



# The 7 Questions Every CEO Should Ask About Culture

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*“Strategy is a bicycle, culture is a bus.”*

## What is culture?

Tony Hsieh, Zappos’s Founder – now owned by Amazon – preaches that an organization’s number one priority is culture. Brian Chesky, the co-founder and CEO of Airbnb, says, “It doesn’t matter how good your original product is, if you can’t build a great company around it, the product won’t endure.” When Satya Nadella took over as CEO at Microsoft, in 2014, he told employees that his highest priority was the company’s culture. He refers to culture as “the soul” of the organization. For a great organization, culture isn’t an abstract or vague concept ... it’s real ... it speaks to people. It’s not a competitive advantage ... it’s a competitive imperative.





Culture is a complex word. Its first official mention, in English, was in 1430 when the Oxford English dictionary stated that it meant “cultivation.” Somewhere along the line culture stopped being about tilling the soil. Instead, it became synonymous with “the arts:” music, poetry, dance, opera, literature, painting and the like. Tilling the intellect!

In a different guise, culture distinguishes one tribe from another. Think about the elite education, polished accent, prescribed dress and required etiquette of the English upper class;<sup>1</sup> the tattoos and street argot of a LA street gang; the shirts, scarfs and chants of Liverpool soccer supporters; and/or the conflict resolution rituals of the Yanomami, one of the most primitive and remote indigenous tribes of Amazonia.<sup>2</sup> Fertilising the closed mind!

In yet one more form of expression, culture describes the habits, values, norms, ethos, organization and identity of a community who work together in pursuit of a common purpose. The tribe is about exclusion; everyone has to look and act in the same way. Taken to its extreme the tribe emerges as a cult. The psychological polar opposite is a community built on inclusion, shared values and a respect for individual difference. If you want things to stay the same ... act as if you are part of the tribe<sup>3</sup> (cooperation, consensus, build walls). If you recognise and embrace the need for change, think and behave as if you were part of a community (collaboration, trust, sharing). Internal tribes at war with each other are the best thing the competition has going for it. Plowing a new furrow!

Culture isn't a plaque in reception, a consulting exercise or a memo to all employees. It isn't limited to the organization's values, exclusively the province of HR, a repackaged engagement survey or something you “do” and then forget about until this time next year. If the term never passed the CEO's lips your culture would still define what's possible. And it will change ... whether you want it to or not. As a business, you are your culture. It's the essence of who you are. The good news is it's the one thing the competition can't usurp.

Culture within a business setting is a container for diversity. Here, one is faced with the law of requisite variety. For a system to sustain itself, it needs at least as much internal variety as exists in the environment in which it sits (context). If you look around your organization<sup>4</sup> or team and, for the most part, those involved all look and sound the same, know that you are ill-equipped for a world where ideas are the lifeblood of tomorrow's success.

The challenge culture presents is that it is the behavioural equivalent of the water in a goldfish bowl. We mostly don't know that it's there but it, nevertheless, sustains life. Have you ever thought how remarkable it is that at the end of the day hundreds, even tens of thousands, of employees go home and, **without thinking about it**, are able to pick up exactly where they left off the next morning? **That's culture!**

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1 Behaviour considered by that particular tribe to be the very definition of being “cultured.”

2 To resolve a dispute the men of the tribe first select a large pole from the roof of their hut. Taking turns, they bring their pole down as hard as possible on the head of their opponent until only one of them (the winner) is left standing.

3 The tribe is more prevalent than you might at first think: the sales tribe, the manufacturing tribe, the finance tribe.

4 Including (especially) the Board.



To survive is to adapt. “Are you managing your culture?” If any of the seven questions that follow receives a negative response, the answer is, almost certainly, “not so much.”

