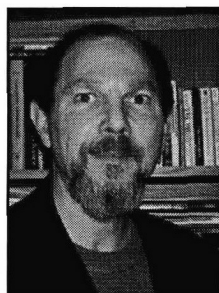# Realigning Organization Culture for Optimal Performance: Six principles & eight practices

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Abstract

Organization culture can be a strong enabler or an insurmountable obstacle to implementing change in organizations. Most organization change efforts require some degree of culture shift. Yet changing an organization's culture continues to be a highly challenging and often elusive endeavor. After all, culture by definition provides stability, continuity, and predictability to organizational life. This article discusses six principles and eight practices for realigning organization culture to support and facilitate the achievement of strategic change goals. The principles address common errors made and the practices offer an integrated, comprehensive roadmap for culture change. The principles and practices are discussed in the context of the relevant literature and several examples from the consulting work of the authors are provided to illustrate application and approaches.

The stories are all too familiar. Wall Street analysts call the planned merger a brilliant combination that brings together complementary products, yet post merger integration problems undermine the expected synergies and realization of anticipated shareholder value. A company spends tens of millions of dollars on a new information technology system designed to integrate all facets of the business, yet post-implementation issues including an unanticipated resistance by some business divisions to use the new system delay expected return on investment. The leadership of a regional health care system reach consensus to implement a "shared services center" to gain economies of scale and improve quality delivery of operational support services to its acute care hospitals. Yet implementation bogs down badly when local hospital leaders
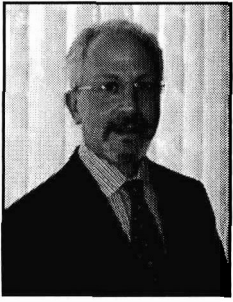
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stall transitioning their local services to the new center and eventually the idea is scrapped. A new CEO is brought in from the outside to "turnaround" a floundering consumer products company, yet after some initial successes, the effort stalls and the CEO departs.

In companies of all sizes and across industries, even the right business decisions sometimes fail to achieve desired results. Taylor-Bianco and Schemerhorn (2006) in their recent review confirmed the fact that rarely do major organization change initiatives achieve "substantial success." Unfortunately, their research reached similar conclusions to one conducted by Kotter (1996) over a decade earlier. In our experience, these failures often are not the product of incomplete business analysis or planning, the absence of senior leadership commitment, insufficient resource allocations, or even as many suggest, execution capability. Rather, these failures often result from a single, powerful, and somewhat invisible source: organization culture. Organization culture can be an insurmountable obstacle to implementing strategic change in organizations. However, when attended to systematically and guided to support and reinforce desired strategic goals, culture can accelerate the achievement of desired results and enable optimal levels of performance.

There are many definitions of organization culture. We view culture from the ideational perspective (Martin, 2000), and thus define it as the shared beliefs and values of members of an organization that provide meaning to and influence daily work life. Similar to Louis (1985) and Schein, (1992), we understand these beliefs and values affect work behavior in tacit and nuanced ways. These shared beliefs and values are expressed in organizational life through various more visible manifestations including business strategies, performance targets and metrics, management prac-

tices, formal and informal rules that govern behavior, traditions, stories and other symbols. While these different cultural expressions are based on the underlying beliefs and values (Schein, 1992), once established they serve to confirm and reinforce those beliefs and values. What results is forceful reciprocal chain of influence that resists disruption and change. We also do not view culture as a monolithic construct where all beliefs and values are shared strongly or entirely across the organization. Instead, we acknowledge that most large organizations are comprised of diverse sub-cultures. Yet we also believe that these sub-cultures share fundamentally similar ways of thinking about things and doing things that distinguish one organization culture from another.

The challenge for organization leaders is that organization culture is not readily changed or adapted. Influenced initially by organization founders and continually shaped by subsequent generations of leaders, culture forms and evolves over time, becoming deeply embedded and layered in an organization's psyche and impacting how business issues are perceived, interpreted and responded to (Martin, 2002; Schein, 1992). It exerts its influence in covert and subtle ways and provides an important stabilizing and continuity function in organizational life. As a result, it serves to perpetuate the status quo. Additionally, since in most cases, culture is shaped by successful responses to past business challenges and effective organizational and group problem-solving (Schein, 1992), it becomes a potent self-reinforcing force that is difficult to change directly. One of our clients characterized trying to change his organization's culture as "attempting to grasp the wind," and another to "kicking a bean bag chair." However, this opaque force can be

intentionally shaped and guided. Based on our experience working with numerous organizations to address cultural impediments to desired change, we have developed six principles and eight practices that have helped leaders realign their organization cultures to support their strategic change goals. These will be discussed in the remainder of this article.

Six Principles: Guiding the Realignment Effort

These six principles provide overarching guidelines for framing the conduct of culture realignment efforts.

Principle 1: Understand the Required Scope of Change

Before initiating any culture realignment effort, it's imperative to understand the magnitude and nature of change required. Very few, if any, culture realignment efforts attempt to change all aspects of a current culture. Even where the magnitude of change deemed necessary is considerable, it is very unlikely the current culture will need to be replaced entirely. In fact, trying to do so may prove unproductive and even destructive. Rather, specific cultural attributes that no longer are useful for addressing emergent business challenges or future strategic aims need to be targeted for change or elimination. Most commonly, some aspects of an organization's current culture are likely to be key contributors to future success and need to be strengthened and leveraged. Delineating the relevant from the irrelevant and the facilitative from the hindering aspects of the current culture is essential for success.

