

APPLICATION PHASE

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Success in business is about people, people people. Whatever industry a business is in, it's employees are it's biggest competitive advantage.

Sir Richard Branson

The application phase is about creating systems that embed values everywhere.

By Nick Freedman

The first thing we should do is define the term. Culture, put simply, is 'how we do things around here.' It is an extension of the professional values of the leaders and other key members. All cultures contain both positive and limiting values. If your business has a healthy, 'level 5 aligned' culture, you will have a strong advantage over your competitors who run their businesses with weaker cultures.

A value is a deeply held principle which you regard as being important. These core principles act like a moral compass, to help employees determine which way to steer. When a business has an explicit culture, it creates shared agreement amongst employees. This agreement enables leaders to attract and empower people

who want to align themselves with the business. It also helps employees to understand how things get done, and make a conscious choice to either align, because they feel a sense of fit (or not). There are 4 phases on the journey to alignment.

Awareness

The process begins with leaders completing their personal values profile to build awareness about how decisions are currently made. This then builds a picture of both the enablers and limiting factors for all future success.

Agreement

Then we use workshops to reach agreement about 6 values and mottos that encapsulate how things get done, plus what needs to change to improve the culture.

Application

Values and mottos mean nothing unless people apply them in their day to day functions, so phase 3 asks everyone 'How will you bring each value to life in your work?' The subsequent ideas that are generated turn into projects that culture teams get to own and drive, which increases the level of accountability and empowerment in the business. It also leads to rich personal growth for all those who partake.

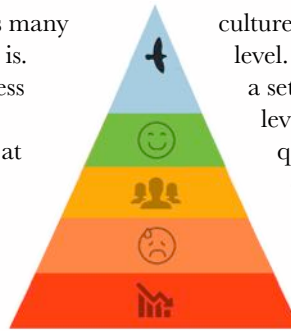
Alignment

To enjoy the magic of a level 5 culture, where employees are your greatest asset takes time and effort. Values must then be embedded in the business, until they become visible behaviours, processes & systems everywhere.



There are 5 levels of cultural maturity that affect both employee and customer experience.

Before getting started with ways to apply your values into people's daily work habits, it can be useful to understand the 5 levels of culture, so you have an idea of the ultimate goal you are working towards. There's many ways to assess culture in terms of how strong it is. Some businesses choose a specific area and assess the culture based on that, such as wellbeing or safety. Other businesses use technology to look at a range of metrics. I believe there is a more primal question when it comes to culture. And that is cultural maturity. If you look at any model of maturity, it will chart a pathway from a simple, lower level, to a more



complex, higher order level and map out the differences at each stage. The cultural maturity model shown below has 5 levels to help you understand how developed your business culture is, plus what you'll need to do to reach the next level. Businesses that have engaged my services to define a set of values and mottos will be functioning around level 4. As you'll see below, reaching level 5 is not a quick fix, but takes time and consistent effort to embed values into people's daily work habits. This can be done using a range of systems, tools and technology. As this starts to happen and more people align what they do with the values, the culture improves and matures towards level 5.