## 1. Does your team regularly have a vibrant culture conversation?

Culture is the often overlooked, all-pervasive, enterprise-wide, organizational DNA that dictates whether your strategy lands or if your brand sustains. It’s “a way to be” shaped by the past but continuously honed by the emerging business, social, economic, political and customer context. Unless your name happens to be Steve Jobs, managing the culture from the inside-out is the commercial equivalent of driving down a busy highway wearing a blindfold. Xerox, Nokia, Northern Telecom, Kodak, Blackberry, Lehman Brothers, Carrefour, British Home Stores and the record industry come to mind.

Where many teams struggle is that they either take a simplistic approach or don’t know how to have a rich and vibrant culture conversation. Culture is managed from the outside-in but demands leadership from the inside-out. There are four essential, supporting pillars of culture:

1. Mission (why do we do what we do?)
2. Diversity (diversity fuels innovation)<sup>5</sup>
3. Brand (why buy from us?)
4. Speed (**F**ocus – **A**nticipation – **S**implicity – **T**echnology)

The four pillars act like the foundation of a house. If they are poorly constructed nothing will stand for very long. And miss one out – or any of the other building blocks of culture covered in the next paragraphs for that matter – and constantly recycling the past is the best that can be hoped for.

Those four pillars are braced by the organization’s values. An organization without values is a ship without a rudder. Values give people permission to act. The values represent the CEO’s and top team’s leadership point of view. Co-creating the values – involving as many people as possible in drawing up the values – sounds like a good idea but there is a reason the expression “a camel is a horse designed by a committee” came into being. Ask, involve, confer and listen but don’t abdicate. That said, the organization’s values must hold meaning for all of the stakeholders, especially the customer.

It should be added that in a multicultural environment the term “values” comes with a good deal of baggage. “Why is the organization telling me what my values should

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5 The simple test of diversity is “Does the makeup of those in key leadership roles reflect the makeup of the population that buys the product or uses the service?” If you are a sector where 80% of the customers are women and the organization’s leadership is dominated by men there is much work to be done. Social justice aside, the ability to follow and anticipate trends in the marketplace is an invaluable attribute.



be? That’s very personal?” The confusion between organization and personal values is overcome if we think of the organization’s values as “guiding principles.”

The four pillars, when married to the organization’s values, frame the context – the cultural canvas if you like. The most forceful elements on that canvas being:

- vision and strategy;
- measurement and rewards;
- the talent management system (e.g., who gets hired and/or promoted, the leadership development agenda); and
- technology (quickly becoming an irresistible force).

Bringing the intended culture to life means also working on:

- structure;
- core processes;
- the nature and degree of freedom to act (how decisions get made and who makes them); and
- how people learn (learning how to learn, speed of learning).

Meanwhile, if the “culture anchors” don’t “introduce” the culture the organization needs ... stasis is assured. Leaders who stumble tend to focus on the drivers without, at the same time, addressing the cultural anchors:

- mindset,
- behaviour at the top of the house,
- letting go of, as appropriate, past history,
- myth,
- language,
- metaphor,
- symbolism and
- storytelling.

A cultural anchor is so called because it describes behaviour that, unless reframed with tomorrow in mind, puts a brake on progress like an anchor thrown from the back of a car.

Addressing the white space on the organization chart – the informal organization – completes the picture. That white space isn’t a vacuum, it’s full of noise; a cacophony of often confused and conflicting babble ... that you need on your side. If you don’t manage the informal organization it will manage you!



All of the elements described come together to shape the organization's story. You are your story. Culture is story and story is culture! We are the storytelling apes. Story touches a part of the brain that nothing else can. Customers don't buy your product ... they buy your story. They buy why you do what you do. When top talent is evermore difficult to find and attract – as it is – a winning story is essential. Talent isn't attracted to your balance sheet; they/he/she want to join your firm because they love your story. And they stay – not because they swoon over your strategy – but because they are a happy captive of your culture.

It's not enough to have a great story – you need to know how to share it. A great story has five parts.

1. Why do we do what we do?
2. Where are we heading?
3. What do we believe in?
4. What makes us special?
5. How does what we do make a difference in people's lives?

Recognising that millennials and iGen employees will soon be the bulk of your workforce – make sure that number 5 includes giving back, building community and the environment.