Principle 2: Model, Teach, and Embed

Organizational leaders need to be the primary architects and sponsors of culture realignment.

This is not work that can be delegated. Leaders need to model the desired behaviors of the preferred culture, teach others how to enact such behaviors, and ensure that appropriate formal and informal practices required to embed such behaviors in daily work life are established. As Schein (1992) astutely noted, organization members take their cues from organizational leaders as to what's important and desirable. Leaders need to be viewed as personally committed to the change they advocate, acting in ways congruent with the new behaviors they are expecting of others, and holding others accountable for similar consistency in desired behaviors. Such actions help validate that the desired change is a reality, establish the alignment of others with the change, and serve to motivate others to learn the nature of the new performance expectations and ways of working. An important part of this is for leaders to convey a strong business case for culture change by explaining why change is required at this particular point in time and articulating a compelling vision for the change by explaining how the desired changes in behavior and practices are expected to contribute to future success.

Principle 3: Use Multiple Levers

Organization culture is very complex and multi-faceted. Therefore, its realignment requires the use of multiple levers to effect change. Two key categories of such levers include what we term instrumental and symbolic levers. Both are important to any comprehensive culture realignment strategy. Instrumental levers focus directly on modifying the work context and how work is performed. Symbolic levers influence people's perceptions, attitudes and the meanings they attribute to organizational decisions, actions and practices. A client of one of the authors asked him whether culture is changed by first changing people's behavior or first changing how people think about things. The answer is that both behavior

and cognitions need to be addressed concurrently. The instrumental levers primarily affect behavior and the symbolic levers impact how people think about things. These strategies are discussed further in the Practices section that follows.

Principle 4: Create Broad Involvement of Key Organization Constituencies

Culture realignment efforts require the concerted effort and contribution of all organization members. Broad based meaningful engagement and participation across business units, functions, and levels is a key mechanism for mobilizing and building commitment and ownership. Culture change is accomplished by getting groups of people to change how they perform their work together. This requires personal commitment and internalization of the change, not compliance. One fact that has been confirmed consistently since the early research conducted by Coch and French (1948) is that people more readily commit to change with enthusiasm and are willing to help enact it when they've had the opportunity to understand its rationale, have their voice heard, and are provided concrete ways to contribute to its design and implementation (Axelrod, 2000; Burke, 2002; Kotter, 1996). As such, effective culture realignment efforts need to tap into the wisdom and talents of all organizational members and move on two primary fronts concurrently — leadership-driven and grassroots-enabled.

Principle 5: Manage With Rigor and Discipline

This principle refers to the importance of managing culture realignment efforts as other important business or operational improvement initiatives are done in most companies. This means detailed planning, realistic estimates of resource requirements, commitment to meeting those requirements, and the orchestration of coordinated and integrated actions. Effective culture realignment plans should be comprised of sequenced actions,

defined milestones, key deliverables expected to be produced, and timelines for producing them. Managing with rigor and discipline also includes establishing a clear set of governance, management, and accountability structures to oversee, steward, control, and monitor the established plan of action. As a result, it is more likely that the realignment work will remain on leadership's "radar screen" together with other important business priorities, receive the ongoing attention and resources needed for success, and provide a means for adjusting plans to emergent circumstances.

Principle 6: Integrate Into Daily Work Life

As we noted, organization culture evolves in a subtle and almost "stealth" manner. For this very reason, its realignment is most effective when such culture realignment efforts are fully integrated into the day-to-day management of operations and organization work life, rather than treating it as a "programmatic" effort. Labeling culture realignment as a "special" initiative apart from the real work of the organization is dooming it to almost sure failure (Levin, Proctor, & Thibault, 2001). It's important to "just do it" rather than talking about it. That means beginning to operate in the new desired way in all decisions and actions. It is not necessary to create enormous hoopla and fanfare about it.

