

Leadership Excellence

BECOME A MORE MINDFUL LEADER

The key is awakening to your mindsets

- Ryan Gottfredson

08

3 Steps To Limit Self-Doubt
- Sue Hawkes

14

Why Every Professional Should Consider Joining A Startup
- Derek Smith

23

5 Misconceptions About Workplace Culture
- Paul White

29

Seven Myths Of Intrapreneurship
- Simone Ahuja



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INDEX

Leadership Excellence

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On the Cover

05 Become A More Mindful Leader

The key is awakening to your mindsets - Ryan Gottfredson



Features

3 Steps To Limit Self-Doubt

Leaders become more effective by admitting their limitations and sharing their insecurities
- Sue Hawkes

08

Why Every Professional Should Consider Joining A Startup

Learnings from my move from corporate culture to a startup scene - Derek Smith

14

5 Misconceptions About Workplace Culture

How you can make a difference - Paul White

23

Seven Myths Of Intrapreneurship

How to create a disruptive culture that inspires
- Simone Ahuja

29

Articles

11 Preemptive Steps Leaders Can Take In The Wake of #MeToo

Removing the power imbalance to create respectful work environments

- Amy Lee and Mikaela Kiner

17 Creating A Culture Of Innovation

Without unshakeable belief, you have virtually no chance of creating a culture of innovation

- Doug Hall

20 The Accountability Tough Talk

Here's how to get "in shape" prior to an accountability conversation

- Michael Brenner

26 The IKEA Effect And The Future Of Company Culture

Four ways companies can create opportunities for employees to invest their own labor

- Nathan Christensen

32 Is Your Organization's Strategic Focus Aligned With The Demands Of The Digital Age?

Ensuring relevancy & congruency in leadership

- Murad Salman Mirza

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the last month of the year, and the best time to review your growth and goals achieved as a leader and as a person. This is also the perfect time to plan for the year ahead. Fine-tune your leadership goals, improvise your leadership development plans and build your leadership skills as you step into the next year. To help you in this journey, as usual, we have a few interesting articles on leadership that can help you grow as a leader and keep your team motivated.

It turns out that 90% of the time leaders' decisions and subsequent actions are driven by their non-conscious automated processes. In other words, for much of leaders' daily life experiences, they operate mindlessly. While this is cognitively efficient, it is likely that leaders' mindless operation and processing is preventing them from being more effective and successful. A better approach is to operate more mindfully. Read Ryan Gottfredson's article, ***Become A More Mindful Leader***,

for more insights on becoming a mindful leader.

Workplace culture is both a "hot" and important topic in the world today. Companies, organizations, and government agencies are all struggling with the reality that they have seriously unhealthy workplace cultures. Yet many people (including leaders) have significant misconceptions about what creates "workplace culture" and whether or not (or how) it can be changed. Let's look at these misconceptions and then address what individuals within an organization can do to start to make a difference. Read Paul White's article, ***5 Misconceptions About Workplace Culture***, to know more.

Most leaders project a calm, confident exterior to the world, but beneath that calm public exterior lurks the fear of being found out

as a fraud. The lack of internal confidence is real. To know how leaders become more effective by admitting their limitations and sharing their insecurities, read Sue Hawke's article, ***3 Steps To Limit Self-Doubt***.

Inside, we also have a handful of other thought-provoking articles on leadership. We would also like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors who have helped our magazine grow. We look forward to your continued support and wish you all success.

Cheers!

Write to the Editor at
ePubEditors@hr.com



Debbie McGrath
Publisher, HR.com



Babitha Balakrishnan
Editor, Leadership Excellence

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Become A More Mindful Leader

The key is awakening to
your mindsets



By [Ryan Gottfredson](#)

Every day, you make dozens of significant decisions that influence your effectiveness as a leader. These decisions could include:

- How to respond to a subordinate after s/he made a mistake that was costly to the organization?
- What do you do with a free hour after a meeting was just cancelled?
- Whether or not to listen to and implement a change suggested by a fellow employee?
- How to give feedback in a way that results in greater engagement and improved performance?

It turns out that 90% of the time leaders' decisions and subsequent actions are driven by their non-conscious automated processes (e.g., habits, biases). In other words, for much of leaders' daily life experiences, they operate mindlessly. While this is cognitively efficient, it is likely that leaders' mindless operation

and processing is preventing them from being more effective and successful.

A better approach is to operate more mindfully. Mindfulness is a state where leaders are able to monitor their information processing, and as they do so, they gain agency to adjust what information they process and how they process it, making them able to respond to their world in a much more flexible, conscious, and effective way.

Let me demonstrate the value of mindfulness to leadership by using a recent client as an example.

Meet Dave

Dave is a leader of a small non-profit organization that helps unprivileged youth and young adults gain employment. When I first met Dave, he considered himself to be a great leader. But after interviewing his staff, it was clear that Dave's evaluation of his leadership was a bit

exaggerated. What Dave initially failed to recognize as that he operated largely mindlessly and that he possessed four common non-conscious desires that drove him to make decisions and engage in behaviors that he felt were best, but were actually detrimental to the work environment.

These non-conscious desires included:

- Looking good
- Being right
- Avoiding problems
- Doing what is best for himself

So, when situations arose that required Dave to make a decision, he was non-consciously predisposed to deal with the situations in a way that helped him look good, feel right, avoid problems, and do what is best for himself.

For example, on several occasions, his employees presented him with suggestions



to improve upon decisions he had previously made (e.g., changing the pricing structure of a service, a new offering to provide to clients). In each of these situations, his non-conscious desires to be seen as looking good and being right led him to automatically, mindlessly, and defensively shut down these suggestions. This is because implementing these suggestions would require him to acknowledge that his initial decisions were not optimal (i.e., his prior decisions were not right).

In these situations, Dave felt justified in his handling of these situations and that he had dealt with the situations in the best way possible. But unknown to Dave, his employees saw these situations as being very frustrating and his defensive reactions to his employees' suggestions led them to have lower levels of engagement.

The Value of Mindfulness

In order for Dave to become a better leader, it became necessary for him to enhance his mindfulness. Doing so led to the two primary benefits of mindfulness:

1. Mindfulness allowed Dave to behave more consciously. By understanding and reducing the habitual and reactive responses that he typically engaged in, a more mindful Dave was able to be more choiceful, intentional, and regulated in how he thought about and navigated the various circumstances he found himself in.

2. It is impossible to operate consciously 100% of the time. But, what mindfulness also did for Dave is that it helped him to become more aware of his typical non-conscious automated processing, which allowed him with the ability to adjust and improve such processes.

It turns out that 90% of the time leaders' decisions and subsequent actions are driven by their non-conscious automated processes (e.g., habits, biases).

Mindsets: The Key to Becoming a More Mindful Leader

Some common and general ways of improving one's mindfulness include meditation, breathing, and yoga. While research has shown that these practices enhance mindfulness, they are limited in their effectiveness because they lack structure, tools, and a language to be able to evaluate our non-conscious automatic processes.

A ground-breaking way to enhance one's mindfulness is to consider a personal attribute that is foundational to our non-conscious automatic processes: Our mindsets.

Mindsets are our mental lenses that selectively organize and encode the information we process, which in turn, orients us toward a distinct way of understanding experiences and guides us toward corresponding actions and responses. In other words, our mindsets are our mental fuel filters. Every day we are bombarded by thousands, if not millions, of stimuli. And it is mindsets that filter select information into our brains, which then goes on to shape our thinking, learning, and behavior.

Whether or not leaders are aware of their mindsets, they possess specific mindsets that non-consciously dictate how they operate, and thus, how effective they are as a leader. But, if leaders can awaken to their mindsets, they can become more conscious of how they operate and they can gain the ability to improve their non-conscious processing.

Learning about his foundational mindsets is what allowed Dave to become a more mindful and effective leader.

