



TALENT, ORGANIZATION & PEOPLE SOLUTIONS

Culture as Your Secret Performance Accelerator: Why Free Cold Brew Won't Save Your Bottom Line

Let's be honest: The ping-pong tables gathering dust in your office aren't fooling anyone. Your employees rush past them, eyebrows raised at colleagues who dare play during work hours. And that fancy cold brew on tap? It's mainly fueling late-night work sessions, with employees still hunched over keyboards at 7 p.m.

It's time to face the facts: Perks aren't culture. And mistaking one for the other could be costing you millions.

Culture as the Real Performance Driver (Hint: It's Not Free Snacks)

Experienced leaders know that genuine culture transformation is not “fluff” and requires much more than amenities. The evidence is clear: When strategically aligned with business objectives, culture becomes your most powerful performance accelerator:



Cash in the Bank

Organizations with robust accountability cultures outperform competitors on total shareholder return by 20 percent to 30 percent.¹



Revenue Rocket

The 100 Best Companies earn 8.5 times more revenue per employee than the U.S public market average.²

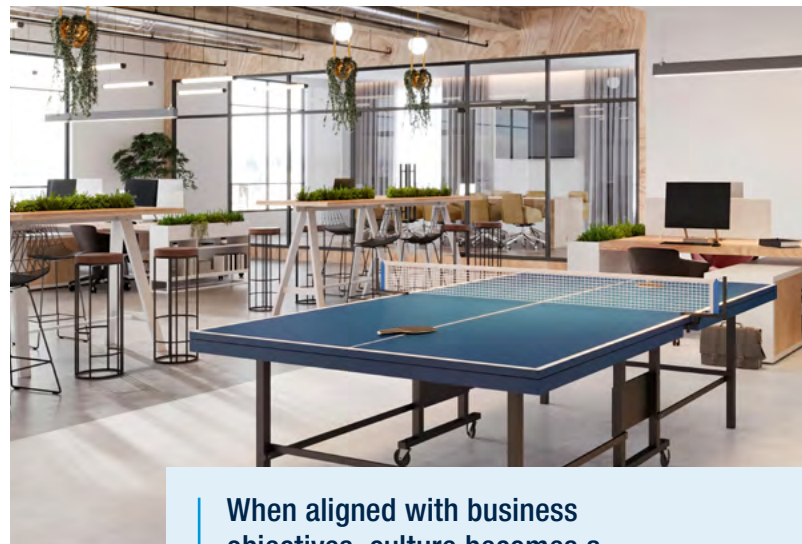


Innovation Engine

Teams with psychological safety identify significantly more operational improvements that directly impact their bottom line.³

Teal Reamer, a Managing Director in A&M's Talent, Organization and People (TOP) Solutions group, shared:

Organizations missing performance targets often have unproductive cultures, unclear expectations, meeting overload, micromanagement, accountability gaps and consequence hangovers from past failures. These culture killers sabotage strategy, demotivate teams and drive away talent. In today's market, culture isn't HR's concern. It's your competitive advantage.



When aligned with business objectives, culture becomes a powerful performance accelerator

¹ Mary C. Murphy, *Cultures of Growth*, Simon & Schuster, March 12, 2024.

² "Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For," Fortune, <https://fortune.com/ranking/best-companies>

³ Mary C. Murphy, *Cultures of Growth*



Cultural clashes remain the No. 1 reason why mergers fail and destroy value.

When to Pull the Culture Lever (Right Now)

Culture transformation becomes nonnegotiable during these critical inflection points:



Strategy Pivots

Culture determines whether your transformation succeeds or becomes an expensive failure.



Workplace Disruption

Post-COVID realities, gig economics and AI have fundamentally reshaped workforce expectations.



Growth Acceleration

Your current culture may be completely wrong for your next growth phase.



M&A Integration

Cultural clashes remain the No. 1 reason why mergers fail and destroy value.



Leadership Transitions

New leadership requires new ways of working.



Cost Takeout

Reenergize and focus the go-forward team to avoid paralysis.

It does not have to be one of these big moments to make meaningful change. Every day presents an opportunity to align your culture with performance goals and meet emerging challenges.

According to Mitch Lor-Fair, a Senior Director in A&M TOP Solutions,

The most successful organizations don't wait for crisis moments to reshape their culture but rather make small refinements on a regular basis to keep up with their market, business, operational and employee needs. When an organization tries to make a "dramatic shift" in their culture, it can be viewed as disingenuous and burdensome to employees who often feel more whiplashed and confused rather than invigorated. To drive a successful culture change, it's important to keep people apprised of changes and solicit their feedback along the way.