Most leaders we've worked with and shared these guiding principles comment that theses tenets seem like common sense. Yet, these same leaders have admitted that they have neglected one or more of them when attempting to address culture-related issues in the past. As leaders develop and guide culture realignment efforts in their own
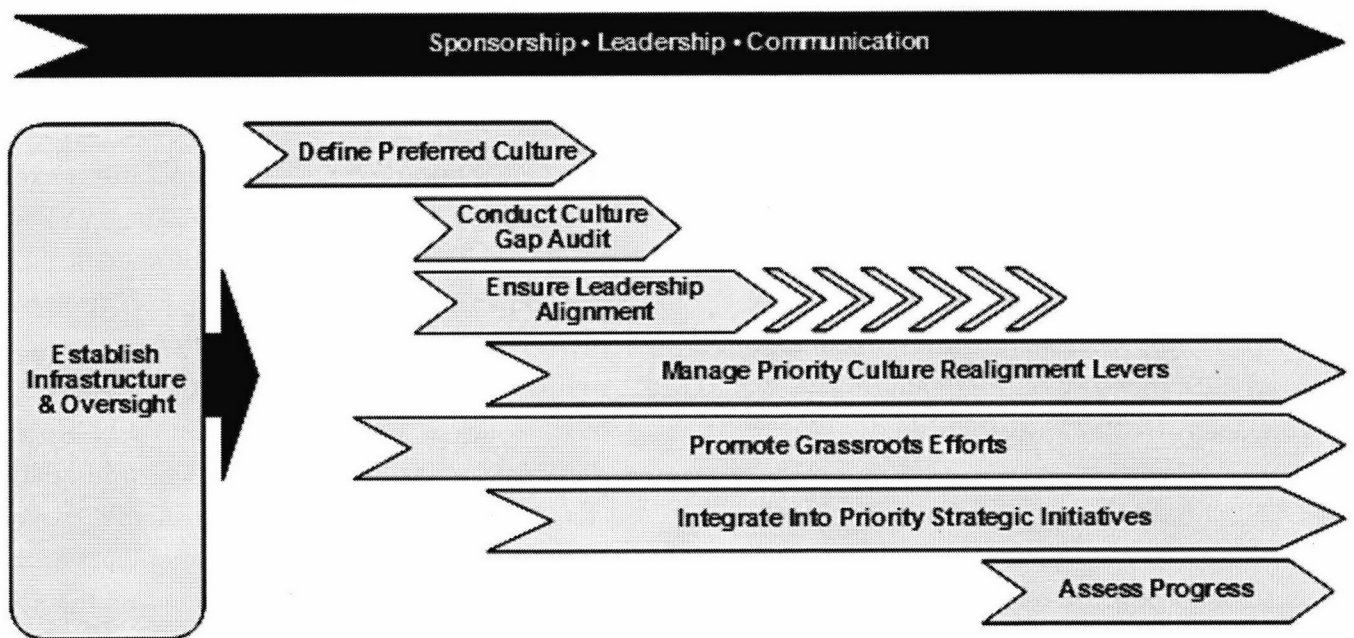
Figure 1. Culture Realignment Roadmap.

organizations, they will find their efforts are accelerated when all six principles are followed. The following eight practices help to put these principles into action.

Eight Practices: The Culture Realignment Roadmap

While culture realignment work is complex and can appear daunting at first, there are clear, concrete and tested strategies for executing this work. These are outlined below as eight practices. These eight practices comprise what we refer to as the Culture Realignment Roadmap and are depicted in Figure 1. Each organization undertaking this type of effort should not merely replicate all aspects of each practice, but rather will benefit more by using this roadmap as a guide and customizing their approach to best fit their unique context, needs and challenges.

Practice 1: Establish Infrastructure and Oversight

Culture realignment efforts work best when there's a supporting management amd accountability infrastructure to provide appropriate oversight. We generally begin by gaining agreement with executive leaders on the outcomes and desired results of their realignment efforts. We also work to clarify their and others' key roles during the effort along with decision-making parameters and processes. In almost all situations, we've advised that a "Culture Realignment Steering Team" (CRST) be established.

The CRST should be comprised of formal and informal leaders. Its primary role is to manage and execute the culture realignment effort and keep other senior leaders and key stakeholders involved and informed. The work of the CRST includes first gaining a shared understanding of organization culture and how it impacts business performance, and creating the specific "business case" for culture realignment in their organization. This is often followed by conducting benchmarking to learn from the experiences of other organizations that have conducted culture realignment efforts, developing a communications strategy and plan to support the culture realignment effort, and overseeing the development of the culture realignment strategy and plan development. Such a plan should comply with proven approaches for successful project management (Phillips, Bothwell & Snead, 2002). These include breaking the larger effort down into manageable parts such as phases, outlining the major tasks and activities that comprise each phase and their duration, key outcomes or deliverables to be produced by each phase of work, resources required to perform the planned work, and specific accountabilities for achieving the results desired. As an example, the founder CEO of a mid-sized e-commerce company decided that a realignment effort towards creating a stronger performance-based culture was needed. One key aspect of this new culture was to instill a widely held sense by all employees and managers that they were "owners of the business" and would act accordingly.

The CEO appointed his senior operations executive as team leader for the CRST. The CRST was formally chartered to develop the specific culture realignment plan and to manage execution of that plan. This CRST was comprised of a cross-section of formal and informal leaders from different business areas, levels and roles in the company to demonstrate visibly the desired cultural quality of shared ownership and the accountability associated with it. While only a couple members of the senior leadership team participated on this team, the CEO made it clear that all members of the senior team had shared responsibility for the success of the culture realignment effort. His commitment to this was evidenced in part by establishing

a standing item on the senior team's regular meeting agenda to review progress of the culture realignment effort, share success stories and key learnings, as well as other refine ideas for how to strengthen this work.

Usually the CRST formally charters a variety of cross-functional teams comprised of managers and employees from different business divisions to carry out the specific culture realignment work associated with the realignment plan. Each team is accountable to the CRST for meeting its defined deliverables within budget and timeline. A critical success factor is ensuring the time commitment expected from team members is defined and agreed to by their supervisors, as well as rebalancing their existing workloads as needed to accommodate this special assignment. Some CRSTs create a Program Management Office (PMO) to manage the day to day logistics of multiple related projects. The PMO is charged with overseeing, coordinating, documenting,, and ensuring sufficient integration across the different work groups operating. The PMO may also provide common templates for status reporting and issues management, as well as facilitating learnings across these different work groups. Often the PMO is comprised of a small team of line managers and supported by dedicated staff resources.