Four Sets of Mindsets

There are four sets of mindsets that, for decades, have been demonstrated to dictate how leaders think about and navigate the situations they find themselves in. Each set ranges on a continuum from negative to positive, and thus all leaders possess a mindset somewhere along each continuum. These mindset sets include the following:





These mindsets non-consciously dictate leaders’ desires and automatic processing in the following ways:

- **Fixed & Growth Mindsets**
 - Leaders with a fixed mindset seek to look good causing them to avoid challenges and failures
 - Leaders with a growth mindset seek to learn and grow, leading them to embrace challenges and failures as opportunities to develop and improve
- **Closed & Open Mindsets**
 - Leaders with a closed mindset seek to be seen as being right, causing them to shut down the ideas and suggestions of others
 - Leaders with an open mindset seek to find truth and to think optimally, leading them to seek out new perspectives and ideas
- **Prevention & Promotion Mindsets**
 - Leaders with a prevention mindset seek to avoid risk, causing them to focus primarily on not losing and avoiding problems

- Leaders with a promotion mindset see risk as being necessary for success, leading them to focus on attaining specific goals and reaching specific destinations

- **Inward & Outward Mindsets**
 - Leaders with an inward mindset seek to do what is best for themselves because they see themselves as being more valuable and important than others around them
 - Leaders with an outward mindset seek to do what is best for those they lead because they see them as being valuable partners

Becoming More Mindful by Awakening to One’s Mindsets

To help leaders become more mindful by awakening to their mindsets, I have developed a [free personal mindset assessment](#).

By taking the mindset assessment, Dave was able to discover the mindsets that were non-consciously driving his leadership. It provided him with a framework and a language that had two specific benefits for his

leadership. First, it guided him to operate more consciously in the moment-to-moment situations that he found himself in. Second, it allowed him to consciously change and improve his natural non-conscious processes.

While Dave is still working on staying consistent with his new positive mindsets, he now recognizes that his prior “best” was limited by his mindsets. And, by awakening to his mindsets, he feels as though he is a much more mindful leader, with his “best” yet to come as he works toward continually improving his mindsets.



Ryan Gottfredson, Ph.D. is currently a leadership and management professor at the Mihaylo College of Business and Economics at California State University-Fullerton (CSUF). As a respected authority and researcher on topics related to leadership, management, and organizational behavior, Ryan has published over 15 articles across a variety of journals including: Journal of Management, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Business Horizons, Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, and Journal of Leadership Studies. His research has been cited over 1,450 times since 2013. Also, Ryan has been featured in popular press outlets including Association for Talent Development and Training Industry.



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3 Steps To Limit Self-Doubt

Leaders become more effective
by admitting their limitations and
sharing their insecurities

 By [Sue Hawkes](#)

Most leaders project a calm, confident exterior to the world, but beneath that calm public exterior lurks the fear of being found out as a fraud. They wonder, *What if they discover I'm not who I'm pretending to be? Or I don't really know what I'm doing. I'm just making it up as I go along.* In fact, the more successful the leader is, the louder and more persistent these voices can become. This lack of internal confidence is real, and somehow no achievement is ever quite significant enough to reassure us we've arrived. The bar just keeps raising. For many business owners I know, their first landmark of success is hitting \$1M in revenue. After that, the goal is to get to \$10M because to them, "\$1M just isn't that much." I have heard people with multi-million-dollar businesses say "I've got a baby business" compared to other business owners. It gets worse the more successful we become. "The more challenging issues people face, the easier

it is to get trapped down the rabbit hole of self-doubt and uncertainty," [shares Mandy Gilbert](#), Founder and CEO of Creative Niche. So, what do we do?

Step 1: Acknowledge the Doubt

The first step to limiting self-doubt is acknowledging that you are experiencing it. This feeling is characterized as Imposter Syndrome and describes high-achieving individuals who are marked by an inability to internalize their accomplishments and have a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud.

Despite external evidence, leaders experiencing Imposter Syndrome remain convinced they are frauds and don't deserve the success they've achieved. No matter how big their business becomes or how many awards they may win, they still feel as if they are faking it. This feeling is more common than you may imagine, with roughly 75% of leaders having

experienced Imposter Syndrome. In fact, those who do not feel this way are of the real imposters. Researcher and positive psychology coach [Homaira Kabir](#) reminds us that knowing your triggers is important in order to address self-doubt quickly and effectively. Knowledge is power and being aware of what triggers your self-doubt can help you manage it.

Step 2: Be Vulnerable with Others

Being vulnerable is crucial when overcoming self-doubt, and that can be difficult at first! The times we are feeling less than our best are usually when we would rather "fake it till you make it," and pretend like everything is fine. This might work on the surface-level, but truly overcoming the self-doubt takes vulnerable sharing with others. Talking about your feelings with other leaders is the best option; find a peer group of other business owners or executives who understand



where you are coming from. It often feels as if there is no one who can possibly relate to all we are challenged with, but finding other leaders who can speak to similar situations will help you feel comfortable opening up. The more successful we become, the less we allow ourselves to talk about the challenges we face because we believe that would crack the façade of how we appear to the world. This is a very lonely way to live. Pride limits us when it stops us from connecting with others in this way.

It can also be difficult to open up because we don't want to burden others with our problems. Often, however, this self-disclosure can be the doorway to intimacy and depth in relationships. Once you admit you are overwhelmed, it opens the door for everyone else to be vulnerable as well. "Nothing can help alleviate self-doubt better than seeking advice and coaching from others," [emphasizes Christine M. Riordan](#), Dean and professor of management at Daniels' College of Business.

Step 3: Ask for Help

Many leaders refrain from asking for help because they worry it will pop their perceived bubble of perfection. When they are able to do so with trusted peers, it's a relief to hear the other person say, "I've been there too." Remember, even the best leaders need help and, in fact, knowing when they need help is part of what makes them so effective. You can accomplish more as a company when you ask employees for help and make them part of the solution. "When you're vulnerable with your team about where you're at, you show them you're human. This creates more of a connection with them, as you're quietly giving the permission to not be perfect either and supporting them through their own journey of discovery," [shares Jenn Lofgren](#), Founder of Incito Executive and Leadership Development. When you don't accept help, you're actually denying others the good feelings they would otherwise enjoy. Giving makes us all feel good. By declining to

receive, we're actually taking from others. Accepting help creates permission for everyone else to be vulnerable and tell the truth about their self-doubt as well.

You'll never know how much others care about you until you take off your mask and let yourself be seen as you are, vulnerabilities, failings and all. Leaders become more effective by admitting their limitations and sharing their insecurities.



Sue Hawkes is a best-selling author, speaker and entrepreneur. She is also a Certified EOS Implementer, Certified Business Coach, WPO Chapter Chair, award-winning and globally recognized seminar leader, and an entrepreneur. She is the CEO and Founder of [YESS! – Your Extraordinary Success Strategies](#), and brings over 25 years of experience to her clients and has designed and delivered dynamic, transformational programs for thousands of people. Hawkes has received numerous awards including the Dream Keeper award recognized by the Governor's Council for her leadership program, the Regional U.S. Small Business Administration Women in Business Champion of the Year award, the Exemplary Woman of the Community award, Women Venture's Unsung Hero award, Women Who Lead from Minnesota Business Magazine, and NAWBO Minnesota's Achieve! Vision Award, in addition to being named a 2018 Enterprising Woman of the Year.



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Preemptive Steps Leaders Can Take In The Wake of #MeToo

Removing the power imbalance to create respectful work environments

By Amy Lee and Mikaela Kiner

CBS Corp., Google, Uber, Nike: #MeToo has given women the guts and the platform to challenge sexual harassment and discrimination.

In each case, we see a familiar trajectory. After women detail workplace abuse, offenders depart after a protracted expose. CBS chief executive Leslie Moonves, for example, stepped down after a [dozen](#) women implicated him as an abuser. Similarly, a [sweeping investigation](#) into workplace conduct at Nike resulted in the departures of eleven top-level executives and senior managers, and a broad apology from the CEO.