When the road ahead is uncertain, speed of learning becomes the ultimate competitive advantage. Best practice (improved on), listening, story, symbolism, creative tension, a great question, challenging the status quo, risk, leadership reach, comfort with ambiguity, coaching, catching people doing it right, reflection and language become the oxygen upon which learning how to learn thrives.

What we observe shapes what we do. Until we listen to others – really listen – we can't listen to ourselves. The stories we share influence how we think. A compelling symbol cuts through the clutter. A great question makes people think slower ... in order that they can act faster. When the status quo remains undisturbed ... opportunity remains unfulfilled. When we coach others we tap into the best of who we are. In affirming others we give them permission to act. Wisdom is insight tempered by experience. Without reflection there is no learning. Language isn't important; it's everything. We navigate “what's possible” through metaphor. Same old language, same old behaviour!

**Culture Imperative:** Culture is a system. If you leave something out expect unintended consequences. Do you separate from the organization those who don't live the values? Are language, imagery, metaphor, story and symbolism central to how your team seeks to create tomorrow today? In difficult times, how people learn is more important than what they learn.



## 2. Do you spend as much (quality time) on culture as you do on strategy?

Traditional business school thinking is that *strategy drives culture*. Figure out the strategy and then make the culture fit. In a steady state world, that model makes perfect sense. Except we don't live in a safe, predictable environment. In a world of uncertainty the only thing that is predictable is that your strategy will be "subject to correction." Long after the strategy has been shredded, what will endure is the culture. The new reality – *culture enables strategy*.

It's become popular to use the expression "culture eats strategy for breakfast." It's colourful, catchy, engaging, provocative ... and wrong! We need both strategy and culture. The conundrum with a good metaphor is that logic doesn't unseat it. We need a better metaphor. Consider "strategy is a bicycle, culture is a bus." It's a mistake of epic proportions to assume the bicycle can pull the bus. Difficult when the road is flat; impossible on a steep incline. Know also that if the bicycle has to swerve – if, for example, a black swan runs into the road<sup>6</sup> – the bus will just keep on going ... and going. And in the collision that follows ... no prize for knowing the winner! We need to get strategy on the bus ... recognising that culture has primacy at the back of the bus! What does that mean in practical terms? The next time your team meets to discuss strategy make sure that culture is front and centre.

Organizations put culture on the back burner because of an attitude to change best described as "cultural drift." Cultural drift is the misplaced belief that even if we fail to invest quality time at the top of the house on culture, somehow the secondary initiatives unfolding in the organization (e.g., six sigma, process improvement, town hall meetings, reinventing the performance management process, engagement surveys) will get us where we need to be. Making culture "a project" is a pretty good signal that cultural drift dominates the day. Delegating all things to do with culture to the HR function sends out a similar message.

In an uncertain and unpredictable world, to be a successful leader is to breathe life into the culture **every** single day. The problem? Intent and intestinal fortitude aren't always aligned. What's important gets in the way of what is essential. Early resolve is not the same as a successful outcome. And like the generals in WW1, far too many of those in key leadership roles are still fighting yesterday's battles.<sup>7</sup> The evidence from our own research, and that of others, is that four out of every five organizations are trapped by cultural drift. That is to say, only 20% of organizations are managing their culture.<sup>8</sup>

6 A black swan event describes unpredictable, sweeping and highly disruptive change, e.g., the 2008 financial meltdown. Because few in the capital markets thought Brexit would happen ... it was a black swan event.

7 In spite of the advances in machine guns and artillery, WW1 opened with all of the combatants using cavalry.

8 An eleven-year study by Harvard Professors, John Kotter and James Haskett, indicated that, over the course of the study, organizations that managed their culture had a stock price increase of 901% compared to an increase of 74% for those who did not. *Corporate Culture and Performance* (1992).



**Culture Imperative:** If you are not managing your culture someone else is! The union; a dominant customer; a predatory supplier; the local press; government regulators; and/or a function or sub-business that, because of past success, have undue influence and will be pleased to move into the vacuum.

