

MAKING YOUR CULTURE SERVE YOUR PURPOSE

CLEAR ON PURPOSE

PURPOSE-INSPIRED TALENT MANAGEMENT

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SUMMARY

The Purpose for which an organization exists should have great power in helping the organization actually achieve that Purpose. If the Purpose is clouded in too many short-term results or has many divergent (and perhaps competitive) versions across the enterprise, much can be gained by correcting these situations. Even greater gain can be had when the now clarified Purpose is leveraged into the daily work of the organization. As members of the enterprise align their efforts to achieve the Purpose, greater autonomy is realized. Many benefits to individuals and the organization derive from this, including a sense of empowerment, greater productivity and better balance of self-interest and organizational interest. Building Purpose into the existing processes can drive it deep into the organization's culture ultimately resulting in the culture serving the Purpose and accelerating its achievement.

BEING PURPOSE DRIVEN

The topic of being “purpose-driven” as an individual and an organization has been extensively written and spoken about for more than a decade, relegating the power of this concept to the category of “settled science”. The importance of clarifying and articulating a clear purpose to which your life (including work) can be aligned is obvious. The importance of the same for organizations of all types is equally clear, yet many organizations lack this clarity often mistaking results for a purpose and using those as a surrogate for which a clear purpose would be much more powerful. For those organizations that have a clearly articulated purpose, the next critical question is whether they are actually harnessing the power of that purpose to help achieve it. Does the purpose merely occupy another wall plaque next to values and vision? Or, has it become the culture? Not merely a part of the culture, but the actual deciding factor in driving what people in the organization choose to do (or not do)? The power of a clear and compelling purpose is made manifest in daily choices that align to fulfilling that purpose. And that kind of power has enormous benefits to everyone the organization touches from customers to employees to communities.

GAINING CLARITY

How does an organization move to this desirable point? Obviously, gaining clarity about its purpose is a prerequisite. Sometimes that is easy, but often it is more difficult because the mission, vision, and results metrics that have been substitutes for purpose have to be carefully thought through, and possibly reset for the organization. That can all be accomplished but then what? How does the organization move from now having clarity about its purpose to harnessing the power of that purpose as the culture of the organization? Changing a culture is more difficult than most any other change an organization attempts. That is expected because a culture really represents inertia. That same inertia becomes an ally once the Purpose Culture is in place. It will tend to stay in place.

MOVING YOUR CULTURE

While many factors ultimately determine how (or whether) the culture can move, the two most critical are who you bring into the organization (e.g. hiring) and who leads the organization. Following these is how you teach and develop the organization. These tend to describe the elements of traditional talent management/talent lifecycle approaches. Thus the concept proposed here is aligning and/or building your talent programs to your purpose and by doing so making it your culture. Beginning with talent acquisition and following through all the way to high potential leadership development and executive coaching, the talent processes of the organization are the excellent leverage points to move to a Purpose Culture. The additional benefit gained is a much more tightly integrated talent management approach because it is all rooted in Purpose.

ALIGNMENT AND AUTONOMY

The most important benefit for the organization, and each individual in it, results from the alignment and autonomy that a Purpose Culture provides. As individuals understand what the real purpose of the organization is they are competent and confident in making the daily choices that serve that purpose. That sense of empowerment allows them to seek the purpose on their own and it relieves leadership of serving only as task directors. Leaders now have the freedom to be purpose clarifiers and aligners, further driving this deep into the culture. The organization benefits from having activities aligned by purpose rather than by the constant need to select activities and realign those that do not fit. It is not magic. It works but it takes work. Leaders must possess a different mindset and skillset. Each member of the organization has to make a personal decision about their ability to align (buy into) the purpose. So, while it takes work, the work should feel less like work as purposes coincide and doing what aligns to them becomes a natural act.

INTEGRATE YOUR TALENT MANAGEMENT LIFECYCLE

It is critical that the entire talent management lifecycle from hiring to retiring become integrated around the purpose. Aligning only the leadership development element seems logical, but if who is hired doesn't change, leaders will be less effective in driving the culture change. The reverse is obviously also true. This need not require replacing the existing structures and rebuilding them (although it might). Often it will require an assessment of how aligned the current approaches are to the purpose and realigning where necessary. This is not about alignment of data, rather alignment of purpose. Many talent management approaches emphasize having the "systems" talk to each other via data sharing. While that is certainly desirable for efficiency it does nothing to align to purpose. In fact it can feel like its own "purpose" and thus be an obstacle.

CONCLUSION

Conceptually, the path is simple: get clarity on your purpose, build or adjust talent processes to achieve the Purpose Culture, and constantly monitor for corruption of the culture, adjusting the purpose and/or the processes that keep everyone aligned and autonomous. Your culture is already reinforcing certain behaviors. Why not make them the behaviors that will accomplish your purpose?

A helpful starting point is assessing how transparent your organization's purpose is in the various elements of the talent lifecycle. Is it visible at all? Does it get reinforced or diluted at each point? Does it help you accomplish your business goals?

If you have clarity on these, do you need to act? Are you ready to act?