While confronting perpetrators is an important first step, it's not a formula for change. "The reality is HR departments are often trying to get rid of the problem as quickly and as quietly as

possible," shares Don McGowan, Chief Legal Officer and Business Affairs of The Pokémon Company International. "They try to get the harasser to leave, or get the victim to leave. Basically, HR is there to help protect the company, not the victim. I don't agree with this, but many do."

Undoubtedly, we can garner better outcomes from the awareness #MeToo has mounted than the apathy McGowan identifies. The bigger goal is about creating cultures where women don't have to get hurt in order to earn their safety. And yet, too often we see vague promises from companies, rather than specific plans to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Kristina Bergman, CEO and Founder of Integris Software, designed a preemptive strategy to protect her company from sexual harassment. [Bergman](#) explains:

"I knew I wanted to create a culture of inclusion and respect supported by board members who shared my values. What I didn't want was a work environment that allowed for, or turned a blind eye to, sexual harassment — something women in our industry face all too often. So, I acted preemptively to protect my team, my business and myself from the dangers and strife brought on by unethical behavior."

Bergman now requires all board members to sign a clause in the voting rights agreement, which provides for the removal of any board member who sexually harasses.

From the Ground Up

In 2016, when she was cultivating her board, Bergman wanted to ensure her own safety and control as a female founder. She explains: "I didn't want to be in a situation

like I've been in before where someone in a position of power is treating me disrespectfully in one of the worst possible ways, and I can't do anything about it."

While preparing her fledgling company's by-laws, Bergman asked her attorney to write an "escape mechanism" into her company's legal and cultural architecture. This clause renders sexual harassment cause for board removal, on par with fraud, embezzlement or breach of fiduciary duty. Bergman and her attorney were surprised to find no legal precedent, making her possibly the only female founder to have implemented such a clause.

While Bergman was initially apprehensive about discussing the clause with board prospects, she has been pleased to find them supportive. Male and female board members all indicated that they feel safer working with an organization that clearly articulates expectations and legal consequences.

Bergman's preemptive clause is the type of proactivity companies need. We create healthy professional cultures by defining our values and instilling them systematically. Leaving gaps is inclined to serve harassers who find opportunity in ambiguity. Building environments where leaders clearly state and reinforce values and expectations removes that opportunity.

Anatomy of an "Escape Mechanism"

This is how the clause functions if triggered: an allegation of sexual harassment against a board member must be submitted by any officer or director to the company's external legal counsel. Due process requires the company's external legal counsel to conduct a high-level inquiry.

This clause seeks to avoid protracted litigation by restricting the inquiry to no longer than 30 days between the notice of the allegation and the delivery of the information to determine if there is a reasonable probability that sexual harassment has occurred. Such an abbreviated timeframe is fair to both the complainant and the alleged harasser.

Counsel presents its preliminary analysis to the directors no less than five days prior to issuing the final determination. Counsel delivers a final determination to the Board as to whether there is in fact a reasonable probability that the board member was involved in sexual harassment. Counsel must remove and replace the board member upon an affirmative determination.

The Business Case for Safety

Harassment can happen anywhere in an organization from the c-suite down, and if not kept in check, can rapidly create a work environment that is toxic, emotionally draining and performance hindering for everyone. Women face the brunt of this, and it not only alienates

them, but bleeds productivity from within, causing costly turnover and chaos.

Sexual harassment claims can also lead to bad press, which can magnify quickly on social media. Recent [campaigns](#) including #GrabYourWallet, #DeleteUber, #BoycottUnderArmour and #BoycottStarbucks have all had a significant financial impact on brands. [The Atlantic](#), for example, reported that roughly 200,000 customers supported the #DeleteUber campaign, denouncing the culture of sexual harassment that became widely publicized.

Allowing bad actors to operate within your company, and to further objectives that run contrary to diversity, puts the company at risk.

Culture Co-Creators

Industries including [news media](#), [tech](#), and [entertainment](#) have emerged as harbors for bad actors and particularly perilous for female employees. What shaped these predatory cultures? How do we ensure that the mores of "bro cultures" are dismantled and not given oxygen to regenerate?

Amelia Ransom, Sr. Director, Engagement & Diversity, Avalara points out: "Is HR accountable for you not being harassed at work? No. The person who harasses you is accountable for you being harassed at work. Is your company responsible for eliminating people who harass people at work? Absolutely. They can use HR as that vehicle, but

they should use other leaders as that vehicle as well, and that should be part of the culture.”

Creating inclusive workplaces primes all employees for peak performance. Leadership must champion that value. HR doesn't own culture; leadership owns culture. This is why Bergman's clause is so valuable: it takes preemptive steps to protect stakeholders' safety by launching a specific remedy at the most senior level.

Cultural values can't only come from HR. This won't be nearly as effective as if it comes from the CEO. This sets a broad cultural tone that trickles down.

Additional Preemptive Strategies

When leadership is onboard to uphold cultural values, HR can implement them. Those who manage day-to-day operations are key cultural ambassadors who champion those company values. Building diverse teams is one important way they enact this work.

To that end, seek leaders who promote equity. Mandate workplace diversity-related questions for recruitment and promotions; for example: “How would you respond to an employee who tells you that she is upset and uncomfortable about working with a certain male employee?”

Additionally, pose behavioral questions such as:

- “What do you do if you witness subtle innuendos or inappropriate comments?”
- “Describe a situation where you resolved workplace/ personality conflict?”

Some other ideas for building inclusive cultures: Provide annual refreshers on what makes the workplace fun for all employees without intruding on the boundaries of any employees. You want employees, especially managers and senior leaders to recognize what behaviors are acceptable at work, and which ones cross the line. Bergman's rule of thumb for recognizing this line: “If you wouldn't do it or say it to a customer, don't do it here.”

Lessons Learned

Even in the wake of #MeToo, companies continue to struggle with scaling a healthy, inclusive culture. Time and time again we see companies fail to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination, and fail to act appropriately when concerns are raised, perpetuating a trust gap with HR.

To successfully transform their cultures, leaders need to put necessary safeguards in place at their company to get ahead of the problem, and take preemptive steps to bolster transparency and establish a space where employees feel safe to voice their concerns. Even as sexual harassers are disciplined, fired from their jobs, investigated by police or, in the most extreme cases, convicted of criminal acts, the culture gaps remain.

So it is incumbent upon executives to fill gaps that once created opportunities for harassers with information for advocates. This way, safety and wellness are built into workplace culture and are guaranteed from day one.

We all deserve that.



Mikaela Kiner is the founder and CEO of uniquelyHR, providing fast-growth companies including startups and scale-ups with flexible HR services from consulting to leadership development and executive coaching. Prior to founding her company, Mikaela was an HR leader with several iconic brands including Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks, PopCap Games and Redfin.



Amy Lee is an employment lawyer from Australia with a LLB from the University of Queensland and a LLM from Melbourne University. She has worked in-house as a Senior Workplace Relations Advisor for CPB Contractors and employee relations advisor for Bechtel and Fluor on major LNG Projects. She was a presenter at the Australian Women's and Gender Studies International Biennial Conference, Queensland University of Technology, “The Paradox of “Mean Girls vs. Mulan?” De-storying Stereotypes of Women in Leadership in the case of Gillard and Tsai.”

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Why Every Professional Should Consider **Joining A Startup**

Learnings from my move from corporate culture to a startup scene

 By **Derek Smith**

Often dubbed Silicon Valley North, Canada's startup scene is scorching. From Shopify to Slack to Hootsuite, our country boasts a number of highly successful startups that have raised the bar for innovation and employment. This is particularly true in Toronto, a city that recently beat San Francisco as the fastest-growing tech jobs market in North America. This comes as welcome news for new jobseekers and experienced workers considering a non-traditional move away from the corporate world.