### 3. Is there clarity around what has made – and makes – the business successful?

A business exists primarily to create tomorrow's customer. Profit is obviously important but it's ultimately the outcome of doing the former well. The organization's culture delivers both the *outward-looking* (why buy from us?) and the *inward-facing* value propositions (why work for us?). Of the two, the latter is the more important. If the brand promise doesn't live inside the organization it can't live in the marketplace.

If employees don't support the organization's promise within the customer space, it matters not how strong the product or service offering is. Brand simply means **Better Results And No Disappointment**. A disappointed employee is a disappointed customer. And based on the business sector, the multiplier effect (number of customers a market-facing employee can influence) may well be 50, 100 or even 1,000 to one.

It's easy to become obsessed about "what we need to do differently." Indeed, the enthusiasm to create "the new" can easily obscure elements of the culture that have historically made (and currently make) the business successful. A man who doesn't read is no better off than the man who can't read. And an organization that loses touch with what makes it special is no better off than an organization that doesn't have anything that makes it special.

Why do people buy what we deliver? Why do our best people stay? What is our core competency? What has made us successful to this point? What is our distinct point of differentiation? What do we do that the competition doesn't? What is sacrosanct? How do we make money? And the answer to that last question isn't always clear.

None of this is to suggest that the organization's distinct competitive advantage is written in stone. Today's winning offering is tomorrow's commodity. And customers certainly don't want a broader offering if it takes away from mastery in what you do best.

Culture isn't an adjunct, a sideshow, or a sandbox for those with a love for all things abstract. Culture is real, practical and central to what makes a business endure. For the business to sustain, the culture has to attract top talent, retain outstanding leaders, provide the agility needed for different strategic scenarios to be realised, create the space for innovation, move best practice across the organization, accelerate learning, nurture risk, empower those closest to the customer to make key decisions, ensure that the environment is a priority and align the organization's resources with why the customer buys – today and tomorrow. Results will follow.



**Culture Imperative:** If you can't quickly and succinctly describe your business's distinct point of difference then (1) you can't protect it; and (2) your business is about to be overtaken by a competitor that can.

#### 4. Are middle managers fully in the game?

No organization of more than 150 or so people has one single and unified culture.<sup>9</sup> The challenge thus becomes one of tight-loose leadership: allow local differences to flourish<sup>10</sup> while, at the same time, develop an overarching Meta culture that ensures common values, consistency, connection, collaboration, caring for the customer and an unrelenting commitment to the whole. And the group that binds everything together is the “middle managers.” Moreover, they are the only group that can!

Virtually every engagement study shows that middle managers are disheartened, disappointed, disillusioned, dissatisfied and disengaged. Those who lead the organization need to be reminded, regularly, of the laws of physics: effluent runs downhill. After two decades of downsizing, rightsizing and doing more with less, middle managers are standing knee-deep in the “nasty stuff.” If the organization's middle kingdom isn't on board ... no one is on board.

Involvement without inspiration is just more work. Content without context is momentum without meaning. Movement without traction is investment without payback. And “know how” without “knowing why” quickly becomes “not now.”

It should not be assumed that middle managers who are “disengaged” have stopped caring about the business. Lack of followership, feeling left out and what appears to be a sense of emotional withdrawal lie not in a loss of loyalty, but in the frustration that accompanies being unable to make a difference. Some come to work to make money; others to make a career; the best to make a difference. Don't frustrate the group you need the most!

And the straw that stirs the middle management drink is inspirational leadership, especially from the leaders who are expected to inspire the middle kingdom – leaders one-level-up! Leaders who inspire do four things extraordinarily well.

One: Through imagery, symbolism, metaphor and story they make tomorrow come alive in the room today. Edicts don't win buy-in. Threat certainly doesn't. Fear isn't that helpful in the long term either. And if you think hard-working middle managers are in raptures about the next PowerPoint presentation, think again. It's not what we tell people that

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9 This is often referred to as “The Dunbar Rule.” We know from studies of social media that 120-150 “friends” represents the outer limits of an active network. It also happens to be the point at which hunter-gatherer bands fracture into smaller groups.