Cultural Maturity	Awareness of what values are driving culture	Employee experience of working within this culture	Customer experience of interacting with this culture	How you can reach the next level of cultural maturity	Roughly how long it takes to reach the next level
Level 5 Aligned	Values have been defined, and on going effort is made to align employee behaviours back to the values, so awareness is good to high	Employees will feel deeply aligned with the purpose and values in a level 5 culture. Engagement levels are high and loyalty is strong.	Customers who interact with level 5 cultures will love the brand and have a magnetic type of loyalty to the business & it's people	The work for the culture team is about maintaining the programs to stay at level 5.	The work for the culture team is about maintaining the programs to stay at level 5.
Level 4 Positive	Values have been defined, but little effort is made to align employee behaviours back to the values, so awareness is average to good	Because some effort has been made to grow the culture, employees will feel somewhat engaged, but many still want more from it	The positivity in the culture will rub off on customers and so many of them will feel valued, which impacts sales and loyalty	Focus on the activities in the Application and Alignment phases of the 90 day culture challenge	A committed culture team, that works on aligning employee behaviours back to the org. values can build a level 5 culture within 6-18 months
Level 3 Mediocre	No organisational values have been defined yet, so the awareness is limited	Most employees working in a level 3 culture will have good and bad days at work, but won't be hugely committed to the success of the business	Customers won't have overly strong opinions of a business with a level 3 culture. They probably like the products, rather than the service.	Focus on the activities in the Awareness and Agreement phases of the 90 day culture challenge	A committed culture team, that defines it values and mottos can go from level 3 to level 4 in 60-90 days
Level 2 Lagging	No organisational values have been defined yet, so the awareness is limited	A 'heavy' or 'negative' mindset of one of more leaders creates an unpleasant workplace	Customers will be left wanting more from their transactions with this business as limited focus is placed on their needs	Typically in a level 2 culture, leaders need to focus on their own self development and then build a vision of a better future	Leadership teams can shift mindset and behaviours within 3 months when they embark on good quality leadership development work
Level 1 Dysfunctional	No organisational values have been defined yet, so the awareness is limited	Fear, uncertainty, and lack of clarity about how things get done in this business	High level of frustration because employees are unable to serve their needs or meet expectations	Typically in a level 1 culture, basic systems and processes need to be implemented to bring order to this culture	New systems and processes can be embedded within 3-6 months to create a level 2 culture.

How do we apply values?

This tool has been written to help leaders who already have a clear set of values and mottos defined (i.e. reached the agreement phase) find ways to bring them to life in their business. It suggests a range of ideas to do this, which can be used in conjunction with my consulting services, if required.

Set up internal communications

An effective culture team will need to include an internal comms person. This might be someone in HR in a small business, or Marketing in a larger one. The key thing to note is that at every stage of the process, it's vital to both share the progress with your people and seek their feedback. Aiming to set up a 360 feedback process where you have information about values flowing throughout the business will ensure everyone remains connected to the ongoing process.

Define your stakeholder groups

How values are applied will vary depending on who the group is. Each stakeholder group will complete different kinds of work, and as such, applying values is not a one-size fits all approach. It should be tailored to meet the needs of each group. As a minimum you should look at employees and customers as 2 main groups. This distinction of internal and external is an important one to make. To go to the

Alignment is the straight running line between 4 territories.



“Building a visionary company requires 1% vision and 99% alignment.”

James C Collins

next level of granularity, consider looking at vendors, community groups, the board and the planet. Each business is different, so figure out what level of detail is most appropriate for yours.

Bring values into meeting agendas

Meetings are a great vehicle to embed values into an organisation. As people come together to discuss the work they have done or are planning to do, it creates a rich opportunity to feed values into the everyday dialogue. This can be done retroactively or proactively with 2 simple questions. ‘In the past week, what examples can you share about how you’ve applied our values into your work?’ or ‘How will you bring our

values to life through the tasks you’re focusing on this week?’ The social learning element of meetings will enable cross pollination of simple ideas to be shared amongst the group.

Help people experience your values

Humans learn through three primary channels: visual (what is seen), auditory (what is heard) and kinaesthetic (what is felt). It's beneficial to create multi-sensory learning experiences that connect people with the values, before exploring ways to apply them. Having an experience comes first. Then people can discuss how to use values. The values wheel (below) is one way to use this learning theory to facilitate productive cultural dialogues in teams.

A lazy susan (rotating wheel), which is usually used on a dinner table can be easily converted into a values wheel by printing your values on top. This spinning wheel can be used to facilitate a wide range of meaningful conversations about how each value can be brought to life in the team.



To learn more about this values-driven business visit www.customedia.com.au

Integrity is the result of creating alignment

Use values to improve relationships


A value is something which, once understood as a theoretical concept, then needs to be turned into a behaviour or action in order for the full benefit to be realised. And it is through our relationships with both colleagues, vendors and clients that this happens. In order for employees to become aligned with the organisational values, they need to make effort to express the values during their interactions with others. And the pre-cursor to this is remembering or being aware of how they are acting. You can create a dialogue planner, like the one shown here, to help people become more conscious about how they are interacting with others.

Misunderstandings, frustrations or conflicts usually arise when people value different things and perceive that their values are the right ones to uphold. In truth, we're all a little different and part of our success comes from learning to work with diverse types of people. Once you have organisational values defined, these can be used to help steer people towards a common ground and more effective working relationships. Giving people a simple dialogue planner (like this one) helps them stay focussed on applying the values at work.

