BÜdaya

HOW TO BUILD A CULTURE WITH INTENT

Sustainable organisations that make a good positive name for themselves have a well-preserved culture that they are known for.

FEB 2022

How do you understand the culture of your organisation?

We see culture as the cumulative beliefs or mindsets of an organisation, manifested in actions. These actions ultimately drive a result. Visualise an organisation as a boat, and all employees as the rowers moving this boat through treacherous waters. It would be easy to agree that in order for the boat to make it to its destination, it **requires all the rowers to follow the same instructions** and therefore, work in unison, performing the right movements so that the boat moves in the right direction. Back to the organisation, it thus becomes critical that people who are associated with an organisation have **similar mindsets** when it comes to going about the work that has to be done. They need to follow the same instructions, have the same goals in mind, and follow a similar strategy towards achieving these goals.

Another way to look at culture is **as a significant part** of an organisation's identity. Just as a company's name, logo, office space, branding and uniform provide aspects of how people understand the organisation, culture – comprising mission, vision, values, key beliefs and behaviours, habits and rituals, and norms of interaction – is the non-visual element of an organisation's identity. Therefore, it is critical in the way its people and clients understand it, relate to it, and commit to a long-term relationship with it. Think of it as **the spirit of what you stand for** as an organisation.

It immediately becomes apparent then that **culture** has a big role to play in the way an organisation operates, and the way it is perceived by people inside and outside alike.

Now, a culture can be positive or negative. And, one should keep in mind that whether or not you design it, or whether you intentionally try to nurture it in a specific way, **culture will still exist anyway**. Culture can also change because of changes in priorities and direction (so an intentional change and possibly welcomed by the top management, at least), or perhaps something less welcoming for the management, i.e. because of large shifts in the workforce at times (for example, with a large intake of new employees and/or some key individuals leaving the organisation while no intentional efforts are in place to preserve the culture).

How do you understand the culture of your organisation?

We see culture as the cumulative beliefs or mindsets of an organisation, manifested in actions. These actions ultimately drive a result. Visualise an organisation as a boat, and all employees as the rowers moving this boat through treacherous waters. It would be easy to agree that in order for the boat to make it to its destination, it **requires all the rowers to follow the same instructions** and therefore, work in unison, performing the right movements so that the boat moves in the right direction. Back to the organisation, it thus becomes critical that people who are associated with an organisation have **similar mindsets** when it comes to going about the work that has to be done. They need to follow the same instructions, have the same goals in mind, and follow a similar strategy towards achieving these goals.

Another way to look at culture is **as a significant part** of an organisation's identity. Just as a company's name, logo, office space, branding and uniform provide aspects of how people understand the organisation, culture – comprising mission, vision, values, key beliefs and behaviours, habits and rituals, and norms of interaction – is the non-visual element of an organisation's identity. Therefore, it is critical in the way its people and clients understand it, relate to it, and commit to a long-term relationship with it. Think of it as **the spirit of what you stand for** as an organisation.