Defining performance-building behaviors and identifying where you and your people fall short is a first step toward culture transformation.

Culture in Action: A Transformation Story

Consider this example from the energy sector:

An energy company was consistently falling short on its product roadmap and failing to meet shareholder expectations, which began eroding trust at the leadership level. What was happening beneath the surface?

A comprehensive assessment revealed several cultural challenges:

- Unclear and competing priorities across departments
- Conflicting leadership agendas creating misalignment
- Inadequate project coordination and execution clarity
- Resource constraints as priorities shifted without transparency
- The expectation that a good culture was a “nice” culture

The result wasn’t just missed deadlines — it was diminishing stakeholder confidence and negative momentum in the business.

The turnaround focused on practical culture shifts:

- Clearly defined investment priorities and ways of working
- Establishing stronger governance for streamlined decision-making
- Redefining roles and responsibilities within the leadership team
- Creating accountability mechanisms that fostered collaboration
- Honest conversations that were professional and kind

A visible quick win was accelerated product delivery, a clear signal that restored stakeholder confidence and positive momentum in the organization.

Three Actions to Take This Monday Morning

Organizations that succeed do not wait for cultural transformation to become convenient; they recognize that navigating imperfect conditions is precisely what builds the resilience and adaptability they seek.

As leaders, you can take steps to evolve and advance your organization's culture. Don't wait for the perfect scenario. Here's your action plan:

1. Define Performance-Driving Behaviors

Start by identifying the unconscious beliefs, patterns and norms currently sabotaging your objectives. Map the specific behaviors, decision protocols and risk tolerance levels required to hit your targets. Conduct a candid self-assessment: Does your leadership team consistently model the desired behaviors?

Matt Campbell, Managing Director and A&M's TOP Solutions leader, noted:

We work with leadership teams to quickly drive clarity to what aspects of the organization's culture serve outcomes and stakeholder expectations, and which do not and should be replaced with new ways of working. By surfacing the culture tensions across stakeholders, we can create a strategy to build the new culture into mindsets, patterns and norms.

2. Activate Culture Through Leadership

Hold culture activation sessions with your leadership team. Remember: Culture cascades from the top. Establish metrics to measure culture alignment and redesign recognition systems to reward culture champions. Create a "culture dashboard" with the same visibility as your financial metrics.

According to Erin Gore, Managing Director in A&M's TOP Solutions:

While culture activation starts at the top, it requires embodiment at every level of the organization to truly create competitive advantage. It shows up in narratives and rituals, leadership approaches, workspaces, and how teams engage with each other and with customers and partners. A true shift in culture requires an intentional change management effort to build new muscles, mindsets and behaviors into the whole organization.

3. Embed Culture in Systems

Identify three operational mechanisms where culture must be embedded immediately, such as hiring profiles, compensation structures, or decision protocols. Culture change is iterative and will take time to build into the organization's DNA.

Teal Reamer points out,

Forward-thinking organizations design systems and structures with cultural intentionality, recognizing that structure reinforces behavior. Culture sticks when it's woven into how work actually happens, not when it's treated as a separate initiative. This is the difference between sustainable performance shifts and revisiting performance challenges every few years.



No matter where your organization is today, the path to cultural transformation starts with deliberate action. While culture can be broken in an instant, it's built through consistent choices. Start now. The steps you take today lay the foundation for a stronger, more aligned and resilient future.

The Executive's Accountability Test

In today's unforgiving business landscape, the margin between market leadership and mediocrity often comes down to one factor: whether your culture — from visible systems to invisible norms — actively drives performance or secretly sabotages it.

As you consider your business performance, answer these three questions honestly:



1 What specific results are we failing to achieve right now?



3 Where are our most dangerous gaps between aspiration and reality?



2 What culture shifts would enable those results?

Every day that your organization operates with misaligned culture creates compounding consequences, from missed opportunities to diminished engagement. Recognizing these disconnects and taking action isn't just good leadership; it's essential for sustainable success. That's a challenge worth addressing immediately. Reach out for a discussion today!

CONTACTS

When your organization needs to align culture with performance, contact our specialist team for practical, results-oriented solutions that deliver a measurable impact. Reach out to:



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