The latter is where I found myself when I decided to leave the familiarity of the corporate world for a gig running the Canadian office of an Australian startup. Throughout my career, I've led teams at multinational corporations, as the Managing Director of Apple Canada, and General Manager at HP, before making the move over to Xref. Now that I've worked in both environments, I can confidently say that the unique benefits of joining a small, nimble organization are invaluable. It's a move I would encourage every professional to consider in their lifetime, and here are three reasons why:

You're Not Moving to the Moon

A jump from corporate to the startup world might seem daunting, like you are entering a whole new world, but that's really not the case. Although there may be some glaring differences between big corporations and startups, if you dig a little deeper, there are also many similarities. When I was at Apple, Tim Cook once grilled me about the number of Bluetooth keyboards we sold over the course of a week. You might think that's such a small detail in the grand scheme of things, but no detail of the business is ever too small to be worth your time. Attention to detail and organizational processes are just one of the many transferrable skills you'll be able to bring to a new organization.

You'll Do Meaningful Work and See Your Impact Firsthand

When you're a part of a smaller team, you are required to be resourceful, and produce quality results on tight timelines. You'll find yourself wearing a variety of different hats, and every contribution will have



a direct impact on the success of the business in some way. It's not that large companies don't foster professional growth as well, but there's simply no chance of falling into a stale routine at a startup. Each day requires you to be sharper and more efficient than the last. And because you'll probably be working on multiple projects, the skills you acquire in a startup environment are more diversified than if you focused on a single task.

You'll Shape the Culture and Build the Company from the Ground Up

Culture gets talked about a lot with startups — and for good reason! Startups tend to have more informal, flexible, and fun work arrangements than traditional companies. That's not to say work isn't getting done, just that *how* it gets done isn't the focus. From my experiences, startups are more concerned about results and client satisfaction than managing staff schedules and dictating dress codes. So if you're the kind of person who is self-motivated, but prefers a more laid-back office environment, you'll feel right at

home. The dynamics at many startups are still being established, so you won't just thrive in the culture, you'll help build it.



Derek Smith is General Manager at Xref North America. His knowledge of the North American HR market, specifically in relation to candidate screening, coupled with his extensive background in sales, marketing and leaderships roles in high profile, technology companies including Apple and HP, make him the perfect addition to the team in a market that poses significant growth potential for the platform.



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Creating A Culture Of Innovation

Without unshakeable belief, you have virtually no chance of creating a culture of innovation



By [Doug Hall](#)

Over the years, we've observed that focusing energy on developing deep belief among a few people is the best way to create a culture of innovation. Research by scientists at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute confirms this. They reported,

"...when just 10 percent of an organization holds an unshakeable belief, their belief will always be adopted by the majority." *Unshakeable belief* was defined as "True believers: People who are completely set in their views and unflappable in modifying those beliefs."

Basically, culture change follows the Bass Diffusion model. Efforts to change “the whole” at one time rarely sustain. Rather, you need to start with a small, highly committed group. When the group with unshakeable belief permeates throughout 10 percent of the organization, then the new mindset spreads.

Without unshakeable belief, you have virtually no chance of creating a culture of innovation. The Rensselaer professors found: “When the number of committed opinion holders is below 10 percent, there is no visible progress in the spread of ideas. It would literally take the amount of time comparable to the age of the universe for this size group to reach the majority.”

From thousands of experiences, we’ve learned that reading a book (sadly even my books) is unlikely to create unshakeable belief. Watching a video or even attending a class won’t do it. Books, videos and classes provide foundational understanding, but not belief.

Unshakeable belief only comes from hands-on application. To quote U.S. Founding Father Benjamin Franklin, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

To develop unshakeable belief, employees are first educated on how to innovate and are then given the tools to innovate. Most importantly, as part of course requirements, they’re required to apply the new mindset and methods on a wave of projects that are within their sphere of influence.

The next step is the application of their new confidence on a wave of bigger projects. The innovation zealots are involved in the hands on creation of ideas and of turning them into reality. They confront and resolve the multitudes of “death threats” that are inevitable with meaningfully unique innovations.

Ideally, upon completion of the second wave, they achieve mastery certification. Certification is more than a credential to add to a resume. When properly designed, the requirements align with what it takes to build unshakeable belief. A US Department of

Commerce study found that this method works. On average, those who achieved mastery lead an innovation pipeline that has a valuation 28-times higher than those who simply attend training but don’t achieve certification.

Efforts to change “the whole” at one time rarely sustain. Rather, you need to start with a small, highly committed group. When the group with unshakeable belief permeates throughout 10 percent of the organization, then the new mindset spreads.

This process of learning combined with direct application works. The biggest challenge we’ve observed is the need for what Dr. Deming called “constancy of purpose.” It can’t be a start and stop. It needs to be focused and continuous to be successful.

• • •



Doug Hall is the founder of the [Eureka! Ranch, Innovation Engineering Institute](#) and [Brain Brew Custom Whisk\(e\)y](#).



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The Accountability Tough Talk

Here's how to get "in shape" prior to an accountability conversation

By **Michael Brenner**

In [Part 3 of this Series](#), I shared some ideas about what managers can do to create a culture where accountability will naturally flourish. In this installment, I'll discuss how to hold conversations about accountability (or the lack of it) with employees when necessary.

Conversations around accountability are among the most dreaded in the workplace. When I ask my workshop attendees who feels uncomfortable holding such conversations, virtually every hand goes up. It's easy to see why. At some point in our careers, almost all of us have been on the receiving end of a defensive reaction that may have included shouting, tears, profanity, verbal attacks, or all of the above. That experience, seared in our memory, is why we typically anticipate accountability conversations with all the relish of a root canal. The good news, though, is there are techniques we can learn to lessen the possibility of such a hostile reaction and to effectively handle one should it occur.

When I was younger, I used to take pre-workout powder to fuel my gym workouts (these days I just eat an apple and a dab of peanut butter). Pre-workout powder is a good metaphor for the internal work we need to do *prior* to initiating an accountability conversation. Mental preparation is key; "winging" such a potentially fraught conversation is a decidedly

bad idea. Find out how to get "in shape" before an accountability conversation:

- **Start with heart.** The authors of the best-selling *Crucial Conversations* use the phrase "Start with heart" to describe the right mindset for holding such conversations. Ask yourself what you really want to accomplish by having this conversation. If your goal is to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution to an ongoing conflict in a civil and respectful way, that's starting with heart. But if your aim is to prove your superiority or belittle the other party, that's starting with some other part of your anatomy.
- **Consider how you've been perceiving the conflict up to this point.** Human beings are susceptible to all kinds of biases and assumptions. We weave fantastical narratives to explain others' motives and intent, draw conclusions based on the flimsiest of evidence, and focus on things that have personal meaning to us while ignoring those that don't. All of these tendencies can distort the truth, i.e. what's *really* going on. Before engaging in an accountability conversation, consider what "lenses" you've been viewing the situation through and whether they paint a realistic picture. You may be surprised to discover that the "truth" is not what you initially thought.

- **Anticipate pushback and how you'll respond.** Just as a football coach anticipates his opponent's plays and prepares in advance, those who are adept at accountability conversations anticipate how their counterpart might react and practice accordingly. If you expect the individual to disagree with your assessment, be ready with examples. If you expect a deflection to a side topic, be ready to pull the conversation back on track. As the old adage says, "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

Once you've consumed the pre-workout powder and are in the midst of the conversation, there are a few principles you should keep in mind:

- **Be like water.** The great Bruce Lee once said, "When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water, my friend." What he means is that remaining agile and adapting to changing circumstances with ease and fluidity is critical in a fight. That's excellent advice whether you're doing martial arts or holding an accountability conversation. Be focused and present, stay attuned to what's coming back at you, and be ready to deal with whatever arises without losing your cool. Agility beats fragility every time.
- **Don't take the bait.** People will try all kinds of ways to rattle you during an accountability conversation. They'll make threats, cry, call you names, explode with rage, question your competence, and so on. Don't fall for it. If the person yells, try something like "I don't know why you're shouting at me. I'm not shouting at you." If the person cries, say "I can see this is upsetting you. Do you need a minute?" Maintain a firm, confident tone throughout and don't lose your temper. When your counterpart is blowing their stack while you remain calm and poised, *you* are in control of the conversation. And that's exactly how you want it to be. If you wouldn't hand over your car keys to a friend who's been drinking, why would you turn over control of a conversation to someone who's having a tantrum?
- **Conclude with an Action Plan.** Even a well-orchestrated accountability conversation can be

compromised if no action steps are articulated. If you are the other person's manager, I would ask: "What are your thoughts for addressing/fixing/resolving what we just discussed? I have some ideas but I'd like to hear yours first." Soliciting the other person's ideas first makes them an active participant in creating their future rather than a passive recipient of *your* plan. Additionally, they will be more invested in the outcome because their ideas are an integral part of the roadmap going forward. Establish checkpoints to ensure your direct report is meeting your expectations and, of course, provide positive feedback when it's been earned.