It immediately becomes apparent then that **culture** has a big role to play in the way an organisation operates, and the way it is perceived by people inside and outside alike.
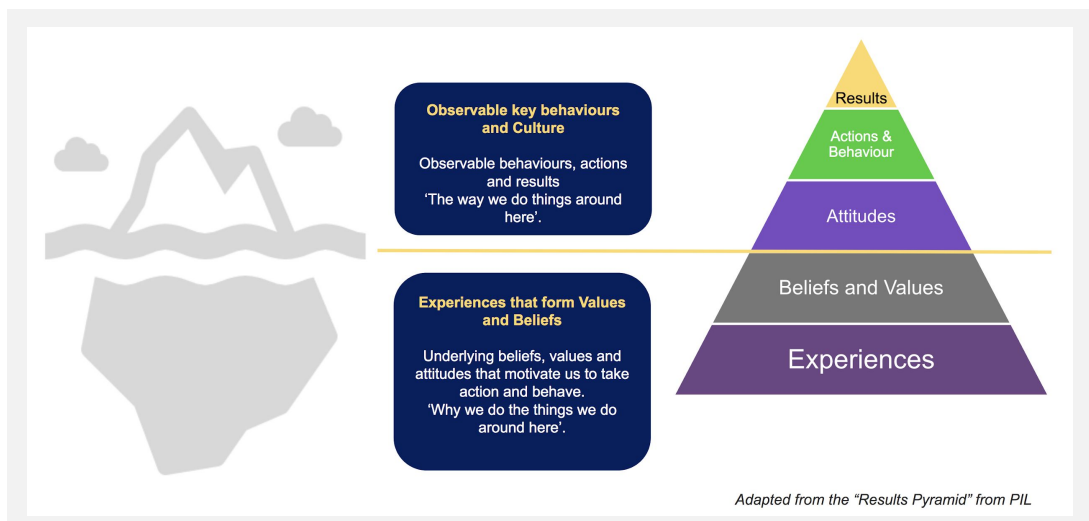
Now, a culture can be positive or negative. And, one should keep in mind that whether or not you design it, or whether you intentionally try to nurture it in a specific way, **culture will still exist anyway**. Culture can also change because of changes in priorities and direction (so an intentional change and possibly welcomed by the top management, at least), or perhaps something less welcoming for the management, i.e. because of large shifts in the workforce at times (for example, with a large intake of new employees and/or some key individuals leaving the organisation while no intentional efforts are in place to preserve the culture).

Understanding culture

Culture essentially is a collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, habits, rituals and norms of interaction, which are implemented consistently by the majority or all of the population, manifested through a variety of observable behaviours and habits that dominate the workplace. These **rely heavily** on the people's understanding of boundaries, expectations, and overall sentiments in the organisation – something that helps them form certain mindsets and beliefs. At this juncture, we should also point out that the **mindsets** we each have are **deep-seated**. And so are the beliefs that we form about our organisation; beliefs like – "we tolerate certain negative behaviours", or "we focus on meritocracy", or "we really care about our clients", or "we are putting relationships/profits first". Our understanding of the world around us is deeply ingrained and hard to change, and the way we understand the organisation we are a part of is no different.

The graphic below uses the **iceberg analogy** to explain our understanding of culture. What is above the water is what we can see, i.e. observable outcomes (results), behaviour of colleagues, or attitude of co-workers and management. These are observable in our interactions on a daily basis. Under the water though, there's a much stronger foundation that guides our understanding, and this is driven by our continuous experiences, and our deeper understanding of company culture. These would give us the **'why'** – **the reason we do things a certain way**. This bottom part is the one that we need to look at and ensure we have the right infrastructure in place to provide the intended experience for our people, because this will provide the **base** of how they see our organisation, and ultimately provide them with the reason to **push for adopting the intended culture**.

Observable key behaviours and Culture

Observable behaviours, actions and results
'The way we do things around here'.

Experiences that form Values and Beliefs

Underlying beliefs, values and attitudes that motivate us to take action and behave.
'Why we do the things we do around here'.

Results
Actions & Behaviour
Attitudes
Beliefs and Values
Experiences

Adapted from the "Results Pyramid" from PIL

This is important for organisations looking to strengthen their own understanding of their existing culture, or perhaps looking at changing the culture – be it slightly or in a more comprehensive way.

How do we make sure our culture is practised consistently in an organisation?

People and organisations are creatures of habit, and changing habits is harder than changing structures or systems. Most organisations often undertake a series of initiatives, discussions and planning sessions that lead to, more often than not, the top management shaping what the culture should look like. Vision and mission statements as well as core values are carefully worded, while key beliefs and behaviours come after, and these are then shared with the rest of the organisation in different ways – over meetings, Q&A sessions, and maybe even some team level roundtables. These would typically define goals and expected behaviours, however, **they do not necessarily ensure that the new desired culture takes root.**

The **hardest part** of any change or growth initiative is to ensure it does not become a fad or a "flavour of the month" but **to ensure that it becomes part of the organisational DNA.** This is a time-consuming, intensive attempt, and it includes processes that systemise the new culture, drive adoption, and monitor progress along the way. These would help shape the beliefs and experiences of people, which will then lead to the expected goals and behaviours.

