



Organisational Culture: Organic Evolution versus Deliberate Development

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Alignment of an organisation's culture with the values of its employees is a major contributor to employee satisfaction, wellbeing and consequently, organisational performance. Accordingly, misalignment of workplace culture and employee's values can negatively impact employee satisfaction. Values are widely cited as a crucial shaping factor in creating culture. Values and culture, in turn, are major contributors to achieving organisational goals and ultimately delivering against strategy. Organisational culture, employee's values, and organisational strategy should therefore be aligned to enable the sustainable, collective pursuit of strategic objectives. There are four known consequences for misalignment of culture and strategy¹:

1. **Lost sense of purpose**
2. **Disoriented employees**
3. **Damaged public image**
4. **Increased staff turnover**

Identifying, developing, and shaping culture to align with organisational strategy can be challenging. In pursuing an aligned culture and strategy, leaders can allow workplace culture to evolve organically (either actively or passively) they can deliberately build culture for the organisation, or they can apply a hybrid approach.



Organic Evolution

The organic evolution approach allows for organisational culture to develop without initial direction, or interference. Known as emergent culture, this can be a successful approach when guided by a cultural champion within the organisation. Implementing processes that shape the emergence of culture can capitalise on authentic values of employees to reflect a truly organic culture. Unchecked with leadership guidance or influence, emergent culture may manifest in a way that undermines the benefits of cultural and strategic alignment, realising one, or all, of the four broad consequences.

Deliberate Development

An organisation's culture can be built more deliberately through shaping factors such as values definition, people orientation, task orientation, and development of organisational subcultures². Deliberately building culture enables leaders to shape the culture in line with their vision and values. This deliberate approach helps align the cultural vision of leaders with the organisational culture that results. Leaders driving culture through a framework of culture-shaping activities should remain wary of misaligning their cultural vision with the values of the organisation's employees. Failure to remain agile and adapt to emerging, organic culture may cause misalignment.

Hybrid Approach

A hybrid approach balances the control of deliberate cultural development with the more passive approach of allowing culture to evolve organically. This balanced approach seeks to build a culture that is conducive to and aligned with strategy, yet agile enough to reflect evolution of strategy, objectives, environment, and people.

GSA Management Consulting has employed a hybrid approach to building culture, through the following key events:

1. Initial values creation by the two founding Managing Directors.
2. Continued deliberate building of culture with team growth, through a set of evolving values that combined the cultural vision for the company with the individual values and priorities of employees.
3. Actively seeking feedback on values and culture from the growing team. This was achieved through the establishment of a Cultural Advisory Team (CAT) comprised of a diverse range of staff across the organisation. After consolidating employee feedback, the CAT reviewed the Managing Directors' intent and refined a set of values to underpin the GSA Management Consulting culture.



What did this hybrid approach achieve?

- Cultural direction in line with the Managing Directors' vision
 - Employee input (and buy-in) to the company values
 - An organisation-wide understanding that leadership recognise that all employees are custodians of the GSA culture and have a voice in setting, maintaining and evolving that culture
- Flexibility to reassess strategy and values as the company grows to maintain alignment over time
 - An appreciation that as the organisation and the team grows and circumstances evolve, that strategy, values, and culture can also grow and evolve.

Leaders should remain aware of the risks and opportunities presented by organisational culture. Regardless of approach, nurturing the organisation's culture is crucial to foster a work environment that promotes employee wellbeing, satisfaction, engagement, and productivity. A harmonised organisational culture that is aligned with strategy will support organisations to pursue their strategic goals in a sustainable, successful and fulfilling way.

1. Deshler, R. (2017). *The Dangers of a Misalignment Between Culture and Strategy*. American Management Association.

2. *Understanding and Developing Organisational Culture*. (n.d.) Society for Human Resource Management.

“Allocating time to develop, review and align organisational culture will improve employee and organisational performance, reduce the likelihood of misalignment, and ultimately offer organisations an asymmetric return on time invested in getting culture right.”

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