If you are the other person's peer, make a slight change to the language: "What can *we* do to address/fix/resolve what we just discussed? I have some ideas but I'd like to hear yours first." By moving from a "Me vs. You" dynamic to a "Me *and* You vs. the Issue" dynamic, you're replacing a potentially destructive orientation with a constructive one. You've created, in essence, a partnership whose purpose is to work out a mutual problem. As a wise person once said, "A problem shared is a problem halved."



As founder and president of Right Chord Leadership, **Dr. Michael Brenner** works with leaders and teams at all levels to strengthen the essential skills needed for peak performance. He achieves this by drawing on almost two decades of experience as an international leadership consultant, executive coach, keynote speaker, and educator, and more than 30 years as a professional musician. Michael's unconventional workshops, executive coaching sessions, and consulting services – grounded in the belief that "When people work in harmony, great things happen!"™ – have helped his clients increase employee engagement, reduce turnover, improve customer service, and create more collaborative work environments. Michael has partnered with leading companies in a variety of industries and has worked for several not-for-profit organizations.



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5 Misconceptions About Workplace Culture

How you can make
a difference

 By Paul White

Workplace culture is both a “hot” and important topic in the world today. Companies, organizations, and government agencies are all struggling with the reality that they have seriously unhealthy workplace cultures. Yet many people (including leaders) have significant misconceptions about what creates “workplace culture” and whether or not (or how) it can be changed. Frequent results of these misconceptions include: a) individuals within the organization giving up trying to improve the culture because they view the situation as hopeless; b) they want to do something to make a difference but don’t know where to start, or c) their attempts to change the culture are so misguided that their efforts are totally wasted. (Some of the approaches are analogous to trying to fix an overheated car engine by changing a tire on the car.)

Let’s look at these misconceptions and then address what individuals within an organization can do to start to make a difference.

Misconception #1: “Culture” in an organization is so big, gnarly and complex that it can’t be changed.

Some individuals (especially in larger companies and organizations) look at the current life of an organization and feel overwhelmed with the complexity of the problems. They conclude the problem is too big to be addressed for the organization to be able to change. This is clearly not the case. Huge organizations of various types *have* taken a self-assessment, seen that there are significant problems that need to be addressed and started on a path to successfully change.

Misconception #2: The only way to change an organization’s culture is to do a total ‘restart’ (or kill the organization).

People sometimes reach this conclusion because they observe companies and organizations changing significantly after they have had a significant event (for example, a bankruptcy) which requires them to totally reorganize and reformulate the organization. Other times, they see that a new company is birthed after a formerly large unhealthy one dies, and “out of the ashes” comes a new renovated variation of the former company. While this can be a way that a workplace culture can change, we obviously don’t want to essentially amputate major parts of the company in order to make it healthy (although this is occasionally needed).

Misconception #3: No one person can really impact their workplaces' culture very much.

This belief is held by some because of the incredible “staying power” that an existing culture has. Many cultures can feel almost immovable. This conclusion is also reached because individuals believe that “culture” is an external entity that essentially *happens* to an organization. The reality is: workplace culture is the result of the combination of thousands of individual interactions between hundreds or thoughts of individual employees.

Misconception #4: A dysfunctional corporate culture is best revamped by changing the leadership at the top.

While leadership at the top may need to be changed, doing this single action in no way guarantees any type of change will occur within the corporate culture. This is evidenced by the large number of companies who have recently had toxic cultures, changed their leadership, but the cultural patterns continue (usually because the leaders underneath them have the same values and approaches the senior leaders did).

Misconception #5: Culture is easy to change.

There are also people who simplistically believe, “all we need to do is be more positive” and a negative culture will magically transform. Culture *is* complex and, in many cases, is difficult to change. But, when the people within an organization understand

what comprises culture and then start a systematic approach to changing those factors which help shape culture, change can happen.

How Is Culture Changed, Then?

As indicated above, the first step is to empower people to change their individual behavior. If each individual employee, supervisor, manager, or executive takes responsibility for themselves to make small, but consistent, changes in their behavior over time, an organization’s culture can begin to “morph” to a healthier state of being.

Secondly, culture is also highly influenced by structure (communication patterns, decision making styles, expectations for daily functioning), as well as repeatedly proclaiming the mission of the organization along with the priorities and values by which that mission will be obtained. A company may have a mission to “serve their clients” and “provide a reasonable return on investors’ investment” but how that is accomplished (and the values on which the actions are based) will significantly impact what the corporate culture becomes.

Third, there are a number of other critical elements that leaders often forget—the need for community, the power of visual symbols, how music, food, and celebrating organizational successes. Rituals (those actions which are done repeatedly without thinking) and traditions fill in

the remaining parts of what an organization’s culture looks like.

If you are interested in trying to help refashion your organization’s culture, start to reflect on how *your* daily actions may influence the aspects of your workplace’s culture you don’t like and see what ways you can start behaving differently that could begin to make a difference. You can influence the interactions around you, and ultimately, begin to affect change in your overall organizational culture.



Paul White, Ph.D. is the co-author of *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, a sought after speaker, psychologist, and leadership trainer who “makes work relationships work”. For the past 20+ years, he’s worked with numerous businesses, non-profit organizations, schools and medical facilities.



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The **IKEA** Effect

And The Future Of Company Culture

Four ways companies can create opportunities for employees to invest their own labor

 By **Nathan Christensen**

A few years ago in the small Swedish town of Strömstad, police received a late-night domestic disturbance call. The caller reported hearing disconcerting noises, including loud banging and crying, coming from a neighbor's house. When officers arrived at the house, they found a gruesome scene: an exhausted young couple struggling to assemble a piece of IKEA furniture.

[Research](#) out of Harvard Business School suggests a surprising ending to this story: Rather than serve as a painful reminder of an agonizing night, what the couple had assembled likely became one of their most valued pieces of furniture.

The reason why is what researchers have coined "the IKEA Effect." Named after the Swedish furniture maker renowned for its assemble-it-yourself household goods, the study showed that people value products in which they invest their own labor more than comparable products that require no effort on their part.

In the Harvard studies, this principle was established through simple games, including one involving

cardboard boxes. One group of study participants was given a preassembled box; the other was given a box they had to assemble themselves. Participants who had to assemble their box were willing to pay a higher price for it than those who had been given an identical preassembled box.

IKEA furniture may be the most obvious example of this principle, but there are many others, including Build-A-Bear stuffed animals, LEGO sets, and prepared meal kits. The IKEA Effect also helps explain the 1950s marketing story of Betty Crocker cake mixes, which collected dust on supermarket shelves until the recipe was changed to require adding an egg.

As its namesake suggests, the IKEA Effect has been applied most directly to product design and marketing. But it has an important lesson for organizational culture and leadership as well: whether employees are engaged as co-creators of company culture or treated simply as its consumers will affect how much they value it. Once employees are brought into the process of culture-building and asked to invest their own labor and ideas in developing it, they

will value the culture – and the organization that embodies it – more highly.