The trouble is that for this latter part that aims to systemise, drive adoption and monitor, **the effort needed is long term**. This is a long-haul game, and in a world where fast wins are celebrated, this increasingly becomes **problematic** in organisations. Management and those tasked with the responsibility to get this done simply do not have the patience or the luxury of time to see it through to success.

Consider the change framework below:
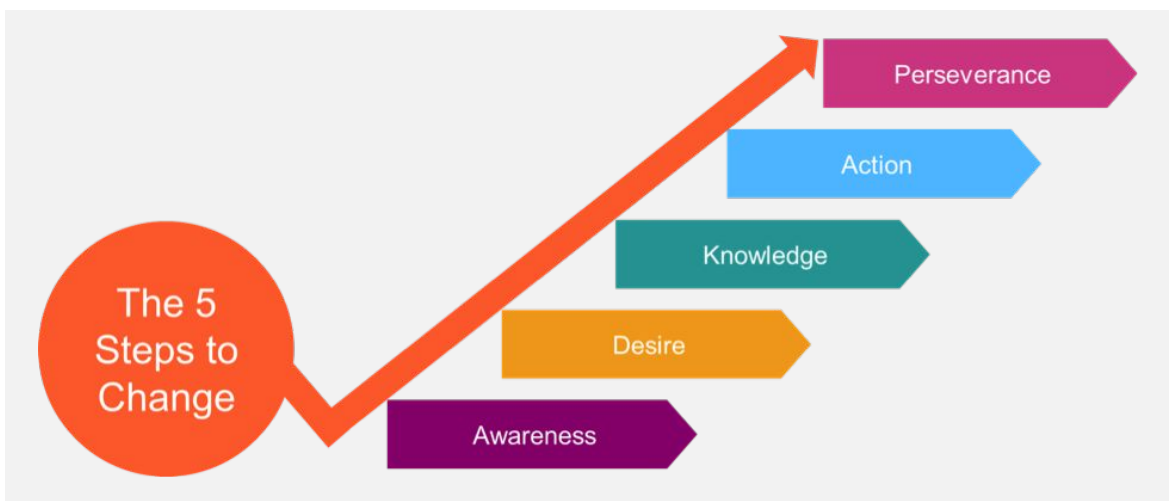
The framework, adopted to multiples cases where some form of change is required, indicates the journey an individual has to go through in order to achieve the desired change.

First, there is **awareness**: *Why is it that I need to change in the first place?* Then, there is **desire**: *What's in it for me? Do I buy in to the idea that this is a necessary change for me/us?* Once the buy-in is achieved, comes the need for **knowledge**: *I know I need to do this, so how do I go about it? What does it mean for me and what do I do?* Then comes the part of taking **action**: *I embark on the journey towards change – taking the steps I need to.* Following that and in many occasions comes **perseverance**: *What will make me stick to it, even when the going gets tough?*

This is the **journey** of an individual to change. But how does this play in a social network such as an organisation? In his research, social scientist Damon Centola has found that to have a cascading effect of change, **a tipping point of 25% is required.** In order to see change that will end up spreading and being adopted by the majority, 25% of a network's population needs to become a **supporter** of the new way of operating.

To get this critical mass, a good place to start is looking at the type of networks and connections in the organisation. **Strong social ties** enable strong reinforcement, and therefore stronger, faster uptake. Strong social ties in a network ensure abundance of social redundancy, with each person connected to multiple others, trust and intimacy, and a foundation of cooperation and solidarity. **Weak social ties**, on the other hand, offer relationships that are not as strong (acquaintances), with each person having little redundancy of connections, and information travelling fast, but not necessarily being influential.

Knowing this, organisations desiring to **achieve** a lasting change and culture adoption should be looking at their internal networks and seeing how best to approach the overall population to reach the tipping point faster. The problem is these networks are not that easy to identify. This is where **employee intelligence** on networks and internal connections can be very useful.

