

Lead On

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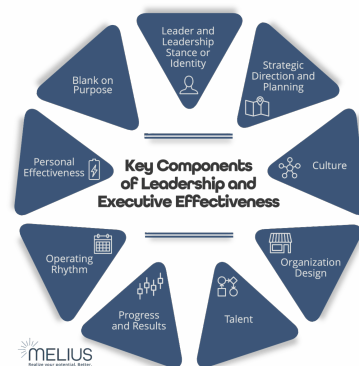
Welcome back to Lead On!

Thus far in this *Leadership and Executive Effectiveness* series, we started at the top, first with **Leader Stance** in February, then moving to **Strategic Direction and Planning** in March. This month, we are diving into **Culture**.

Where strategic direction and planning may be about *what* work gets done, culture is about *how* work gets done.

It represents a collection of visible and invisible elements that shape the shared meaning of what is valued in the organization, how work gets done, and how the team works together or operates within their relationships to accomplish work.

Click the image to enable an expandable view.



Treat Culture as 'Hard Stuff'

Culture is often perceived as the “soft” stuff. Yet both research and practice have demonstrated time and again how culture can determine or hinder strategy, change, and overall organization success. In my experience, culture is hard...maybe you can relate. So, while it may be perceived as “soft”, treat culture as the *hard stuff*.

A Starting Point

It often starts with identifying the **core values** needed for the organization to help attain the desired direction—what is important to the organization when it comes to how its purpose, mission, vision, work, etc. are accomplished.

Often this is where organizations stop.

In doing so, it leaves room for personal interpretation—what you think Leadership or Integrity means might be different than what another thinks. This can lead to different behaviors and practices that can pull the organization away from the intended culture. It is important to clearly define each core value.

Once the core values are identified and defined, I often take it a step further by outlining **expected behaviors** for each value across employee groups. The way a front-line employee can impact and shape the culture through their work and relationships is different than a senior leader. And, with that in mind, identifying observable behaviors that would indicate someone is demonstrating the value across front-line employees, supervisors/project leads, mid-level managers, and senior leadership (you may notice that seems like a career progression—more on that later).

A Few Other Key Practices

Core values, expected behaviors, and culture are not something for which HR alone is responsible. Nor is culture just a few inspiring messages or annual events.

Senior leaders must personally own and model the desired culture—integrating into daily practices of what they and the organization does and how they do it, reinforcing it through structures and systems, and holding themselves—individually and collectively as a team—and others accountable.

An example of reinforcing it through structures and systems is integrating the expected behaviors across employee groups into employee development, performance management, and career development.

Another key ingredient? **Leadership teams truly playing for the team.** Not just agreeing on working norms for decision making and communication, but being deeply committed to the team and the organizational success above their individual interests. This requires having healthy dialogue, mutual accountability, and continually focus on improving effectiveness—individual and collective self-awareness, behaviors, actions, results, etc.



Final Thoughts

There's much more we could unpack around Culture, but I'll pause here for now. 😊 (And yes, I'm noticing a trend—I do tend to get a little excited and share a lot in these articles.)

I'd love to hear your thoughts—what resonates, what you would like to explore further, or where you might need support. Reach out and let's continue the conversation!

Until next month, Lead On!

Tara



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