For many executives and HR teams, this idea is counterintuitive. Companies often assume that employees look to them to provide a ready-made workplace and culture and that they will value a “finished” product more than one they are asked to help build. In addition, companies often fear that “distracting” their employees with culture and organizational development work will reduce productivity.

The Harvard research challenges these assumptions and suggests that the opposite is true. When employees are invited to participate in the process of building and developing culture, they will value it more highly, which results in higher productivity and retention.

Here are four ways companies can create opportunities for employees to invest their own labor in building the company’s culture:

1. Communicate a shared vision. For employees to be culture co-creators, they need to know what kind of culture they are working together to create. Otherwise, the final product won’t look at all like the picture on the box. When executives and HR leaders communicate a shared vision for culture within their companies and invite their employees into the process, their employees will be empowered to engage in their role as culture co-creators.

2. Provide the tools. Employees don’t just need an invitation to participate; they also need the tools to do so. Without tools, they can’t make an impact. Company leaders can provide these tools by involving employees in culture-building activities like work groups, company offsites, informal leadership opportunities and task forces as well as roles in hiring, onboarding and training.

3. Measure and communicate progress. A key qualification to the IKEA Effect is that for a person to feel enhanced attachment, they have to see that their labor is contributing to progress. Products or projects that are never finished don’t drive value. It’s important for executives and HR leaders to clearly

define culture-building activities and to measure and report their progress so that employees see the fruits of their labor.

4. Avoid the assembly line. An “assembly required” culture doesn’t require an assembly line to build it. Rather than asking employees to do repetitive low-value tasks, executives and HR leaders can help their teams find ways to contribute their unique efforts and strengths to develop the company’s culture. When employees contribute to creating the culture in this way, it becomes something they closely identify with and something they feel a sense of ownership over. It’s not just the company culture; it’s *their* culture.

Given today’s labor market and the challenges companies face in identifying, hiring and retaining the talent they need, the teachings of the IKEA Effect are timely. But taking advantage of these teachings requires seeing company culture differently and recognizing that great culture is measured not by what employees can get but by what they can give.

Executives and HR leaders who understand this principle and invite their teams to become culture co-creators with them will build a sustainable competitive advantage through a culture their teams own and love.

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Nathan Christensen is the CEO of Mammoth HR, the national leader in Collaborative HR. Nathan is a recognized industry leader, speaker, and writer in the fields of business, law, and education.



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Seven Myths Of Intrapreneurship

How to create a disruptive culture that inspires

 By **Simone Ahuja**

Over the past three years I've researched the connection between innovation and intrapreneurship to determine if intrapreneurs really can drive disruption inside even the most labyrinthine organizations. The short answer? Yes, but it's not easy. It requires ingenuity, a little luck, and organizational support to make intrapreneurial endeavours impactful and sustainable.

As part of my research journey, I examined the classic stories of intrapreneurship from the business lexicon over the past 30 years, in organizations from 3M and W.L. Gore to Sun Microsystems. I was inspired by visionary employees who saw a need and managed to fill it, mainly through their own ingenuity and grit. They faced resistance from colleagues and leaders, and with little expectation for resources beyond 20 percent time for exploration, they somehow beat the odds. They became the heroes of intrapreneurship.

Yet, beyond the inspiration these stories provide, I came away wondering whether the mythology that has grown up around these heroes is entirely relevant today. Yes, many have been mavericks, iconoclasts, and dissenters. But in a twenty-first-century organization broadly committed to innovation—as many are today—do intrapreneurs still need to fly under the radar? Is happenstance and serendipity still a core ingredient of entrepreneurial success?

Overall, the intrapreneurial mythology we have inherited from the past is more exclusive than inclusive—and that's making it harder for companies to innovate and grow. It is time to construct a new mythology of intrapreneurship—one that celebrates the diverse skills and behaviors that drive innovation forward today. We can start by taking a hard look at the myths that exist and use them as building blocks for the future:

Myth: Intrapreneurship is Too Creative for a Disciplined Approach

Truth: Innovation is too important to be conducted in a random way.

At the core of any innovation is an act of creativity... and everyone knows that creative epiphanies are unpredictable. But that doesn't mean processes can't guide innovation from idea to impact more reliably. Today, we know a lot more about how to do that. Design thinking, agile, and lean startup methods all show the results that come when people are trained in a disciplined way to do things differently and take calculated risks in search of better results.

Myth: Intrapreneurs Go It Alone

Truth: Intrapreneurship is a team sport

When people hear the term *intrapreneur*, many still think of the lone wolf—the voice in the wilderness proclaiming the value of an idea only he or she can recognize. In this scenario, the story of intrapreneurship becomes a hero's journey centered on a brave

soul with the determination to singlehandedly bring about change.

In today's hyper competitive, interconnected environment, that turns out to be a dangerous myth. Today, almost nothing of sufficient scale that moves the needle on performance can be accomplished without teams of contributors, networks of partners, and committed sponsors providing air cover. If we encourage people to go it alone, we keep them from learning to lead change, recruiting likeminded followers, and developing the other skills they need to grow as intrapreneurs.

Myth: Only “Creatives” Become Intrapreneurs

Truth: Intrapreneurship requires a wide variety of talents and types. A successful intrapreneur can excel at any of them—and can't be expected to have all of them.

Creativity comes in many forms but people continue to contextualize the term in a narrow sense. We tend to think of individuals who are overtly unorthodox in their thinking, appearance, and otherwise. But intrapreneurial success depends on the contributions of the “suits” as well as “creatives”— [hipsters](#), [hackers](#), and [hustlers](#) as well as people with more traditional business skills. The right person to lead a team that combines various talents might not be the one with the most imaginative and original mind. It might be the individual whose “creativity” helps them navigate the bureaucratic ins and outs of an organization.

Myth: Management's Best Approach to Intrapreneurs Is Benign Neglect

Truth: Management's best approach to intrapreneurs is active support.

Most of the classic intrapreneurial projects we read about are ones that succeeded without management support. (And the celebrated intrapreneurs who tell their stories usually say they were better off without it.) But here's the problem with taking your lessons exclusively from outliers: you aren't hearing from the majority who never made it. Intrapreneurship is better served by managers who both understand the value of it and know how to encourage it without taking charge of it. They help intrapreneurs actively and in many ways—from providing resources and connections to

supporting their ongoing development, training and career paths.

Myth: Intrapreneurs Aren't in It for Financial Rewards, and They Don't Need Performance Metrics

Truth: If you want more of something, measure it—and reward it.

Intrapreneurship is a tough enough route that no one takes it without intrinsic motivation. Passion is essential. But this doesn't need to be an either/or proposition. Extrinsic rewards, whether an intrapreneur demands them or not, signal to the rest of the organization that this is important and valued activity. Performance metrics for innovation not only provide an objective basis for those rewards, they help intrapreneurial teams track progress toward goals and make the case for further investment—and innovative organizations understand this.

Myth: Intrapreneurs Are Just Like Entrepreneurs

Truth: The typical intrapreneur is different from the typical entrepreneur in terms of skills and motivation.

Intrapreneurs are entrepreneurial in many respects, but that doesn't make the two synonymous. Both share a builder's mindset that makes them eager to create valuable solutions that don't yet exist. But intrapreneurs are less drawn to the huge rewards that can come with founding one's own firm. They don't necessarily want the all-consuming hours, unpredictability, and risk that go with a start-up. Often, they see a way to have more impact by staying in their jobs and leveraging their employers' already established scale and brands. They have the knowledge—and the patience—to navigate the politics and protocols of their large organizations.

Myth: Innovation Labs Are the Best Place to House Intrapreneurs

Truth: The place for intrapreneurs is everywhere. Innovation centers help provide the discipline and network required to grow intrapreneurial initiatives from idea to execution.

This is a more contemporary myth, because it has grown along with the trend toward large companies, nonprofits, and government institutions creating innovation centers, labs, incubators, and garages.