Practice 2: Define the Preferred Culture

Successful organization culture realignment efforts must begin with reaching agreement among senior leaders and key stakeholder groups about the preferred future culture required to help successfully achieve business goals and implement planned changes. This definition describes the key characteristics of the preferred future culture and serves as an important reference point for guiding the effort and gauging progress. We've often advised leaders to integrate features of this preferred future culture definition into their description of the organization's vision. We've found that a useful preferred future culture definition describes in clear behavioral terms the key characteristics and attributes of the desired culture—making clear what actions and behaviors are desirable. This frequently includes an affirmation, modification and/or reframing of the company's current core values to ensure their continued relevance and alignment with current business goals and strategy. This process of defining the preferred future culture can help organization leadership reexamine their beliefs and assumptions underlying current operational and management practices to assess their continued relevance and usefulness. An important aspect of this work is translating the values into daily work life behaviors so that all organization members understand how they will be expected to conduct business in ways that exemplify these values. See Figure 2 (p. 36) for an example of a future preferred culture profile for a not-for-profit healthcare company. For example, in this profile the culture attribute *Candor* was behaviorally operationalized as being truthful, open, frank, and direct in all communications, speaking the "truth" even when it was something difficult to say, and speaking such truth respectfully.

While we have used a variety of different approaches for defining a preferred future culture, one in particular has demonstrated consistent success. This is the convening of large group work session over multiple days (Axelrod, 2000; Bunker & Alban, 2006; Weisbord & Janoff, 1995). Participants often include senior leaders and a cross-section of other key formal and informal leaders representing key organizational stakeholder groups. We have conducted these sessions with as few as 25-30 people and with as many as 250. What is important is to engage a "critical mass" representing diverse constituencies of the organization. In some instances, key customers
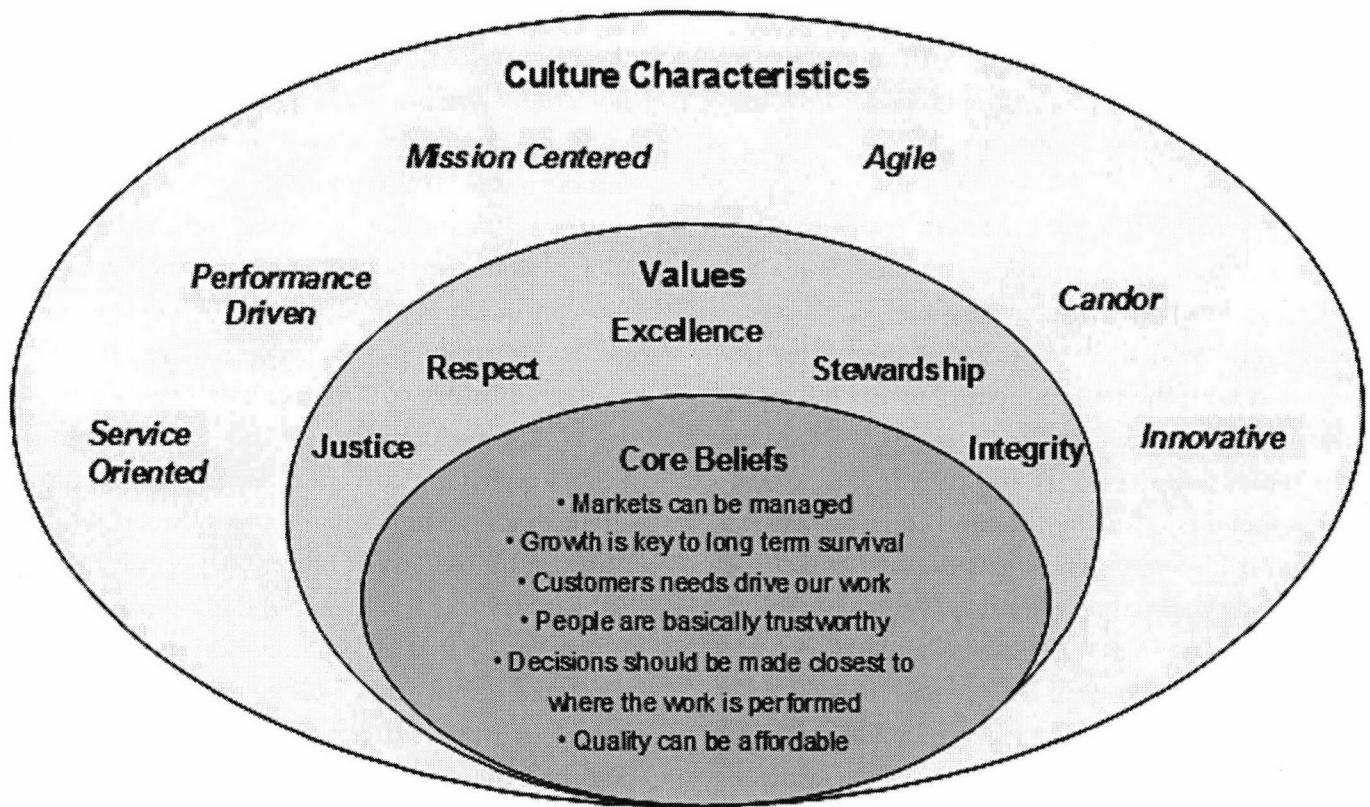
Figure 2. Example of Preferred Culture Profile

(Note: This profile is shorthand representation of the preferred future culture. Each culture characteristic is defined in behavioral terms and each value is translated into behaviors and practices)

and suppliers may be invited to participate in all or selected segments of the session. In our experience, the keys to success include having a highly structured, yet flexible meeting design and skilled facilitation.