Build values into job descriptions

Any effective job description should clearly articulate what responsibilities the employee is expected to perform, whilst at work. It will often use language which talks about the specific skills they need to be capable of doing in order to be effective in the job. This is the standard. Once you have values defined, you can then evolve your job descriptions into more dynamic descriptions of the work to be performed by including the values too. I am big believer in giving employees

Who is the relationship with?	
What's working well at the moment?	
What are the challenges, misunderstandings or conflicts about?	
How would you like to improve the relationship?	



USING VALUES IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Value	Motto	How can you apply this value to improve the relationship?
Excellence	Aim for perfection, excellence will follow.	
Timeless advice	Knowledge and application trumps years on the job.	
Integrity	Actions that you can always stand by.	
Authenticity	Genuine and transparent in everything we do.	
Collaboration	Involve others early and often.	
Enterprising	Don't wait, create and innovate.	
Other	Sometimes you'll need a different value to improve the relationship	

autonomy to determine their own way, as this builds strong people, rather than dependent followers who don't think for themselves. If the ideal of autonomy is also valued in your organisation, you can go one step further and ask your employees to come up with ways they can bring the values to life in their jobs. This approach is a rich way to get them thinking for themselves to find ways to activate the values across all of their daily functions and tasks.

Bring values into project management

Project management is a task based body of knowledge. Most businesses will use it widely to get things done. It was created to help leaders break lengthy pieces of work into more manageable chunks, with clarity of roles, tasks, deadlines, scope and budgets. What is missing from the body of work is 'the how we do things statements.' Spending time during project planning meetings discussing ways the values can be used to improve stakeholder communication and relationships could save time and money later on in the process, when roadblocks occur, due to different ways of working getting in the way.

Teach leaders how to discuss values

Leaders need to both model the values and also encourage their teams to do the same. This approach is vital to ensure the integrity of the values is maintained from the top down. Very few leaders will be able to innately do this, without some kind of training and a process. It is a good idea to include a module on 'how to have a values based conversation with your team member' in your leadership development training programs. This module, alongside other vital leadership skills such as coaching, feedback and delegation is essential to ensure the next generation of talent is nurtured to grow using your values.

Link what you reward back to values

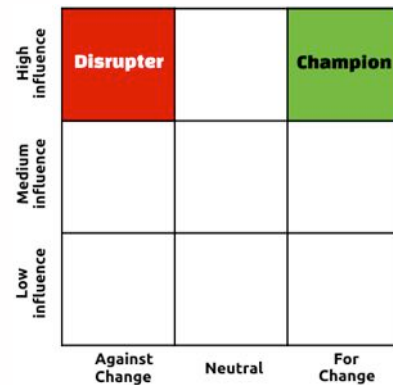
When all is said and done, reward and recognition systems are what employees look at, to determine what is valued in the business. Their performance that is measured and rewarded will drive their behaviours. As such, to build true cultural alignment in your organisation it's important that there is clear link created between values, behaviours and what your people are rewarded for.

[Download the integral map here, to learn about values application](#)



“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

Henry Ford



To embed values from the start to the finish of your employee experience takes time & effort.

Engage your CEO first

The most important person on your team is your CEO. Without her on him on board with the culture program you want to roll out, you will hit roadblocks quite quickly. Ensure you have their buy-in first. If they are sceptical about culture, you might need to build a business case.

The good news is that there is plenty of easily available data to compile to help win them over. By gathering relevant statistics about why having an average culture is costing the business money, it becomes easier to get buy-in for your new culture project. Check out the Gallup data on engagement levels. Have a look into Deloitte's 2018 Millennial Survey for some statistics and explore Josh Bersin's findings on the costs of losing good talent. And look into Branson's philosophy of focussing on engaging employees first, and customers second. There is plenty of great content on the web to help.

Pick engaged culture champions

Then you'll need to recruit and engage your culture champions to join your team. Most people embark on a culture building process because they want to bring about some positive change in the organisation. And so understanding a little about change management will help here. When recruiting your team consider that all your possible recruits will fit into differing categories, based on their level of agreement (with the changes you're proposing) and their level of influence (i.e. how many people trust them, that they can influence to create change).