The whole point of these investments in facilities and talent is to focus on fueling the innovation pipeline. So this is where intrapreneurs should be housed, right? While that might seem true at first, the whole point of cultivating intrapreneurship is to encourage it across the organization. Creating a cordoned-off holding tank for intrapreneurs will signal the opposite and imply that innovation can only happen in specially designated spots by the people whose job it is to innovate. Innovation centers provide a clear pathway, training, networks, and other resources to help intrapreneurs succeed—regardless of where they come from.

New mythologies don't emerge just because someone writes a book conducts research and suggests they are needed. The myths we carry around in our heads and choose to live by are harder to dislodge than that. They are formed over the course of years by a combination of our observations of what works and our values regarding how we wish things would work.

Right now, we are in a period when corporate innovation activity is exploding. We will have many more models of success, and of failure, to take our lessons from. Many new stories will emerge from which we can gain a new and better understanding—and with these we can construct a new mythology of intrapreneurship. Let's make it a good one.



Dr. Simone Ahuja is the founder and principal of innovation strategy firm [Blood Orange](#), and co-author of the forthcoming book, [Disrupt-It-Yourself: Eight Ways to Hack a Better Business--Before the Competition Does](#) (January, 2019).



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Is Your Organization's Strategic Focus Aligned With The Demands Of The Digital Age?

Ensuring relevancy & congruency in leadership

By **Murad Salman Mirza**

The word 'Disruptive' has come to signify the kind of transformative change that uproots existing norms of competitive economies and forges a path of its own by rewriting the 'rule book' while relegating complacent titans of industry to the annals of history. It's the kind of trailblazing that is majestic in nature and game-changing in practice. However, organizations that are built upon such innovations are also highly susceptible to becoming like the ones they replaced as accelerated growth and unbridled expansion come into focus, especially, after the 'aura' of being a 'startup' disappears. Consequently, it is imperative that the strategic focus of progressive organizations is

in congruence with the demands of the Digital Age to remain relevant and competitive while maintaining an effective buffer

against disruptive influences/competitors. The following model is being presented in the respective context:





The aforementioned model highlights the five strategic imperatives for organizations to stay relevant and competitive in the Digital Age, i.e., Humanistic, Functional, Architectural, Business and Technology. It is designed in the form of a self-reflection that creates a framework for an honest self-appraisal of an organization's strengths and weaknesses to further strengthen the positive traits and to enable timely corrective/preventive actions for overcoming any shortcomings. Let's discuss each of the five strategic imperatives with their constituent elements, as follows:

Humanistic

The Humanistic aspect focuses on all areas pertaining to the management of human talent that creates a win-win situation for both the employee and the employer during the lifecycle of the employment relationship. It calls for cognizance of the fact that employee voices are being increasingly muffled under the euphoria induced by the increasing encroachment of seemingly user-friendly technology in the workplace, especially, AI-enabled, that is serving as a 'relationship buffer' for the senior management, enamored with an obsessive focus on efficiency, to marginalize the humanistic concerns. Consequently, the fugaciousness of careers in a digital economy is significantly changing the 'psychological contract' as it shifts from being blindly based on 'solemn faith' to being watchfully propped up on 'validated trust'.

Short-sighted organizations often implement talent management practices that are designed for 'risk accommodation' against 'talent flight' instead of 'risk mitigation' that caters to 'talent engagement'. However, gone are the days when budding professionals depended upon the paternalistic instincts of their employers to provide them with a viable career path. The capable professional of today is more informed, incisively skilled, and comes with a baggage of knowledge that enables leveraged negotiating targeted to achieve maximum gains within a mutually agreed frame of reference. Consequently, Total Rewards has evolved to incorporate Employee Experience in addition to the traditional norms of Compensation and Benefits. It has become a hallmark of outstanding employers as reflected below:

Therefore, the key question in the respective context becomes 'Is there substantial value in being an employee of our organization'.

Functional

The Functional aspect focuses on all areas pertaining to the effective integration, harmonization and channelization of activities/ initiatives that are manifested through prudent organizational structuring. It elevates the notion of nimbleness to a core competitive advantage and points to the significance of being able to pivot congruently with respect to the demands of the Digital Age. This is crucial in terms of safeguarding against disruptive forces (astute competitors, breakthrough technologies, transforming eco-systems, dynamic customer/client bases, binding laws/rules/regulations, uncertain political environment,



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multi-generational workforces, etc.). However, care has to be taken in terms of not being lured into excessive experimentation associated with 'fad-surfing' or becoming highly vulnerable to the pitfalls of accelerated growth and unbridled expansion without a supportive organizational structure, especially, in case of new organizations, after the 'aura' of being a 'startup' disappears.

Organizations are a complex mix of various interactive elements that are both organic and inorganic in nature as shown below:

Most leaders struggle to find an optimum balance between the two key facets due to the inevitable presence of various controllable/uncontrollable factors and are generally resigned to leaning more towards one than the other as they try to stamp their influence on building an enduring legacy within the organizations. Such an imbalance creates serious issues for the long-term success of the organization, especially, considering that one of the key reasons that 'organizational restructuring' often fails in progressive organizations is due to the inconspicuous fact that it

is primarily focused on tinkering with the 'organizational hierarchy', rather than, significantly improving the 'thought hierarchy'. Therefore, the key question in the respective context becomes '**Are we configured in the best possible way to deliver desired results**'.

Architectural

The Architectural aspect focuses on all areas pertaining to designing, implementing, maintaining, improving, and sustaining the physical work environment that is conducive to the health and wellbeing of the workforce. Proactively assuring

How Well do You Measure Up on the 'Total Rewards' Package?



Created & Developed: Murad Salman Mirza



and ensuring such initiatives is a significant part of the overall equation for corporate success, especially, in terms of managing stress levels, reducing fatigue factors and inculcating measures for a lively and invigorating workplace. Following questions pertaining to workplace design should be considered for gaining a better understanding of relevant strengths and weaknesses to reinforce/institutionalize effective remedial measures:

1. What are you trying to achieve with workplace design now that earlier initiatives could not accomplish?
2. How is your organization meeting the associated challenges?
3. How is 'employee voice' being incorporated in the respective context?
4. Are there any areas where customer/client needs and employee desires clash? If so, how have you resolved them?
5. What are some of the key direct and indirect metrics that reflect the impact of workplace design in your organization?
6. Do you benchmark in the respective context? If so, how has it helped you?
7. How does the 'gig economy' (freelancing) fit with such initiatives?
8. What role do you foresee Artificial Intelligence (AI) playing in the respective context for the future?
9. Have you used innovative workplace design as a recruitment tool too? If so, is it attracting the desired talent accordingly?

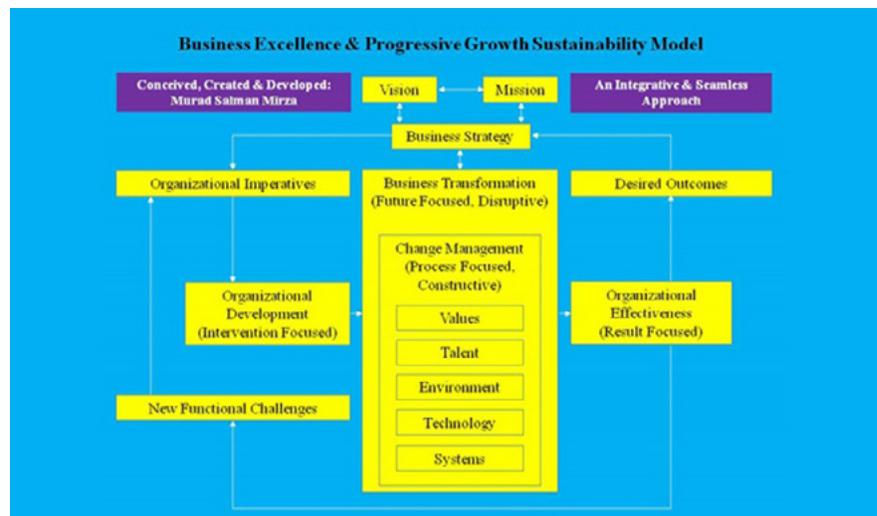
10. How do you intend to inculcate lessons learnt from such experiences in future endeavors?