The output of this type of session is reaching consensus on the core beliefs, values, and operating characteristics of the preferred culture needed for future success. This "culture profile" is usually then taken out by participants to their various constituencies for review and additional input. Once the preferred future profile is ratified, all organizational members need to be engaged in

learning about the implications and new expectations for their daily work life. Some clients have chosen to draft a brief narrative titled "Our Preferred Culture In Action" to assist in this educational effort. This future tense narrative describes in vivid and concrete detail how the preferred culture is being enacted and experienced by different stakeholders. This type of description helps convey explicit expectations for all organizational members and serves to inspire and motivate them to help realize it (Levin, 2000). We've learned that this type of highly inclusive approach creates a broader base of commitment quickly and generates more thorough and com-

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plete definition of the preferred future culture. This helps sustain aligned action over the longer term.

Practice 3: Conduct Culture Gap Audit

Once the preferred future culture is articulated, conduct of an initial audit is important to determine the magnitude and focus of change in the current culture required to actualize the preferred culture. In addition to identifying gaps between the current and preferred culture, this audit reveals where and how the preferred culture may already be in practice. We've generally used a combination of approaches for this audit including individual and group interviews, surveys, structured observation, and document analysis. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the respective advantages and disadvantages of each culture inquiry method. However, using all of these in a combined approach leverages the advantages and minimizes the limitations of employing alone any one approach.

The behaviors and practices defined in the preferred culture profile and narrative can be translated into a survey tool that is highly distinctive to the organization. This type of assessment tool generally asks organizational members to evaluate the extent that the desired behaviors and practices are reflective of current organizational life. Surveys also enable comparisons across business units, divisions, departments and positions to determine leading practices that can be emulated, and areas that will need focused attention. Individual and group interviews provide more depth into the dynamics and operation of current beliefs, norms and practices, as well as the meaning attached to them. We've often used interviews to delve deeper into survey responses to help explain them. In particular, this audit should focus on learning the aspects of the current culture that are congruent and supportive of the desired change and those that may hinder it. Information collected from structured observations of the workplace and work practices can be explored usefully in the interviews. The members of the culture are in the best position to help explain the meaning attached to observed cultural expressions and artifacts. Finally, we've also conducted reviews and analyses of key management practices including how planning decision-making, resource allocations and communications are conducted, as well as human resources management policies and processes. One CEO client remarked how the culture audit helped her to identify quickly the high priority culture areas requiring realignment and change. More specifically, she and her leadership team learned that a strong deference for authority, risk avoidance, and belief that good decisions require comprehensive analysis evident in the current culture was incompatible with her vision for an agile and innovative company. The team also learned that the strong company value for collaboration had evolved into such a "politicized" process in which people felt compelled to "touch base" with so many others before making a decision that the whole process was excruciatingly slow. And to her surprise she learned that some aspects of the current culture such as strong shared values for integrity, a high achievement orientation, and norms promoting a strong work ethic were consistent with what was considered crucial to realizing her vision and the established business goals. This is true for most organizations. As discussed earlier, some aspects of the existing culture will continue to be important to carry forward for future success. As a result of the culture audit, her senior leadership together with their established CRST was able to develop a specific customized culture realignment strategy that leveraged and built upon some cultural attributes while targeting others with fine precision for change or elimination.

Practice 4: Ensure Leadership Modeling

The importance of the earlier stated principle regarding leadership modeling, teaching and embedding culture cannot be overemphasized. As such, it is included as a key practice. All too often a CEO will assume that senior leadership is in complete agreement about what needs to be done and why, only to find out later that they were not. We approach culture realignment by working first with senior leaders and then supporting their efforts to engage members of their extended leadership early on to reach agreement on the specific scope and focus of culture change needed, as well their role and accountabilities in the effort. A specific emphasis is placed on their appreciation for how influential their own behavior is to the effort. An important part of this work is for leaders to discuss, define, and agree on the specific behaviors and management practices they need to enact individually and collectively to create and nourish the preferred culture and promote daily work environments that emulate it.

One of the authors worked with senior leaders of a health care company to define the specific leadership behaviors needed to demonstrate the preferred future culture. The aim was to translate each preferred culture characteristic defined previously into concrete leader behaviors, actions, and practices. Their shared commitment to modeling and reinforcing these behaviors in daily work life became known as their "Leadership Covenant." Each senior leader then engaged their respective direct reports in similar discussions and dialogue resulting in their own shared commitments. This process continued cascading down to the first line supervisors. This strategy is consistent with viewing culture formation as a social learning and meaning creation endeavor requiring dialogue and reflective discussions. It also helps the construction of a new social reality and serves to build a sense of shared accountabili-

ty among leaders' for their individual and collective behavior and actions.

Effective culture realignment requires leaders to be held firmly accountable for their role in modeling, teaching, and embedding the preferred culture into daily work life, and thus living up to their commitments with each other. We have used a multi-rater feedback process to help leaders understand the extent that others view them as acting in ways consistent with the preferred culture. Based on the feedback received, we've worked individually with these same leaders to develop and execute personal action plans to strengthen their modeling of the behaviors consistent with the preferred culture.

