

If strategy was breakfast, what's for lunch?

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Everyone knows that "culture eats strategy for breakfast". So why are companies still starving when it comes to enjoying the fruits of their cultural labour? The answer lies in their brand diet. It lacks the one vital ingredient that has the power to give their corporate culture substance and sustainability - internal communications.



"Culture eats strategy for breakfast." When Peter Drucker made this statement and Mark Fields (former President and CEO of Ford) made it famous, it was 2006 – back when people still thought Blackberry was a progressive form of communication. Fast-forward 13 years and we now have studies, from veritable institutions like Harvard, to prove that, yes, corporate culture does have a direct and substantial impact on a company's bottom line. Again, no news there. But what is surprising is that, after all these years of acknowledging, defining and redefining the importance of corporate culture in enabling a happier, more productive and higher performing

workforce, most companies are still serving up their strategy as the company's main, and sometimes only dish, on the corporate menu.

We'll give you one example. In 2017 Deloitte conducted a Global Human Capital Trends survey with over 10,000 HR and business leaders in 140 countries. The task? To unpack the value of corporate culture and workplace purpose. 80% of the respondents rated employee experience as key to finding purpose in the workplace. Only 23% of the organisations felt that their employees were fully aligned with their corporate purpose. Hang on a minute. So the studies and employees say culture is important. Companies know that they aren't getting it right and yet the answer is what? More strategy? It's like going to a buffet lunch and only finding lasagna as the dish on offer.

Let's be clear. Strategy is not the problem here. It is important to spend time making sure you have a clear, well-defined strategy that is able to guide leaders and employees alike. No strategy. No direction. But then what? Who needs to implement this strategy? And where will they be doing that? The more questions you ask, the more the answers point to corporate culture – that living environment where strategy gets implemented by real people. But don't take our word for it. "The thing I have learned at IBM is that culture is everything." Louis V. Gerstner, Jr, former CEO IBM.

Here's another brand truth – culture is not your business, it's everybody's business. Your culture – what you collectively value, how you do things, your common expectations – defines your organisation. And it doesn't matter whether a company intentionally defines or shapes their culture, because it's already influencing the company's success, with or without their permission. And let's not forget that Gen Z and Millennials want, nay, demand, that the companies they work for align with their values, commitments, and aims. Or they walk. To your more culturally sensitive competitor. The bottom line? Any company disconnecting culture from profit or productivity is putting the company's success and future at risk.



Let's forget profit for a moment. Marc Kahn, Global Head of Organisation Development & Human Resources at Investec, has spent years researching and defining what turns ordinary people into extraordinary performers. His discovery? It's not innate talent or even more leadership training. [It's culture](#). And he's not alone in this thinking. When her company was undergoing its own "cultural transformation", Noha Georges, Chief Marketing, Communication and Public Affairs Officer at Deloitte Risk and Financial Advisory, experienced, first-hand, that "a strong culture can inspire and instill confidence in

employees to deliver stellar products and services through better problem solving, heightened awareness around ethical standards and creative thinking.”

So it's not just a case of strategy versus culture. If each of these are given the same importance and focus, the two can and should feed each. Culture gives strategy substance, which begs the question: What gives culture substance? What makes this fluid and changing thing we call “culture” solid, measurable and sustainable? The answer lies in *how* this culture is supported and communicated internally, through a focused and flexible internal communications strategy that inspires, engages and enables employees to take up the mantle of brand ambassadors. Noha Georges believes that “strategic Internal Communications can help strengthen culture.” She believes that “there’s a direct link between effective internal communications and employee satisfaction. This should never be underestimated and, in fact, should be amplified in the C-suite and boardroom.” But how?



If internal communications is to support and drive culture it needs to start right from the onboarding stage. That's why some companies give their employees a “culture book” that explains the brand and sets the expectation for how team members can live up to the brand promise. And that's just for starters.

Internal communications has a very key role to play in supporting and driving company culture every day, in every way. The “how”, “when” and “where” will depend on the company and the culture it aims to enable. Luckily this is 2019. Email and PowerPoint are not the only options in the internal communications arsenal. From mobile apps, animation and intranet, to

videos, podcasts, events and roadshows, there are as many smart technologies as simple innovations that will get the right message to the right audience at the right time.

Take the Hilton hotel group for example. They realised that many of their employees didn't have or use email. So they developed an [Employee App](#) for employees to receive and share important information. Delta Community Credit Union uses a “spokescharacter” called “Simon” to make their intranet more personal. Today “Simon says” has become an effective way to share details around promotions, employee news and other information that brings their team together.

Noha Georges agrees. Here she shares four ways effective internal communications can be a powerful support tool in your business:

1. **Simplifies the complex:** It uses the creative language of real-world examples, personal stories and even metaphors to explain complex products, services and solutions.
2. **Creates one voice:** It makes sure that everyone speaks the same language, while still allowing for creative interpretation on an individual level.
3. **Makes the large feel small:** For most companies, their workforces are geographically spread, across buildings, cities, even countries. Through storytelling and the right engagement, Internal communication can make even the most distant colleagues feel closer and more like family. That's key to building a cohesive culture.
4. **Inspires innovation and creativity:** Innovation inspires innovation. But how would one colleague know about another's contribution or even where they can input their own ideas? Communication of course. It enables leaders to reward and praise employees for displaying these qualities which, in turn, leads to more innovation and more creativity.

If internal communications supports culture and culture supports profit and productivity, the only question left to ask is: “Who is supporting your internal communications?” And, if done effectively and strategically, internal communications will not only support your culture but also make your strategy speak to your employees on a more personal and individual level. Maybe it's time to take your internal communications strategy out for lunch. Or at least brunch.

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