10 As an example, the term “team” means something entirely different in Seoul than it does in Syracuse.



matters ... it's how we make them feel. People won't care how much you know ... until they know how much you care.<sup>11</sup>

Two: In addition to agreed goals and scope of responsibility, they ensure that everyone on the team fully understand their role on the team. To inspire is to believe. Really believe. Believe not that the desired outcome might happen, could happen, or we would like it to happen ... but that it WILL happen. A leader's belief system is like a virus. If it's virulent enough – everyone catches it.

Three: Those who inspire others work on the principle that if you don't grow the people in the business, you can't grow the business. And that growth starts with them personally. Those who inspire others display a passion to learn. They see coaching not as a nice capability to have but as central to what it means to be a leader.

Four: Leaders who inspire connect with people. This speaks to employees having a voice, pushing decisions as far down the organization as possible, caring, listening, being authentic, bringing out the best in people and treating team members with dignity and respect. Always!

**Culture Imperative:** If the middle managers in your business are sitting on the sidelines ... if the middle kingdom isn't fully in the game ... you don't have a strategy ... you have a problem.

## 5. Do you measure culture?

The disruptive dynamic currently battering business negates the naïve notion that change can be managed, translated into a series of workshops or framed as a program. To lead is to learn to ride the waves of change. Change thus has to become a way to think ... a mindset grounded in a resilient<sup>12</sup> and adaptable approach to interruption and ambiguity.

There are four levels of change: (1) transactional – do more of what we have always done better; (2) transitional – significant change but we have time to evolve; (3) transformational – reinvention and do it *now*; and (4) exponential – a tsunami that is merely an introduction to the next and greater tidal wave. Culture plays a key role in change no matter the degree of change envisaged. Both transformational and exponential change are literally about reinventing the culture. The engine of culture change? A leader who knows how to successfully introduce the culture conversation.

Ongoing and unprecedented uncertainty, meanwhile, demands a culture that is both strong and agile (StrAgility).<sup>13</sup> Strong enough ... to build commitment to the organization's

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11 Attributed to everyone from Teddy Roosevelt to John C. Maxwell.

12 Resilience is like the plasticity of the brain; it can change. Step one – measurement. See the Orxestra assessment of resilience.

13 "StrAgility" is an Orxestra measure of culture. The assessment is called *Are You Managing Your Culture?*



mission. Agile enough ... to “enable” the right strategic scenario to unfold. As to the future, the only thing you can count on is that it will be different.

If you don’t know where you’re going ... don’t be surprised if you don’t get there. What we don’t know we can’t address. It’s difficult to raise the bar if you don’t know how high it is. It’s essential, however, that the culture measurement express, in business terms, where the organization’s culture is (roots) and where the organization’s culture needs to be (wings).

Here we face the reality that if you don’t measure culture, you can’t manage it. Intellectually appealing as many of the sociological approaches and those focusing on values congruency may be, if the cultural journey isn’t described in business terms, the top team – keeping in mind that most senior teams have a notoriously short attention span – will quickly move on to the next topic. If the language employed to assess the organization’s culture sounds as if it were drawn from a psychology textbook, then that’s where it belongs. No less important, culture is strategic. We need to understand both where we are and where we need to be.

It’s not a matter of one-size-fits-all.<sup>14</sup> An interactive conversation with the Board on culture invariably demands a different way to present – and thus measure – the organization’s culture. Similarly, transactional versus transformational change are different challenges ... a difference that has to be reflected in how the culture journey is presented to those whose support is needed.

**Culture Imperative:** It’s tough to manage what we don’t measure.

## **6. Are all of the communication channels – especially those preferred by employees who inhabit the informal organization – fully brought into play?**

Driverless cars lie – in some cases literally – just around the next corner. We are building bridges and large buildings with 3D printers. Robotics and cobotics are irrevocably changing the face of manufacturing. The supermarket, call-centres, medicine, even your lawyer sit on the edge of a social revolution of epic proportions. As for technology ... quantum computing will change everything. Today it would take our fastest computers about a billion years to crack the most complex algorithms. For the same task, think in terms of seconds for quantum computing. Today is the slowest things will ever be!