In one financial services company, a cascading multi-rater leadership assessment and feedback process was implemented using a customized leadership survey instrument based on the preferred culture desired behaviors. First, the CEO received feedback, followed by his direct reports, and then subsequently members of each of their teams. It is important to begin this type of multi-rater feedback process with the most senior leader so that he/she understands the perceived gaps between his/her own behavior and what is called for in the preferred culture. This also prepares the senior leader to serve as an effective "coach" of other senior team members to help them utilize fully the feedback they receive. Finally, having the senior-most leader go first sends an important symbolic message to others about the importance of the process.

Once individual development plans are in place, each leader needs to be held fully accountable for his/her behaviors in order to achieve and maintain alignment. In many cases, leaders quickly adapt to the new leadership requirements. In other cases, repeated coaching and feedback are

ineffective and difficult decisions need to be made to sideline a leader in a less visible role, or exit the person from the organization. And leaders who demonstrate increased effectiveness and commitment to performing in ways consistent with the preferred culture need to be publicly recognized and rewarded by promotion or assignments to highly visible and key roles. These "judgment calls" about personnel are some of the most important that leaders have to make (Tichy & Bennis, 2007). Such actions convey the message about how serious the CEO and senior leaders are about the culture realignment efforts.

Practice 5: Manage Priority Culture Realignment Levers

Culture realignment is more effective when leaders ensure that all organization subsystems—

structure, business processes and management practices/policies are functioning in ways that support and promote the preferred culture. Failure to attend to one or more of these often results in confusing or conflicting messages, or people working at cross-purposes. At the same time, the specific levers for each culture realignment effort need to be customized, coordinated, and managed to maximize their impact on the culture. One of the principles discussed earlier is the use of both instrumental and symbolic levers. These are depicted in Figure 3 and discussed below.

As stated earlier, instrumental levers are focused on directly influencing behavior. A number of instrumental levers are available for supporting culture realignment. Organization structure includes the formal management structure and
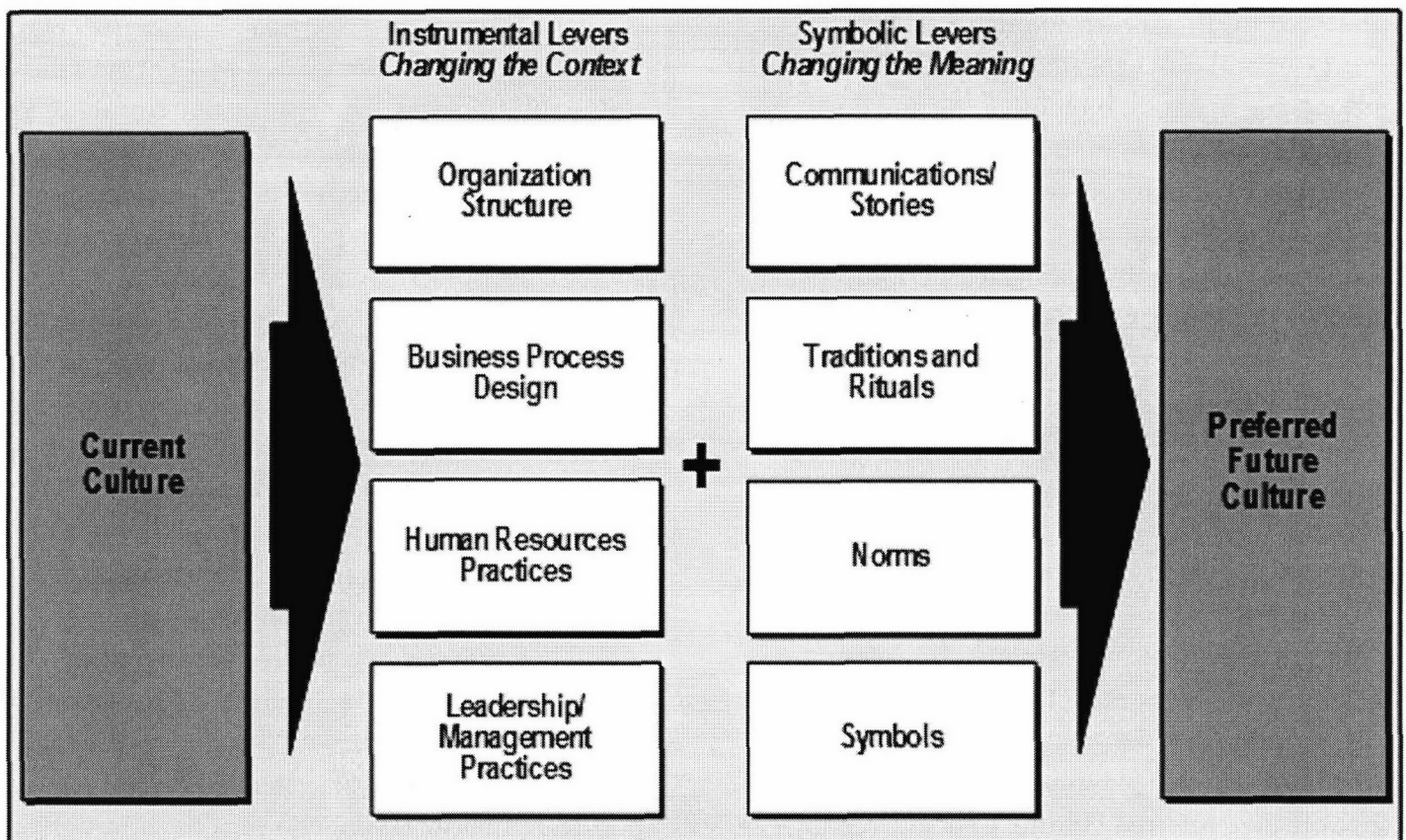
Figure 3. Culture Realignment Levers.