The aforementioned questions create the 'thought space' that can compel progressive leaders to not only focus on the 'palatable' prioritized areas, but also, the 'contentious' marginalized areas, e.g., overcoming communication/engagement challenges through the astute use of office space, elevating productivity levels by effectively catering to ergonomic considerations, boosting diversity and inclusion initiatives through design innovation, excelling in meeting customer/client needs/expectations by incorporating the 'WOW' factor, adopting environmentally-friendly designs/practices that lead to efficient utilization of available resources, using [human-centric lighting/luminosity to enhance focus and comfort levels](#), etc. Therefore, the key question in the respective context becomes '**Have we created a welcoming and healthy place for work?**'

Business

The Business aspect focuses on all areas pertaining to the strategic imperatives and operational elements that work in congruence to robustly maintain an organization's relevance and competitiveness in the Digital Age. It cautions against falling into the abyss of an idealistic vision that projects the 'mirage' for embarking upon doomed initiatives by conducting timely and effective due diligence of organizational capabilities with respect to the 'mobilizable' resources, availability of 'prodigious' talent, and prevalence of 'scrumptiously' favorable factors for business in the foreseeable future. The following 'Business Excellence & Progressive Growth Sustainability Model' illuminates a viable path in the respective direction:

The aforementioned model also provides a strong basis for taking calculated risks, rather than, capitulating to the addiction of 'risk aversion' that is the current



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norm for the leadership of many organizations, who prefer measuring corporate success in terms of avoiding failures, rather than, learning from missteps and consolidating gains on a long-term basis, due to the pressure to produce positive quarterly/short-term results to placate impatient/'activist' shareholders. An associated aspect in the respective context is the recognition that great responsibility resides with the caretakers of critical information in corporate entities for assuring and ensuring its pristine quality to avoid categorization of being tainted as a corrosive tool, a destructive weapon, an endless source of fodder for feeding the grapevine, a malicious catalyst, or as an enabler of destabilization to organizational harmony.

Additionally, in rushing to embrace the alluring promise of AI-enabled technology, progressive organizations often fall into the trap of providing incomplete/immature service models before the discerning eyes of emboldened customers/clients, who are more than willing to expose the associated shortcomings/failures in terms of adapting to multi-dimensional/unforeseen service conditions, especially, through online forums. For example, courier companies are generally highly proficient/competitive in 'Product Delivery' and many are actively working on 'normalizing' drone deliveries, however, they lag significantly in appreciably/consistently upholding any outstanding standards with respect to Product

Return, Product Replacement, and Product Recall.

Furthermore, concerns for environmental and social imbalances have added extra dimensions for competitive organizations to proactively engage in remedial measures before irreparable harm to increasingly fragile reputations, especially, from a few keystrokes of an internet-savvy disturbed/disgruntled/disillusioned party from any corner of the world. The term 'activist' has shifted from its rudimentary contemplation as an act of defiance pertaining to societal upheaval to a more apt description of an 'engaged' stakeholder. Therefore, organizations with an eye on thriving in the future are well-advised to heed the adage 'someone is always watching' and proactively embrace the consequences of their actions in a more accommodating and responsible manner.

Consequently, the two toughest decisions that astute leaders have to make in the Digital Age are:

1. Saying 'No' in an Era of Prosperity

This pertains to going beyond the allure of short-term gains in favor of progressive measures that secure long-term sustainability

2. Saying 'Yes' in an Era of Uncertainty

This pertains to taking calculated risks for initiating progressive measures against the conventional wisdom of playing it safe. Therefore, the key question

in the respective context becomes **'Are our strategies aligned with our capabilities to achieve desired results responsibly and sustainably?'**

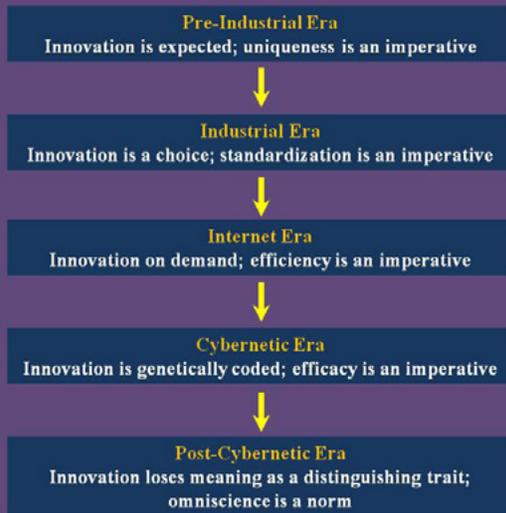
Technology

The Technology aspect focuses on all areas pertaining to the incorporation, utilization, supervision, viability, efficacy, and improvement of non-human talent in enhancing functional capabilities of an organization. Currently, the preferred approach is to find the means to complement the bulk of the human workforce; however, the future seems to be gravitating towards minimal human presence/interface/interaction as AI-enabled entities achieve primacy in the workplace.

A common mistake made in the dash for embracing technological solutions is to equate technology with innovation. However, innovation is a cardinal 'humanistic' concept that refers to the astute application of human ingenuity, whereas, technology is a consequential 'mechanistic' tool that enables the efficient accomplishment of targeted tasks/assignments/responsibilities. Keeping the 'human factor' in prime position while charting the course of a prosperous future in the Digital Age ensures organizational harmony in congruence with the optimal technological solutions. Following is a brief overview of the evolution of innovation through the key past, present and future eras:



A Brief Overview of the Evolution of Innovation



Created & Developed: Murad Salman Mirza

Today's multigenerational workforce is looking at existential challenges that are more pronounced and transformative than for earlier professionals, e.g., narrowing occupational paths, re-skilling imperatives, multiple careers, early retirements, forced entrepreneurship, etc., especially, as AI-enabled entities progressively conquer the conventional 'strictly humanistic' domains within the workplace and relentlessly push the threshold for 'staying relevant' to the upper echelons of cerebral application. This is also testing the robustness of core values that form the basis of a cohesive corporate culture as employees get more and more apprehensive about the validity/strength of the 'psychological contracts' with their employers.

Additionally, benefits from having a generationally-diverse workforce can be comprehensively realized by astutely creating, prudently deploying, and effectively assuring an optimal balance between the 'Crystallized Intelligence'

(prevalent in older members), and the 'Fluid Intelligence' (prevalent in younger members). Anyone marginalizing older workers and/or prepping them for early retirements under the guise of restructuring/streamlining/reforming initiatives forsakes a golden opportunity to utilize the full capacity of available talent for overcoming formidable challenges in a hypercompetitive Digital world.

Consequently, a sagacious measure will be to avoid sacrificing effectiveness at the altar of efficiency by succumbing to the lure of pervasive user-friendly technology at the cost of marginalizing human ingenuity in devising innovative solutions to overcome present and future organizational challenges. Furthermore, organizations that can provide the strongest 'jovial anchors' for their employees will be the ones to have a healthy pool of bustling talent in competitive economies of the future. Therefore, the

key question in the respective context becomes 'Is technology a substantial competitive advantage for us without compromising our core values'.

Parting Thoughts

A key aspect of strategic reviews within progressive organizations should be the ascertainment of whether there is an inherent inclination for the 'need to change' or the 'want to change' approach to stay relevant in the Digital world. The first one reflects a reactive approach and is a clear signal for course correction before being marginalized by more astute competitors. The second one indicates a proactive approach that signifies a hearty embrace of timely innovative practices for assuring an organization's competitive future with a robust 'going concern' status. How was your last review? Are you alarmed, hopeful or confident? Your future awaits...



Murad Salman Mirza is an innovative thinker and an astute practitioner of areas within and associated with the fields of Organizational Development, Talent Management & Business Transformation. He is also a globally published author and an active contributor to various professional forums.



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