Culture and change walk side by side. One serves and supports the other. Attempts to force-fit today’s technology into an organization designed for a steady-state, mechanical world will suck the energy out of every unwarranted level in the business. Assuming that the future of the organization lies in the hands of traditional, middle-aged managers who

<sup>14</sup> For a robust and practical measure of culture see *The A-Z of Organization Culture*. John O. Burdett (2017).



think that mastering their iPhone is pretty cool – when technology savvy millennials and iGen employees are about to be in the majority – is to sow the seeds of one’s own failure. Loyalty without allowing people to make real decisions is a *non sequitur*. Seeking to do things faster without changing how those involved learn is, paradoxically, destined to slow things own. Reinvention, whatever form it takes, without a supportive culture is the organization equivalent of thrusting a large stick into the spokes of a rapidly moving bicycle.

In the midst of this ongoing tumult the question becomes “Who owns the culture?” The obvious answer is “everyone.” A more considered answer might refer to the Board, the CEO or even the top team. I might have given that answer. Until I was recently persuaded to buy a cute puppy, that is. My kids love this little guy and lavish all sorts of attention on him. All well and good, but “who exerts the most influence over the puppy?” “Who shapes his behaviour?” Ownership certainly isn’t based on status, size or even assumed power. The simple answer is that, above all else, he bonds with and pays the most attention to the person whose responsibility it is to feed him. And guess who “feeds” the informal organization? Middle managers.

The only time the formal hierarchy dominates the informal organization is for a brief time every 29th of February. And never before lunch. Perpetuated through a need for inclusion, self-protection and loyalty to one’s immediate group, fluid and highly adaptable informal networks are remarkably effective. Lack of attention to this network (grapevine) is an “organization heart attack” that hasn’t yet happened.

Four issues are vital here. One: Make middle managers matter. Two: Build a bridge to the organization’s informal leaders. Three: Traditional, corporate-sponsored, trickle-down communication is like going into the fray armed only with a water pistol when those who would seek a different outcome (malcontents and cynics) come armed with a fire hose (social media). Four: Act on the knowledge that millennials are about to become the bulk of your workforce.

Think social media, blogs, interactive technology and any other means possible to provide the organization with a voice loud enough to interrupt the communication pollution that we are all drowning in.

Meanwhile, it’s a mistake to think you can change the organization one person at a time. The team is the basic building block of the modern organization. To be a successful leader is to always keep in mind that the team doesn’t work for the leader – the team leader works for the team. Tomorrow’s organization will be a team of teams. But they have to be great teams! The multiplier effect of even one ineffective team is astounding.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The 1631 edition of the King James Bible only had one mistake. The Seventh Commandment in the book of Exodus read, “Thou *shalt* commit adultery.”



**Culture Imperative:** If your marketing literature, reception area, intranet, website, boardroom, social media work, conferences, town hall meetings and/or your next middle management workshop don't grab people emotionally – if they don't capture the company's story – if they don't remind everyone involved of what it is that makes the business special ... you have work to do.

## 7. Do you hire/promote with “tomorrow's” culture in mind?

The world of work is changing. And the very definition of “a job” is, perhaps, changing most of all. In North America the gig economy will soon make up 30% of the workforce. Europe is on a similar track. Fuelling part of that growth are online, crowdsourcing sites such as Gigster, Guru.com, TaskRabbit, Toptal and Amazon's Mechanical Turk. “Independence” is the desired way of life for millions of contract employees.

These online “job centres” offer work that requires human intelligence; work that our species can still do better than computers. It might involve something as simple as transcribing an interview or as innovative as teaching computers to learn. You could, literally, be working for a computer and not know it. If your partner is a computer you are redefining the meaning of terms like “collaboration,” “teamwork” and “trust.”

