

GALLUP'S PERSPECTIVE ON ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

MAXIMIZING PERFORMANCE BY ACHIEVING CLARITY, CONSISTENCY, ALIGNMENT, AND ENGAGEMENT IN AN ORGANIZATION'S PURPOSE, BRAND, AND CULTURE

Few things are as important — and difficult to grasp — as an organization's culture. Senior leaders want to know what it is to use it to their advantage or influence behaviors. Employees want to know what it is to know whether they will “fit in.” We all want to know where we came from, who we are, and where we are going.

Not surprisingly, there are probably as many definitions of “culture” as there are people trying to define it. Some take a descriptive approach to the concept, defining culture in terms of its essential features such as being “innovative,” “performance-based,” or “traditional.” Others take a dynamic view, defining culture in terms of the interplay between and among different forces in the organization, some of which may be good or bad. But all of these approaches view “culture” as a sort of invisible hand that guides and shapes an organization.

At Gallup, we take a functional approach to culture. Our experience has taught us that culture and its components are inherently neither “good” nor “bad.” For culture to matter to employees and customers, there has to be tangible action driving an organization's culture toward its aspired state. It is not so much the definition of a desired culture that matters, it is “why” and “how” the organization achieves that desired state.

Because of this, Gallup sees culture as just one part of a larger dynamic that we call *organizational identity*. In fact, organizational identity consists of three interrelated elements: *purpose* (“Why do we exist and why are we here?”), *brand* (“How are we known to the world?”), and *culture* (“How do we live and how do we do things around here?”). An organization's success is dependent on its unique answers to these three questions and on how well-aligned those three answers are with one another.

PURPOSE

While an organization might neatly sum up its purpose in a mission statement, few mission statements (i.e., “To become

the company of choice among our employees, our customers, and our shareholders”) really represent the company's DNA. An organization's purpose is a bold affirmation of its reason for being in business in the first place from a historical, ethical, emotional, and practical perspective. The purpose is the company's GPS, telling it why it's here and where it's going.

BRAND

The brand is the company's way of communicating “who we are” and “what we promise” to the outside world. This includes existing customers, prospective customers, current and future employees, industry influencers, and shareholders. A strong and aligned brand is focused on the notion of a brand promise — the unique statement of what the company offers and, importantly, how the company is different from its rivals and worthy of customers' consideration. Few companies have a clearly articulated and differentiated statement of their brand promise.

CULTURE

Culture is instrumental: It either facilitates and supports organizational success or undermines and inhibits it. Culture serves as a road map, as a set of ground rules and guidelines that articulate for every employee in the organization “how we do things around here.” In a sense, then, culture is the organization's operating manual. But unlike a typical operating manual, culture is not a written set of instructions or a narrative.

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG IDENTITY

Purpose, brand, and culture represent the essence of an organization's identity. If any one of these components is not well supported or understood, that identity becomes fractured and weak. To build and uphold a strong identity, purpose, brand, and culture a company must sustain four essential elements: clarity, consistency, alignment, and engagement.

CLARITY

An organization obtains clarity when its aspirational purpose, brand, and culture are clearly agreed on and articulated by the leaders of an organization. This clarity of purpose, brand, and culture allows all employees to understand why the organization exists and how the organization wishes to be perceived, as well as how the organization connects each employee's daily activities to the realization of this purpose, brand, and culture.

ENGAGEMENT

An organization cannot bring its most compelling identity to life without commitment from employees. Core values, mission statements, and brand promises have no worth unless there is broad agreement and support for them. Employees must be personally engaged to bring these various credos to life, and to do that, they must feel emotionally connected to their organization's identity and be able to connect it back to the work they do every day.

ALIGNMENT

In any organization, innumerable processes happen routinely every day. To the extent that these processes are clearly aligned with the organization's purpose, brand, and culture, they have the ability to act like a flywheel — increasing the momentum of an organization and promoting a strong identity. Conversely, when activities are misaligned, or even opposed, they have the ability to create confusion and dysfunction inside the organization.

CONSISTENCY

Consistency addresses the activities and processes that happen inside an organization. Beyond alignment with the aspired purpose, brand, and culture, these activities should be consistently executed across the organization. Inconsistencies allow for different experiences for employees and customers that have the potential to confuse or even detract from the aspirational identity.

DRIVERS OF IDENTITY

Gallup assesses an organization's identity, including where it is today and how to improve it, by examining how well the four elements of clarity, consistency, alignment, and engagement are leveraged to deliver its purpose, brand, and culture. We do this by looking at the five most significant drivers of organizational

identity: leadership and communication, values and rituals, human capital, work teams and structures, and performance.

These drivers, individually and collectively, shape how employees conduct themselves, how decisions are made, and how work gets accomplished. Exploring these drivers, individually and holistically, Gallup can help to explain why employees behave in certain ways. More importantly, however, Gallup can offer an organization guidance on how to influence these drivers and manage its identity toward its desired aspirational identity.

Leadership and Communication: The way in which top organizational leaders define, display, and communicate the organization's aspirational purpose and brand.

Values and Rituals: The shared beliefs and ways of social interaction among employees.

Human Capital: The attraction, selection, engagement, development, and well-being of employees.

Work Teams and Structures: How work is designed and executed, how individuals and teams interact, and how decisions are made.

Performance: Measurement of accountability, reward structures, and goal setting throughout the organization.

MAXIMIZING PERFORMANCE

Gallup helps organizations achieve their highest potential by bridging the gap between aspiration and reality. Through in-depth research and a deliberative plan for action, Gallup's partnership paves the way for creating and sustaining a purpose, brand, and culture that is clearly understood, consistently executed, effectively aligned, and fully supported. When these elements come together, organizations create a competitive advantage for themselves in everything from recruiting and retention to productivity and profits.