the grouping of functions/disciplines, key roles, accountabilities, and the relations among organization roles and entities. These should be designed to support the preferred culture. For example, a hierarchical management structure is likely to hinder developing a culture that is entrepreneurial, opportunistic, and agile. A matrix structure with dual accountabilities may help develop increased collaboration. In addition, core business processes and their respective governing policies and protocols need to be designed to be congruent with culture realignment aims. A slow moving, bureaucratic, and unnecessarily complex customer service process is not consistent with the goal of creating a strong customer oriented culture. It's also important to make certain that all Human Resource practices including selection, orientation, performance management, compensation and rewards, and learning and development processes reinforce the behaviors desired in the preferred future culture. Human Resource processes and practices play a significant role in influencing behavior by motivating and ensuring the right capabilities are developed. The entire portfolio of HR management practices also needs to be internally congruent. Several organizations we have worked with established periodic "values in action" awards programs that recognized individuals and teams who were identified as emulating a specific value, and redesigned their new employee on-boarding program and performance review process to emphasize expectations for acting in ways consistent with the espoused values of the Firm.

Other management practices are also important instrumental levers. Such formal practices including planning, decision-making, budgeting and capital allocation need to be aligned with and support the preferred culture. In one company, one of the authors supported a change in its strategic planning process from a almost entirely

CEO driven and dominated activity to an approach that engaged the top levels of leadership within the company in the development of strategy. This change supported the preferred cultural value of collaboration and teamwork, and resulted in a high level of shared ownership of the new strategy. Another company that strived to build a more innovative culture created a new Innovations Practices operating unit. This new unit reported directly to the CEO and was responsible for promoting innovation by funding and providing project management consultation to "skunk works" or "pilot projects," and helping to deploy successful pilots into operations. Another organization one of the authors worked with implemented a "value-based decision making process" in which each decision before being finalized was evaluated against the company's values to ensure it was consistent with and served to promote the values.

Symbolic levers are directed at influencing attitudes and thinking. All organization formal communications and stories need to convey messages that reinforce the preferred culture and teach organization members how they can contribute to its actualization. This includes creating new stories that identify employees or teams who act in ways that exemplify the preferred culture. Such stories in effect create new "heroes" by conveying important messages about what is valued and appreciated in the new culture (Sleznick, 1957; Wilkins, 1984). Stories serve as prescriptive and descriptive fables or parables. For example, one organization created a special column in their monthly employee newsletter that celebrated what they referred to as "our company champions." One such column told the story of a heroic effort by an information systems technical support team that worked 24 hours a day through an entire four day holiday weekend to get the company computer system back up after it had

crashed. This particular story instructed the important lessons of dedication and personal sacrifice in the interests of the common welfare and the company's success.

Traditions and rituals are another important symbolic lever (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Martin, 2000). By redesigning existing, creating new and eliminating no longer relevant enterprise traditions, events, and other rituals, leaders are able to ensure increased consistency and support for the preferred culture. We've worked with organizations to "inventory" their current formal traditions and rituals and assess their "fit" with the preferred future culture. In one case, an annual "service awards" ceremony was changed from recognizing tenure in the organization to recognizing service to internal and/or external customer groups to support the desire for a stronger service oriented culture.

Work group norms also need to be aligned to support the preferred culture. We've worked with senior leaders, front-line leaders and their work groups to examine and reshape current "operating norms" for increased congruence with the preferred culture. This work helps departments, work units and teams gain awareness of tacit rules that influence their behavior and to assess their consistency with the preferred future culture. Conscious efforts can then be made to replace norms determined to be inconsistent or in conflict with the behaviors and actions of the preferred culture, or new norms established deliberately. Also, by modifying and creating new organizational symbols, important messages are sent that express and reinforce the preferred future culture. These symbols include the design and decoration of office/work space, branding and marketing strategies, job titles, and organizational jargon used to refer to business entities, roles, and processes should also be examined to ensure con-

sistency with the preferred culture. One client organization that was trying to develop a stronger customer service culture changed the job title of their senior vice presidents of their field operating units to "customer service area leaders."

