

Building Blocks of Culture for Facilities Management—Part IV, Publish Your Cultural Strategy

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To continue our exploration of strategy for building up culture within an organization, in partnership with the University of Chicago, we turn to building block number four, “Publish Your Cultural Strategy.” The first three building blocks we looked at were number one, Values (self-examination), number two, Strategy (selection of core values), and number three, Define Roles of Individuals and Leaders.

In this building block, we assemble all the component parts of the strategy that form a business plan or constitution for those within our organization. This document is a reference for our team, defining strategy in the form of values that we believe create engagement and success, both for the team and the overall organization.

This plan accomplishes several things: It gives us a clear vocabulary and set of terms that are easily referenced by all. It defines the actions, artifacts, and associated relationships with everyone in our 360-degree circle of influence. It presents a simple, easy-to-use template for every individual to apply to their daily work, and includes specific tools for our front-line supervision that provide evidence and experiences reinforcing our culture where it matters the most. It defines our strategy for accountability, alignment, and communication. Finally, the plan offers hiring guidance that helps the leaders and staff who will actively participate in our new culture. As with many documents in today’s organizations, the plan is “living” and is updated at least annually.

The outline for the cultural strategy is as follows:

CULTURAL CONSTITUTION

This section of our cultural strategy represents what we as an organization believe about ourselves. The way we characterize our culture is important; we define our culture based on the values we have selected for

ourselves and that we believe will create the highest level of engagement, professionalism, and community within our organization. A culture that promotes the growth, respect, and professionalism of each individual and our organization as a whole is the most productive. In one sense, the constitution establishes the basic beliefs and values our staff members can always rely on. Within it, we describe how these values were selected and exactly how we interpret values such as respect, accountability, collaboration, and others.

We select our values and define them ourselves; and we promote these definitions so that everyone understands them the same way. Change is often stressful to an organization; however, our cultural constitution expresses to everyone within our organization the basic understanding of our culture, so that our values remain the same no matter what happens.

ROLES OF INDIVIDUAL AND LEADERS

Another key to our cultural strategy is the work we have done through facilitated meetings and individual research to define the roles of individuals and leaders within our organization. This is based on a 360-degree action plan and our understanding of the “Covey Circle of Influence.”

Everyone in our organization has four basic working relationships: 1) with supervisors or leaders; 2) with those who report to them; 3) with their peers; and 4) with their customers or their organization’s customers. Their interactions with these four constituents should demonstrate and reinforce the cultural values we have selected if they are properly guided. We have defined these interactions in terms of both kinetic actions and static artifacts (evidence). In addition, we have daily, weekly, monthly, and annual activities combined with artifacts.

We recognize that it is not the “great” actions that demonstrate our value-based culture as much as the

small, everyday actions and interactions that reinforce our values. This is the harder but more important work that goes into creating our culture. Within this section of our cultural strategy, we create templates or matrices for our staff and leaders that list our relationships, artifacts, and actions in the frequency with which we intend to execute them. These are openly shared in a common format so they can be worked into a comprehensive, cohesive document.

ROLE OF CHAMPIONS

Also within this section is a description of our leaders' roles, to help us identify champions and guide them in contributing to the creation of organizational culture. It is understood that while leaders are important, they cannot create the culture by themselves, nor can individuals operating alone. Champions are identified—at least one per department—who can magnify the efforts of both leadership and individuals and provide energy and enthusiasm in promoting our value-based culture. The tools, techniques, and communication strategies made available to our champions are defined within this section, along with the expectations and reporting relationships between leadership and their respective champions.

TOOLS FOR FRONT-LINE SUPERVISION

As taught in APPA's Supervisor's Toolkit, there are several best practices involved in organizing, deploying, rewarding, and enhancing the relationship between supervisors and front-line staff. In this section, we define and evaluate current supervisory practices and examine the intention and inclusion of our cultural values within this critical relationship. Where positive examples of actions and artifacts reinforcing our cultural values can be identified, they are reinforced and promoted. Where limiting values are identified, they are removed.

We try to implement three to five specific actions and artifacts that reinforce our culture within the reporting relationship of supervisors and front-line staff. This relationship is perhaps the most important in that it encompasses the largest number of individuals within our department. For a cultural value to take hold, it must be successful within this peer group.

ACCOUNTABILITY, ALIGNMENT, AND SUSTAINMENT

An organizational culture cannot survive unless it is nurtured and sustained. To achieve this, we must build upon the previous sections of our cultural strategy and define for our organization how we—both individuals and leaders—will hold each other accountable and

how we will measure our progress. We will continue to conduct our cultural values survey and look for improvement and/or identification of limiting values. We will monitor ourselves, our leaders, and our champions. Our leaders will test our organization to verify that we are creating experiences, beliefs, actions, artifacts, and results that reinforce our cultural values. This will be measured empirically. Where there is deviation from a contributing value, we will identify this as a gap and improve our strategy to create alignment.


We recognize that without continual nurturing and growth, the culture of the organization will revert to a default culture based on strong personalities and, most likely, limiting values. Given this reality, the sustainment of our culture will require continual reinforcement through accountability and alignment.

HIRING FOR VALUES AND SUPPORT OF OUR CULTURE

An important part of our cultural strategy is the recognition that we can directly impact our culture through the people we hire. Jack Welch, formerly of General Electric, often said he would "hire for values and train for skills." Based on close collaboration with our organization's human resource department, this section addresses each component of the hiring process in the context of a potential employee's ability to embrace our cultural values. Those individuals who will not support our cultural values are not viable candidates, so it is important to screen them. But it is even more important to identify those individuals who might serve as champions for our value-based culture through their actions, beliefs, and example.

DEFINITION OF TERMS, PRACTICES, AND BELIEFS

While seemingly unnecessary, a common understanding of the new terms and definitions associated with this cultural initiative is crucial. The open communication style and interaction required to achieve our results are more difficult without a mutual understanding of basic terminology. Borrowing from APPA's practice with other published sources, it is necessary to share a well-socialized glossary of terms and their definitions in many formats. A simple and straightforward presentation must always accompany our cultural strategy publication.

Building block number four is the detailed outline of a best-practice cultural strategy; in our next column, we will explore the implementation of this strategy. 

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