

Your Company Culture Ecosystem

GROWING A VIBRANT BUSINESS

~ Sample Chapter ~

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CHAPTER 2



The Company Culture Ecosystem

Business models are useful because they provide a framework for thinking about an issue or attacking a problem. Models are like a 3-D mobile of the solar system—they are a construct or analytical system that points to reality. In business, models help leaders conceptualize and organize the many competing priorities needed to run a business.

Here, we introduce the Company Culture Ecosystem model, which combines several academic models of organizational culture into a practical, feet-on-the-ground framework for examining it. The *Company Culture Ecosystem* serves as a checklist for designing and sustaining organizational culture.

The *Company Culture Ecosystem* includes the six interdependent and necessary components of a vibrant work culture. When all elements are in alignment, the culture and therefore the company functions well. When an element or two are missing or weak, the company does not perform optimally.

To provide an overview, the following introduces each element of the *Company Culture Ecosystem*. Subsequent chapters will provide in-depth explanations of and how-to instructions for each element.



The Company Culture Ecosystem

Values and Purpose

The core values are the ideals that the company wishes to honor in its corporate life.

The espoused values of an organization must be nurtured in the daily life of the company.

Many business leaders think limited resources of time and money constrain their ability to create meaningful rituals and events to support, maintain, and celebrate the organization's espoused values. They scoff at other company's extravagant practices, saying that those organizations have big pockets and

can afford lavish rituals and boondoggles.

Often, this means that sustaining the espoused values is left to chance, typically resulting in the toleration of behaviors and norms that run counter to the organization's declared values.

It is not sufficient to educate employees once about cultural values and norms; rather, the espoused values of an organization must be nurtured in the daily life of the company, including decision-making, people practices, operational processes, and customer-service standards.

A purpose statement describes the greater good results the organization wishes to achieve. All companies can identify a purpose to their efforts besides enriching the bank accounts of their owners.

Wise leaders will uncover that purpose and use it to inspire employees, customers and suppliers. A motivating purpose sustains the *Company Culture Ecosystem*.

Leadership

**Leaders set the
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Culture is set by the leaders of the company. Schein states that if leaders do not actively manage the culture, "the culture will manage them" (22). Another phrase that reflects the oversized influence of leaders on the culture is "Tone at the Top." As we know from emotional intelligence studies, the leaders set the emotional climate of an organization, are the role models for expected behavior, and enforce or detract from organizational values. Developing the emotional intelligence characteristics of self-awareness,

humility, empathy, compassion, accountability, and trust is the best way for a leader to affect a positive culture.

People Practices

We've already established that culture is the sum of how you treat people: employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. The good news is that how management treats employees is the predictor for how all other constituencies are treated. How you interact with your team members will be reflected in how they treat customers and suppliers. And the level of care shown to your employees will be reflected in how your company cares for the community. It is all one fabric.

Rituals, Symbols, and Stories

It is not sufficient to develop core values, print them out, and post them on a bulletin board. Values, assumptions, and beliefs are taught to team members by leaders who model them and are best taught in a repetitive manner to keep them top of mind. Drip irrigation, rather than a flood followed by drought, is the best way to nourish both a garden and a company culture.

Examples of routines/rituals include how you schedule and organize meetings, what rituals are repeated at each one, how you routinely celebrate success, and the regularly scheduled social gatherings you provide employees.

I once made a sales call at the corporate headquarters of Medtronic, the medical device company located in Minneapolis. As I sat down in the reception area to wait for my sales prospect, I noticed a beautiful book, called *The Medtronic Way*, on the coffee table. I opened it and was mesmerized by the story of Medtronic's history, founders, and timeline of innovative devices it released to the market. The book was full of photos—of employees, customers, and patients—and commentary on the life

of the company.

This is what I mean by stories—the stories you tell about your company. Choose the positive ones to repeat.

Symbols are the tangibles that you see in your office, starting with the branding of the company and extending to the type of furnishings in the office. Is there a Persian rug, or a second-hand conference table in the conference room? Each of these symbolizes the personality of the company.

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Operational Processes and Tools

Because your culture is embedded in everything you do, whether you are aware of it or not, it is important to be intentional about the methods used to get work done and the tools you provide to do so. Core values can be consciously included in your operational procedures, and the tools that you provide your employees will be emblematic of the culture.

For instance, if you provide outdated computers to the least paid workers in your company, that will represent a hierarchical value system in the company.

In contrast, if you provide everyone updated computers on the same refresh schedule, you will demonstrate a culture in which everyone is appreciated.

Accountability Systems

This element includes all the ways that employees are held accountable, starting with strategic goals and cascading through

departmental objectives and, ultimately, individual goals and plans. It encompasses the metrics used to measure the progress and success of everyone in the organization and the company itself.

This element is vital to culture. Without it, culture is simply an intangible, feel-good abstraction. With accountability systems come manageability, trust, safety, and security.

Key Concepts

1. Like an ecosystem, a company's culture is made up of many interdependent elements. *The Company Culture Ecosystem* model identifies six elements that must be in alignment: Values and Purpose; Leadership; People Practices; Rituals, Symbols and Stories; Operational Processes; and Accountability Systems.
2. Of the six elements of *The Company Culture Ecosystem*, values and purpose are the foundation, but leadership quality is the most powerful fertilizer of a flourishing culture. For that reason, the leadership chapter of this book is the longest.
3. All six elements must be designed to uphold the core values of the company.
4. All six elements must be strong and working together to grow a vibrant company culture.