Practice 6: Promote Grassroots Efforts
As noted earlier, culture realignment is best achieved through actions spanning multiple fronts. While a top-down cascading type strategy is important given the significant role leaders need to play in culture realignment efforts, parallel grass roots efforts also need to be mobilized. As we noted earlier, organization cultures are not singular and rarely tightly integrated, but rather are more realistically differentiated and comprised of sub-cultures (Martin, 2002; Schein, 1992). Grassroots strategies attempt to leverage such differences by promoting customized translations and enactments of the preferred future culture. An important strategy is identifying specific departments and teams whose current performance and operating styles already exemplify aspects of the preferred culture, or who are becoming early "adopters" of desired practices and behaviors. The intent is to recognize, encourage, and facilitate the diffusion of such efforts. In a mid-sized technology company, an effort was initiated to identify different operating units and departments that had practices, norms, and traditions considered consistent with the preferred culture. Once discovered these were shared across the organization by creating an internal repository of "leading culture practices" housed on the company's intranet. In addition, members from these units and departments were engaged as "ambassadors" working directly with other operating units, departments, and work groups to assist them in learning, customizing, and replicating some of their practices and behaviors. Another company held an annual "culture fair" at a local conference center during which different success-

ful practices that were viewed as contributing to the preferred culture were showcased. Moreover, storyboards describing various efforts were posted on the walls throughout the conference center and demonstrations on different practices for building the preferred culture were provided. As discussed above, team development work with intact work groups focused on helping them examine their current formal and informal operating practices, assess their fit with the preferred future culture, and realign as needed were also important grassroots strategies.

Practice 7: Integrate Into Priority Strategic Initiatives

All organizations commonly have portfolios of strategic initiatives either planned or underway. It's critical that those involved with these initiatives conduct and manage them in ways consistent with the preferred culture by explicitly viewing their work as part of creating the new culture beyond achieving whatever other goals have been established for their work. One organization inventoried key-planned and in-process strategic initiatives and evaluated each for its expected contribution to their culture re-alignment efforts. Next, all the initiative sponsors and leaders were brought together to review and discuss the cultural implications of their respective initiatives, and explored how their initiative could be managed in ways more consistent with the preferred future culture. This work helped to coordinate better the resources and support required for success of these initiatives and their collective contribution to achieving the preferred future culture. It also helped identify interdependencies and overlaps among initiatives requiring coordination that had not been recognized before. This practice integrates the culture realignment effort into the ongoing work of an organization.

In our experience, we've found that the CRST can play a very important role in this area. As a result of its broad view of what is taking place in the organization, it can work directly with initiative leaders to ensure effective integration and coordination among the various strategic initiatives. The CRST can also ensure increased sharing and generalization of culturally consistent approaches across initiatives so these can become embedded as new norms for the way work functions.

Practice 8: Assess Progress

Periodic progress assessments are another critical component of an effective culture realignment strategy. Such assessments help keep the effort on track by informing senior leaders and the organization of progress being made and calling attention to specific areas requiring more concerted effort. Eighteen months or so into the realignment effort is a reasonable period for conducting a follow-up culture audit. This allows enough time for many redesign efforts to become operational and begin to have some impact. The results of this follow-up culture audit are compared with the baseline data gathered in the initial culture audit. In one organization, the results of this follow-up culture audit helped narrow, simplify, and reprioritize their culture realignment agenda to increase its focus. The outcome was a better resourced effort that became more manageable given the array of other business initiatives underway in the company. The CRST usually commissions and oversees this second audit process, but it is important for other senior leaders to be involved in decisions regarding any revisions to the original culture realignment plan. Both the results of the audit along with any planned changes should be communicated across the organization so that all organization members are kept informed and engaged. The second culture audit also provides an excellent opportunity to celebrate identified progress and to link such progress to business

performance gains.

Conclusions

Culture realignment is a long-term endeavor—
one that demands endurance and unyielding
focus. Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes
regardless of how appealing and seductive that
notion seems to be. Culture develops and evolves
slowly over time. It is simply not realistic to think
it can be changed quickly. Patience, determina-
tion, and a strong certainty of purpose are
required for success. The challenge for senior
leaders is maintaining their own persistence and
that of others in the face of emergent business
challenges and other competing pressures. In
today's highly competitive and fully "wired"
business environments, leaders are bombarded by
staggering amounts of information and rival
demands for their attention and time. All too
often, we have witnessed well-intentioned and
planned culture realignment efforts lose their
momentum, stumble off track, grind to a halt, or
die a slow death due to neglect, when other press-
ing matters vying for senior leaders' attention and
finite company resources win out. Culture
realignment and change require ongoing care and
feeding. That is why we have emphasized a struc-
tured, disciplined, integrated, and multi-faceted
approach. It is also why we strongly advocate
integrating culture change with the "real work" of
the organization.

Additionally, organization personnel need to
observe and acknowledge that the new ways of
working actually are better than how things were
done in the past. This requires the demonstration
that the new ways of doing things are contribut-
ing to achieving desired business results. While it
is important to acknowledge and celebrate the
achievement of milestones along the way of the
Culture Realignment Roadmap, what is critical is
linking the new ways of working with concrete
indicators of improved performance and achieve-
ment of performance goals. Culture change will
not occur unless the new culture actually helps
the organization perform better and organization-
al members believe it to be true. And based on the
culture's ethereal nature, changes in culture that
lead to the improved organizational performance
will not be recognized unless formal attention is
directed on their impact.

A key premise of this article is that some degree
of culture realignment is required for most organ-
ization change and performance improvement to
occur—whether that change is internally driven
or externally demanded. It has become a cliché,
but change is a fact of life in business and organi-
zational life today. Organizations must be able to
change and do so proactively to survive and pros-
per. The capability to realign organization culture
effectively in support of strategic goals may be a
source of competitive advantage. The principles
and practices discussed here offer a clear, system-
atic approach for doing so. These in combination
with leadership's perseverance and tenacity are
the ingredients for successful culture realignment
in support of organization change initiatives and
achieving optimal organization performance.

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