

Leveraging the unique identity, culture, purpose and strengths of an organization to advance sustainability and corporate success. To achieve a business's potential, strategic and operational integration must consider the unique culture, identity and strengths of the organizations and their components. Culture can be a significant barrier or powerful amplifier of executing strategy.

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

— Peter Drucker



UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

Though researched for decades, organizational culture has only recently been studied with respect to sustainability. In 2010, the Network for Business Sustainability published their review of the academic body of research at the time. This project adopts their description of organizational culture:

"Like sustainability, organizational culture is also defined in many different ways. Academic definitions make reference to shared assumptions and values as well as expected behaviours and symbols. An organization's culture guides the decisions of its members by establishing and reinforcing expectations about what is valued and how things should be done. For this reason, culture is often described as 'the way we do things around here.' Over time, an organization builds up its own culture, providing a sense of identity to its members about 'who we are' and 'what we do.' An organization's culture is both reinforced and reshaped through the daily practices of its members."

A common point of view is that we must "fix" significant problems in our existing culture to achieve a significantly more sustainable society. Unfortunately, this is a long-term process that many argue only emerges as a result of years of repeated new behaviours whether inspired, mandated or "nudged".

There are elements of existing business culture that if changed could accelerate sustainability. There are also tremendous strengths, capabilities and human energy that can be tapped to accelerate the integration of sustainability in our current organizations and therefore expand the potential for business to become a force for good, while retaining or potentially enhancing profitability.

OPENING DOORS AND CRACKING LOCKS

This project seeks to help sustainability leaders understand the context of other, less familiar functions to uncover opportunities to find the cultural fit or more inviting "Doors" through which to better engage the distinctive strengths of those functions in the sustainability journey. To extend the Door metaphor, this understanding can also uncover unintentionally constructed "Locks" that have created cultural or intuitive barriers to the function's engagement in sustainability.

While any group of people expresses a range of strengths, perspectives, values and thinking styles, there are some generalizations for functions that can be explored to uncover historic barriers to engaging in sustainability and potentially untapped opportunities, its unique Locks and Doors.

For example, strengths in Finance and Accounting include diligence, accuracy, consistency, adherence to standards and a strong sense of responsibility. R&D is similarly focused on logical reasoning and objective criteria and evidence, but it is also driven by curiosity, exploration and learning. The seemingly ambiguous, subjective criteria of new stakeholders regarding sustainability themes can be hard to translate into functions that lean toward objective evidence and criteria of success, such as Finance, R&D, and Legal, thus creating Locks or barriers to engagement. While Marketing teams are increasingly using analytics to improve effectiveness, they are more driven by subjective and intuitive perceptions, feelings, motivations of behaviour, clarity of messages and human relationships. Values, stories and meaning can become powerful Doors to engaging Marketing and Branding, many times more powerful than tables of data. With this understanding, reflexive "Locks" can be avoided and inviting "Doors" can be framed into sustainability based on the characteristics and roles of the function in the company.



IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURE

To improve the Cultural Integration of Sustainability in any function, it is important to:

- Explore the distinctive values, relationships and strengths of the function and how it is used to add value to the business.
- Explore the range of needs and opportunities presented by the business's priority sustainability themes and goals and look for unique contributions provided by the distinctive characteristics of the function.
- Considering its unique Doors and Locks, frame sustainability in a way that contributes to the core role and values the function provides to the business. De-emphasize elements that are not relevant to the function, especially if satisfied by others.
- Seek opportunities to involve the function in stakeholder engagement activities so that it better understands the drivers of priority sustainability themes and can generate new ideas only visible from within its perspective and functional expertise.

