10 Leadership Strategies for a Thriving Culture

Themes and concepts from content by John O. Burdett.

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1. Align culture and strategy

'Culture eats strategy for breakfast' is interesting and provocative... but it's wrong.

Foster a culture that aligns with the strategic objectives of the organisation. Actively shape values, norms, and behaviors that support the execution of the chosen strategy. Learn how to develop strategies that are culturally coherent and leverage cultural strengths.

2. Manage culture from the outside-in

The cultural crisis... You have to manage culture from the outside-in.

Recognise external influences on organisational culture (such as market trends, societal shifts, and customer expectations) and actively manage those influences. Adapt and shape the internal culture in response to these external factors, ensuring the organisation remains relevant and resilient.

3. Manage and measure a learning-focused culture

You can't manage what you don't measure.

Create a learning-focused culture, and measure and enhance it. Set up systems to evaluate cultural aspects, collect feedback, and monitor key indicators. Foster ongoing improvement and adaptability among your team members.

4. Understand that culture is complex and interconnected

Culture is a system.

Culture is made up of many parts like values, beliefs, behaviors, and artifacts. Learn to manage and influence these parts. Understand how different aspects of the organisation work together to create the culture as a whole.

5. Ensure the organisation's purpose and values resonate with diverse groups

Not every organisation has a compelling purpose. The organisation's values have to connect with each of the demographic groups.

Recognise diversity and create inclusive value systems that engage all employees and align with their varied perspectives and needs. Foster inclusivity and diversity, understand the needs and perspectives of different groups, and articulate values that are meaningful and relevant to everyone.

6. Prioritise talent management and retention

Talent management is the engine of possibility. Who you hire, retain and promote is critical.

Focus on talent management that reflects your desired culture: hire people who share your values, foster diversity and inclusion, plan for future leaders who embody your culture, and keep top talent engaged and retained.

7. Ensure the organisation's design meets changing demands

Yesterday's organisation design is a dysfunctional model.

Traditional organisational structures may no longer be effective. Be willing to adapt and evolve the organisation's design to better support the desired culture and strategic objectives: restructure teams; revise reporting structures; facilitate collaboration, innovation, and agility.

8. Understand, and engage with, the informal culture

The informal culture cannot be simply set aside.

Understanding and managing the informal aspects of the organisation's culture is crucial. Acknowledge and engage with the informal networks and social dynamics that influence employee behavior and attitudes. Create opportunities for employees to have autonomy and choice within the organisation.

9. Empower middle managers

The Middle Kingdom have to be part of the solution.

Middle managers play a crucial role in translating top-level strategies into actionable plans and influencing employee behavior on a day-to-day basis. Engage middle managers to ensure alignment and buy-in throughout the organisation. Ensure they are equipped and motivated to drive change and uphold cultural values within their teams.

10. Adopt a holistic approach to change

You can't change the organisation one team at a time.

Approach culture as a holistic system and work to align all its components towards common goals and values. Create a shared vision for the desired culture, communicate it consistently across the organisation, and provide resources and support for implementation.

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John has extensive international experience as a senior executive. As a consultant he has worked in more than 40 countries. His extensive consulting around organisation culture encompasses, literally, some of the world's largest organisations. John's coaching work, meanwhile, embraces a number of international CEOs. His books, articles and assessment tools are embraced by executives worldwide.

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