

Culture Transformation: Q & A with Chris Edmonds

Author: Chris Edmonds . August 2019

In this article I asked Chris Edmonds about culture transformation. Chris Edmonds is a sought-after speaker, author, and executive consultant who is the founder and CEO of [The Purposeful Culture Group](#)

MN: You wrote the book *The Culture Engine*. What is organisational Culture and how important is it in driving business performance?

CE: Culture has a variety of components. The easiest way to describe it is “the quality of your work environment,” the degree of trust, respect, and dignity in everyday interactions between leaders, team members, suppliers, and customers.

Culture is immensely powerful; it drives everything that happens in organisations, for better or worse. If your culture dismisses, demeans, and discounts team members’ ideas, efforts, and accomplishments, they will not apply discretionary energy in service to your organisation or its customers. If your culture is purposeful, positive, and productive, they will apply discretionary energy in service to your organisation and its customers.

MN: In your book, you seem to emphasise values as the key drivers in organisational culture transformation. Can you explain why?

CE: Values - observable, tangible, measurable values - are the core of a purposeful, positive, productive work culture. Most leaders spend all of their time and energy managing results. Results are certainly important - they provide revenues to sustain the business. But managing results is HALF the leader’s job. The other half? Managing values, how people treat each other in daily interactions.

Ultimately what organisations need are work environments where people are treated with trust, respect, and dignity. A sole focus on managing results has not created that kind of work environment. A values-based focus does.

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MN: What is the process the organisation should follow when undertaking a values alignment process?

CE: The three steps of my proven culture refinement process - as outlined in *The Culture Engine* - help guide leaders that wish to create a purposeful, positive, and productive work culture. The steps are define, align, and refine.

Leaders must first formally define their desired culture in the form of an organisational constitution: a

servant purpose, values and behaviors, strategies, and goals. Most businesses have strategies and goals defined so that is easy. It is rare for an organisation to define their present day “reason for being” in terms of how they serve others, how their products or services improve customers’ quality of life.

Defining values in behavioral terms shift values from “lofty ideals” to practical ways of behaving. And those ways of behaving are observable, tangible, and measurable - just as traction on performance expectations is observable, tangible, and measurable.

Instead of saying one of your values is integrity - then hoping everyone knows how they are supposed to behave, define the exact behaviors desired for each value. For example, to formalize how team members must demonstrate integrity, one of their behaviors for that value is “I do what I say I will do.” That translates a lofty value into a measurable behavior.

The align phase is the longest phase - typically 12 months or more. It requires leaders to model, coach, and praise valued behaviors daily and re-direct misaligned behaviors promptly. Only when leaders model your desired culture with that culture take hold.

The refine stage allows updating of behaviors, strategies, and goals every two years or so.

MN: How do you know now your values are in support of the organisation’s culture?

CE: That cannot be done until an organisation defines its culture, which is rare. Once an organisation’s desired culture is formalised in the form of an organisational constitution, it is a simple task to observe how people treat each other daily - and assess the degree to which those behaviors align with your desired culture.

MN: Individuals bring their own values to organisations, more importantly at leadership level. How do you make sure the [leadership](#) does not impose their own personal values onto the organisation?

CE: If a leader’s values, and demonstrated behaviors, are fully aligned with the organisation’s desired culture, that is wonderful! Frustration arises when a leader - a person with positional power - demonstrates values and behaviors inconsistent with the desired culture. That erodes employee engagement, customer service, and results, every day.

Only by defining your desired culture - formalising your servant purpose, values and behaviors, strategies, and goals - are you able to assess how well individual leaders values and behaviors align with that desired culture.

MN: I have observed that organisations do have espoused values clearly displayed on posters but they are rarely practiced? How do you go through the process of aligning espoused values with practiced values?

CE: Stated values that are not practiced have no beneficial impact on the organisation’s culture at all. I

have a term for “stated values not lived” - I call them **a lie**.

Stating values and behaviors does not align plans, decisions, and actions to those values and behaviors. Leaders of the organisation must embrace the servant purpose, values, and behaviors **FIRST**. By modelling those behaviors, coaching those behaviors, praising aligned behaviours, and re-directing misaligned behaviours, those leaders create credibility for their desired culture.

My proven culture refinement process includes a formal survey of leaders by employees at least twice a year. You measure performance traction daily! You must apply the same discipline and measurement to desired values and behaviors.

When an organisation is serious about values alignment, they measure, monitor, and rewards values alignment just as they do delivery of performance goals.

MN: What is your advice to executives who ignore organisational culture when managing their businesses?

CE: Do not leave the quality of your work culture to chance. Create a purposeful, positive, productive work culture, starting now.

*S. Chris Edmonds is a sought-after speaker, author, and executive consultant who is the founder and CEO of [The Purposeful Culture Group](#). After a 15-year executive career leading high performing teams, Chris began his consulting company in 1990. He has also served as a senior consultant with The Ken Blanchard Companies since 1995. Chris is one of Inc. Magazine’s [100 Great Leadership Speakers](#) and was a featured presenter at [South by Southwest 2015](#). Chris is the author of the [Amazon best seller The Culture Engine](#), the best seller *Leading At A Higher Level* with Ken Blanchard, and five other books. Chris' blog, podcasts, research, and videos can be found at [Driving Results Through Culture](#). Thousands of followers enjoy his daily quotes on organisational culture, servant leadership, and workplace inspiration on Twitter at [@scedmonds](#).*

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