People with low levels of influence might be useful later in the process, but for now, focus on those who hold some degree of influence in your organisation. Then consider the people who are on board with what you want to do. These people are your culture champions. Engage them first. Also be mindful of who your disrupters might be, as they

will act to slow you down. These are folks who are against the change and are also highly influential. Sometimes it's possible to convert disrupters, so they become advocates for the culture.

Allocate people into key roles

Consider what roles you'll need in your team. Here are some suggestions, which you can adapt to best fit your needs:

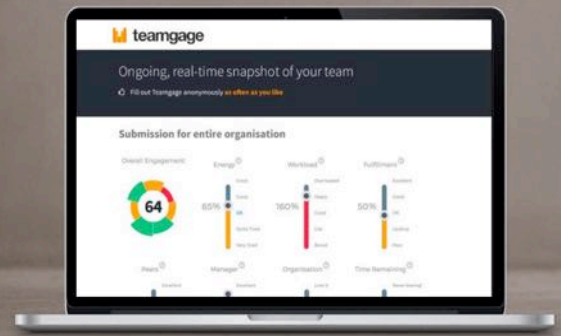
Executive sponsor - usually your CEO
 Culture leader - the project manager who brings the whole thing together
 Communications - usually a marketing person to create all your comms work
 IT - sometimes you'll be using technology platforms, so consider IT
 Culture champions - people who will help you build momentum and roll out the various projects/workshops
 External consultant - if you're looking for external help / mentoring, [click here to book in a time to talk more with me.](#)

Employee lifecycle phase						
1 ATTRACT	2 RECRUIT	3 ONBOARD	4 DEVELOP	5 ENGAGE	6 RELEASE	
Ensure the best talent in our sector knows we exist and wants to work for us	How we hire people who fit our culture and have the skills we need	What new employees experience in the first 90 days of joining	How we train and empower our people to function at their best	How do we keep our people positively motivated about work?	How do we help people leave our business who are no the right fit us?	
List all the key activities in this phase	Value 1					
	Value 2					
	Value 3					
	Value 4					
	Value 5					
	Value 6					
	How do we bring this value to life in each phase of our employee experience?					



“He who fails to plan, is planning to fail.”

Sir Winston Churchill



Before starting the journey, put the things in place that you need, to ensure your success.

Sign up for free tools

This document explains the principles of how to build a level 5 culture. It will get you thinking about how you can start building your own. I also offer a range of free culture building tools to help support you on my website. [Sign up here to receive your copies of these.](#)

Make time every week

Before embarking on a culture journey it's important that you allocate time in your week to lead the program. This is not something that can be done if you're at full capacity already. I would suggest you begin with allocating at least 2 x 2 hour blocks each week, (more if you can) to progress your culture and invite the members of your team to do the same.

Build a culture project roadmap

One of the things you'll need is a culture project roadmap, with series of step by step actions. This will paint the journey to take so you know what's in store. Begin with mapping out

the key milestones you want to reach then breaking each milestone down into smaller tasks and actions to work on.

Technology and data

There are a range of software tools that track your culture. I recommend you look at [teamage](#), as it's fully customisable and enables you to track the monthly ebbs and flows of your culture. Contact [Richard Wortley](#) to book in a demo.

Book in a call with me

The 90 day culture challenge brings together my 15 years consulting experience working with a wide range of organisations into a structured process that I can take your business through. I work with SMEs and startups that don't have sufficient size to employ a dedicated culture director. And I also consult to teams within enterprise organisations, who are seeking personalised culture solutions. [To book in a time to talk about your culture, email me here,](#) or you can call the number below to talk instead.

About Nick Freedman

Since 2002, I have been designing and facilitating development programs which have helped 1000s to transform their lives and businesses from the inside out. My clients include organisations like Salesforce, Yahoo, Westpac, AoL, Ronald McDonald House & Coca-Cola, as well as 100s of SMEs & not for-profits. If you want to know more about me, my TED talk is a good place to start, which is on my homepage - <https://nickfreedman.com.au/>

Australia - 0400 601 600. International +61 400 601 600

