday Destination: Family cabin in Penticon

Favourite Community Organization or Charity: Union Gospel Mission in Vancouver

Favourite Reason for Subscribing to BIV: It helps me stay current and provides valuable business insights

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