To help with all these, **systemising** the new culture can ensure that it becomes deeply ingrained in different aspects of our work environment. Organisational processes that are crucial to ensure adoption include our recruitment process, appraisal systems, training and development plans, and rewards and recognition. A mechanism for socialising the intended culture is also a critical part of the exercise here.
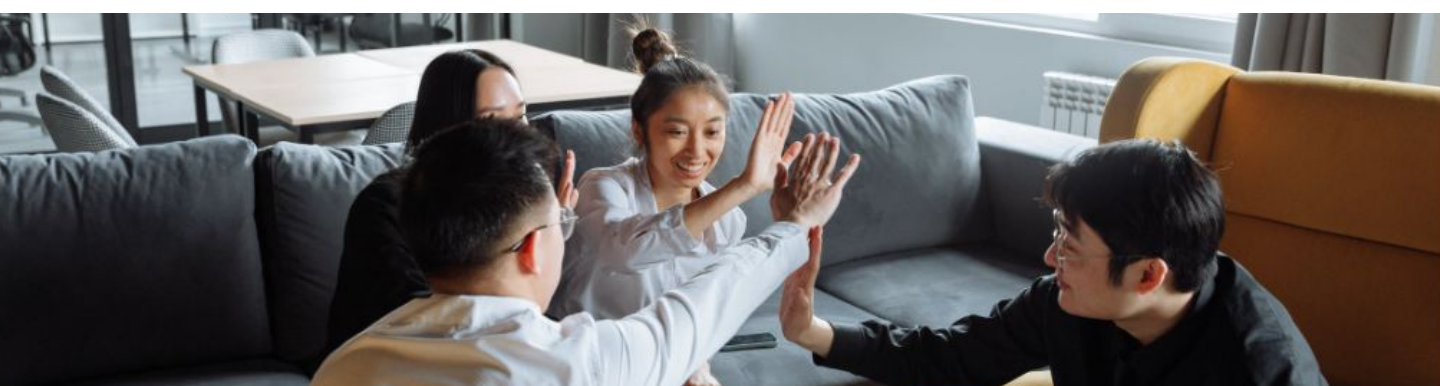
Final thoughts

Having an intentional, prescribed, monitored and corrected culture in an organisation ensures the success of the organisation. Sustainable organisations that have been around for many years and made a good positive name for themselves have a **well-preserved culture** in place that they are known for. Yet, even though the need for such an intentional culture is understood, few are able to successfully implement the structures and processes that ensure this exists in an organisation.

Understanding how humans generally perceive change, and how change actually happens in a collective sum of people becomes **critical**, therefore, for organisations to plan wisely and see successful execution in this area. Our guide ***In it for the long-haul: Making culture stick*** will take you through some of the details of how exactly you can achieve an intentional culture in your organisation. To summarise, consider the following:

- The understanding people have of a culture goes beyond the day-to-day observations and is built in **mindsets** and beliefs formed over multiple experiences and long periods of time.
- There are 5 steps to change. For a person to achieve a desired change, he/she has to go through these steps, ideally with the **help** and **support** of others in their environment.
- To achieve overwhelming change, a **tipping point of 25%** buy-in needs to be reached. The best way to achieve this is to truly understand networks in the organisation and influence the right people.
- To truly internalise change, an organisation needs to **embed** it in key processes in the organisation so it becomes part of daily conversations and behaviours. These processes include hiring, appraisal, training and development, rewards and recognition, and socialisation.

To get you started on this journey, visit <u>budaya.app</u> to find out how you can keep a timely, deep understanding of how your people are doing.

All the best!

References

Abidin, A., 2021. *Designing and Systemising Organisational Culture. Skillshare course.*
LOEFFELHOLZ T.M., 2021. The 25% Tipping Point, YES!. Retrieved from:
https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/what-the-rest-of-the-world-knows/2020/11/03
/how-social-change-happens

SUDBRINK L., 2015. *The Five Steps of Change, American Management Association.*
Retrieved from: https://www.amanet.org/articles/the-five-steps-of-change/

Büdaya

Powered by **HAPPILY**

Visit *budaya.app* to find out
how Budaya can help your organisation