Structures, processes and tools honed over the last hundred years are starting to fail. Hierarchy and a command and control mindset are out of step with the need for agility. Strategy is an unreliable compass. A decade from now the workforce will look very different. In that, literally, many of the jobs that companies will seek to fill a decade from now don't currently exist, even our investment in training and development is open to question.

Into this maelstrom rides talent management. The metaphorical quarterback of talent management ... who and how we hire. Simply replacing a leader who leaves is to reinforce the status quo. External consulting support drawing largely on an expensive address, a nice suit, great marketing and a thick rolodex belongs in the past.

A reliance on selection that ignores culture is to build a house on sand. And an executive who lacks mastery in the interview puts the business at risk every time he/she makes a hire decision.<sup>16</sup> Little is more important to tomorrow's culture than who the organization hires and promotes. Go astray and there is no easy fix.

Most leaders arrive at work to a full diary. The day-to-day and the immediate have a habit of overwhelming a long-term view. And yet, unless we create tomorrow today, the future will, inevitably, be little more than a replay of what has been. Count on it!

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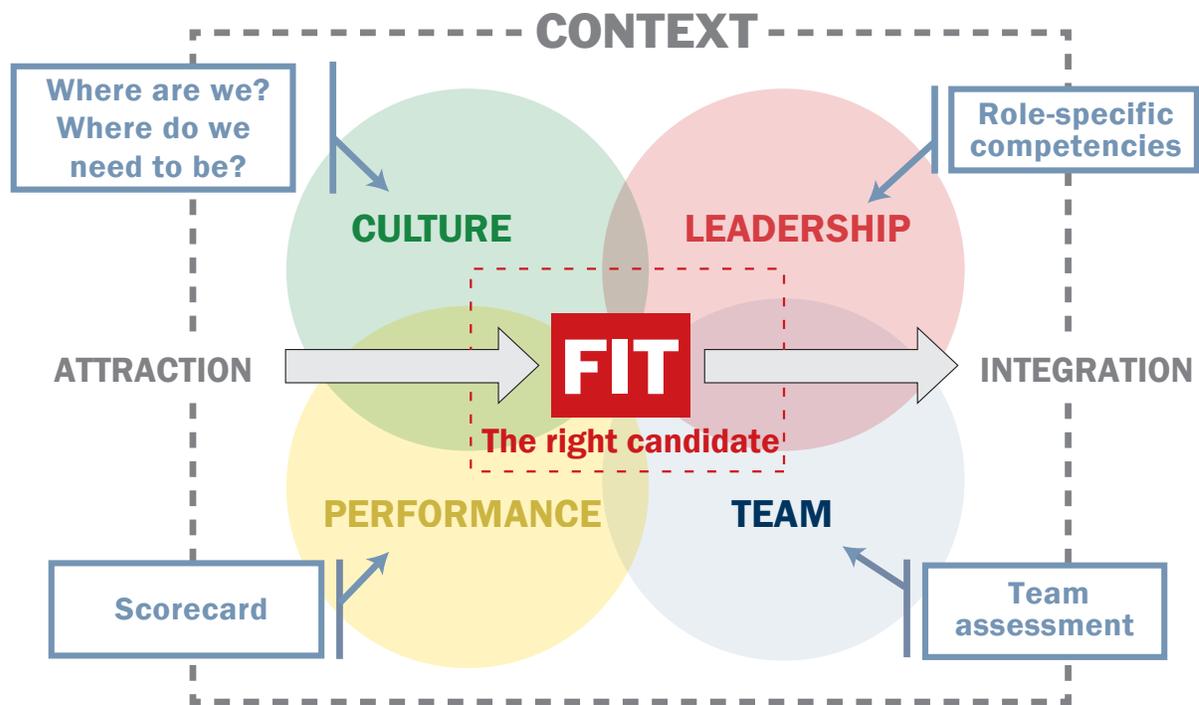
<sup>16</sup> For now! Expect artificial intelligence, facial interpretation of micro behaviours to determine personality and role-specific algorithms to soon play a pivotal role in the interview.



