

Organizational Development through Creating Culture Change

By Patricia Heyman



Patricia Heyman, MSW, LCSW, CPC works with top leaders in organizations to define and demonstrate leadership behaviors individually and to foster leadership in Executive Teams. The focus is on Leadership, Productivity and Collaboration as keys to strategic results. She approaches organizations with an eye toward leadership development at all levels. She has a keen eye for assessing organizational systems and a dynamic approach to assisting leaders in the development of themselves and their teams to enhance business results. Prior to the

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I have spent a number of years working with individual leaders and leadership teams to implement results based on strategic planning. Individual productivity when combined with alignment of teams allows for a new culture. As an executive coach and team alignment coach, I have realized that leadership behaviors are built on a daily basis with intention while using the technology and people who are already available.

Results show that in order to create a culture where productivity is integrated into the management structure of an organization, individual leadership behaviors that relate to self management and leading others are an important factor. Although this article contains reference to simple every day behaviors please consider the changes that one small shift can have in an entire organization.

Here, we will discuss four aspects of culture and culture change that can be affected by behavior changes that can occur on a daily basis.

1. Proactive vs. Reactive
2. Focus vs. Interruptions and Distractions
3. Alignment and Collaboration vs. Competition
4. Implementing Strategic Goals

Proactive vs. Reactive Cultures

Many executives define their culture as reactive vs. proactive and express a desire for more proactive thinking. In order to have this occur, a simple set of changes across the leadership stream can often make a big difference.

At present many have developed cultures of interruption which consist of constant e-mail checking, drop ins or drive bys and a sense that every issue must be dealt with immediately. This creates a lack of focus on projects and a sense of overwhelm. These patterns start at the top executive level and can be changed within the entire organization when the mandate comes from the top both in words and actions. As we all know, behavior change is a challenge so creating processes for this change from the top down is vital.

When the job description of the CEO is given it always includes proactive thinking and networking with other executives to create cutting edge business practices. With a reactive culture the top executive is often caught up in internal affairs so that priorities are often delayed and time for visioning is lost.

Just the daily pattern of coming to the office, opening the computer and immediately being drawn into the inbox creates the reactive pattern. Often planned work, meetings or projects can be overruled by the contents of an e-mail. Just the simple act of bringing up the calendar first can begin the change to proactive thinking.

Focus vs. Interruption and Distraction

Think about a typical day in the office, on travel or in meetings. How often are unexpected interruptions and distractions the rule rather than the exception? The “open door policy” has worked to create the distractions and can be altered to allow for specific times of availability for most communication. Focus on priorities can be put on the calendar as work time and colleagues can be informed of the available time except for true emergencies.

Some of the elements that discourage the above are the cultures of interruption that have been fostered by greater information availability and stated concern for immediate responses.

Suggestions for small changes with great impact:

1. Go to Tools and change the option to open your PC onto the calendar so you can review your day and what is scheduled for that day.
2. Use the calendar for all activities not just meetings.
3. Create a baseline calendar for all activities and meetings that are recurring.
4. Schedule time for work with yourself as you would an appointment with someone else.
5. Create times of availability that are on your calendar and communicated to others.
6. Make a time on the calendar for checking e-mail. If you feel more comfortable scheduling several in a day, do that and stick to it.
7. Turn off signals or pictures that indicate when you have an e-mail.
8. As a leader begin with your team and create this system for everyone.
9. Set up regular meetings with direct reports, project partners and the boss.
10. Have your yearly goals, projects and 1:1 meetings in your task system.
11. Integrate tasks with the calendar so things that need to be done get done when necessary.

Alignment and Collaboration vs. Competition

I am going to approach this area just as a way to invite consideration. I am aware that this could be an entire book of discussion about business practices. There are many references to the importance of the Leadership Team such as Jim Collins, Good to Great, and Patrick Lencioni in the Five Dysfunctions of the Leadership Team and Zaffron and Logan, The Three Laws of Performance.

In my experience there are many cultures where ideas and discussion are discouraged unintentionally whereby leaders and developing leaders miss an opportunity to contribute. Part of that is fostered by the competition created among peers. In the LAI 360 Assessment given to participants at Linkage’s Global Institute of Leadership Development (GILD), the peer relationships are often where the lower scores occur in evaluating leadership behaviors. Some of

that comes from the lack of time spent in teams of equals especially at the top. Also, there are concerns about conflict thinking that it is dangerous when in fact if done with process, conflict can create great solutions, with thinking” out of the box”.

This area if developed will revolutionize business to allow leaders to be in a continual state of development. Imagine a leadership team meeting where members actually asked their peers for solution suggestions for issues within their own department. Eliminating the need to look good. The available assistance from one’s peers as well as the head of the organization is invaluable.

Coaching which fosters collaboration as a goal, on an individual level and for teams creates the willingness to risk as a group and to lay issues on the table. Changing the culture to be solution oriented rather than placing blame strengthens the team. In addition it acts as a support to the Top Executive to move into greater visioning and networking trusting the team of leaders to fulfill the goals of the organization.

Implementing Strategic Goals

In my experience as an Executive Coach and Team Alignment Coach, I am often told by leaders that although strategic meetings take place the execution aspect is not successful. Through the cultures of interruption and distraction created in recent times there is a loss of focus. The simple act of coming to work, turning on the computer and going directly into e-mail can create a reactive rather than proactive day.

Following through on strategic goals necessarily requires proactive leaders and managers. These skills can be taught to emerging leaders and individual contributors as part of the mentoring process. One aspect of aligned teaming is focus, opportunities for real communication, and delegation processes with accountability.

Often the culture dictates immediate responses as indicated above. This has led to constant e-mail checking and drop ins with a neglect of regular meetings. In my experience this has created a culture of interruptions and distractions leading to difficulty with focus. To do lists are made daily without the overall structure of the strategic goals and project organization that leads to successful completion.

With the behavior focus and changes described the result is that the top leaders are aware of the strategy plan on a daily basis and can plan work that will implement those both individually and as a team.

Suggestions Reviewed:

1. Create regular leadership team meetings at least bi-weekly for 1 ½ hours and put in the calendar on a recurring basis
2. Coordinate Tasks with Calendar
3. Create task categories to match
 - a. Yearly goals

- b. Projects
- c. 1:1 Meetings
- d. Actions

4. Calendar actions

5. Set aside work time on the calendar

These four areas if approached with intention can be the foundation for culture change that will bring in proactive thinking, alignment, focus, and accountability.

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With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

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