When talent acquisition is a beauty contest – as it is in many organizations – the **best** candidate wins. It’s easy to find the *best* candidate. Getting culture on the right track means identifying the right candidate.<sup>17</sup> Not every now and then ... but **every** time.

Talent acquisition is about managing risk. Risk, in turn, is about fit. There are six critical elements of fit: (1) attraction; (2) culture; (3) performance; (4) role-specific, leadership competencies; (5) team fit; and (6) integration. See **Figure one**. All six elements of fit are essential but as disruption, uncertainty and new technology impact how business does business ... culture is destined to become evermore important. Moreover, the more senior the role, the more vital culture becomes.

**Culture Imperative:** Who you hire determines what’s possible. Hiring that has a “replacement bias” is to become more of what you have always been. In determining fit, measurement matters. Especially when it comes to culture and team. Consider a



From *The Empty Suit* (2016)

## THE DIMENSIONS OF FIT

Figure one

<sup>17</sup> Factors that go towards defining “the right candidate” include not only a candidate who is a fit for the role in terms of culture, performance, leadership and team but an individual who will continue to grow in the position, whose approach to learning is congruent with the leadership development philosophy within the organization and who, where there is a distinct need, is a key successor for a mission critical position elsewhere in the organization.



move to what Charles Handy called the “Shamrock organization:” 1/3 permanent, 1/3 contract and 1/3 temporary. Money might attract talent but if you want to keep high performers give them a job that they love.



## Conclusion

The world of business ain’t what it used to be. Arguably, it has changed more in the past five years than in the previous fifty. Were that not enough of a challenge, the rate of change continues to accelerate.

The light squall and occasional shipwreck notwithstanding, sailing close to home, in sight of land, in a calm sea is relatively straightforward. Charting a course into raging, turbulent and unpredictable international waters presents an entirely different magnitude of challenge.

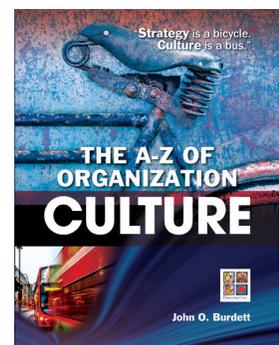
It’s easy to push culture aside. What’s wanted all-too-often gets in the way of what’s needed. Cultural drift, however, comes at a significant cost. Technology, being customer-centric, leveraging big data, agility, reach, responsiveness, innovation, collaboration, coaching, succession, attraction and retention ... are all wired into the organization’s culture. Get culture wrong and many of the building blocks of a successful business amount to little more than a spin of the roulette wheel.

The metaphor *de jour* not too long ago was to describe leadership in terms of the hard (results) and the soft (people) stuff. It’s unhelpful language. Success is about both results (strategy) and people (culture). Both are essential. Both are hard.

All that said, for a leader one question always has primacy, “What do I need to do *today* to make the business better *tomorrow*?” No matter the size of your organization or the sector you operate in, if you really think about that question ... culture will figure prominently in the answer. Leaders leave a legacy!



The content of this paper was taken from *The A-Z of Organization Culture* (2017). The book concludes with a robust and pragmatic (business) measure of both the culture your organization has and the culture you need to create. To purchase a copy of John’s new book go to ... <https://www.amazon.ca/dp/0994763123>. It is also available on a digital platform from iBook, Kobo and Barnes and Noble.





John Burdett has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He has worked and continues to work on organization culture for some of the world's largest corporations.

During the past 12 months, John's partnership with the Bedford Consulting Group and TRANSEARCH INTERNATIONAL meant that his proprietary work on organization culture was utilized by hundreds of major businesses around the world.

John holds a doctorate in management development and since 2000 has published ten best-selling books on leadership, talent management, executive coaching and organization culture. He recently completed his highly lauded talent trilogy: *Talent* (2013), *Team* (2015), and *The Empty Suit* (2016). His latest book is *The A-Z of Organization Culture* (2017). John lives in Toronto.



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