



**IF YOU
ARE NOT MANAGING
YOUR CULTURE ...
SOMEONE ELSE IS!**

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Are You Managing Your Culture?

The 10 Imperatives

- 1. In turbulent times, long after your business strategy has been overwritten by the events of the day, what will endure is your culture.** To that end, although we may appear to be making great time, without culture measurement we are lost! 'The culture we need' frames the context for any meaningful, strategic conversation around 'where are we ... and where do we need to be?'¹ It also informs 'the how.' Make 'where you need to be' real – not an **aspirational**, best guess.
- 2. Culture is story and story is culture.** Build a vibrant Meta-story as a culture imperative. It should capture: Why we do what we do. Where are we heading? What do we believe in? What makes us special? How does what we do make a difference in people's lives? Loyalty is, ultimately, based on the extent to which customers and, for that matter, employees connect with your story. Top talent don't join your organization, they are drawn (or not) to your story.
- 3. Culture will change whether you want it to or not. Know also that if you're not managing your culture, someone else is.** To manage culture is to understand that language is everything. 'Change,' for example, is a word that carries a lot of baggage. For most middle managers it simply means – 'more work.' Same old language – same old behaviour.
- 4. Manage the business from the outside-in; lead the business from the inside-out.** Be specific when defining the overarching elements of **connectability** that bind different parts of the organization together: e.g., what does 'being customer-driven' really mean? How will we know when it's happening? Recognize that there is a major difference between cooperation and collaboration. Innovation is rooted in collaboration. Innovation = (curiosity + the quality of the question asked + the learning approach) x the degree of psychological safety. In a world marked by uncertainty, if you are fearful of failing ... don't expect to embrace the joy of winning.


1. Talk to us about the 'Orxestra Workup' – a unique and compelling way for the team to determine: (1) the organization culture we currently have; (2) the culture we need to compete effectively tomorrow; and (3) the action steps needed to move from where we are to where we need to be.



5. Move beyond the thinking of the watchmaker (fixing what's broken) and adopt the mindset of the potter (how can we shape tomorrow's winning value proposition?). Access big numbers but don't fall into paralysis by analysis. Move quickly. Keep it simple! It's a mistake, meanwhile, to assume that breakthrough technology and the drive for digitalization represent an end in themselves. Technology is an enabler. The customer doesn't want a better mousetrap ... just because it's a better mousetrap – they want to work with a provider who has a faster, environmentally friendly, more efficient and cost-effective way to deal with their mouse problem.

6. Work with ... not against the grain. Get middle managers back in the game. If middle managers don't buy-in, nothing will change. Culture is a system. It demands systems thinking. To that end, work as aggressively on the things that hold the organization back (e.g., the history you need to let go of, language, metaphor, symbolism, story, mindset, how people learn) as you do on the elements that drive the organization forward (e.g., purpose, strategy, brand, structure, compensation, talent management, processes, technology). Content without context is momentum without meaning. **Always** hire with tomorrow's culture in mind. Who you hire determines what is possible.

7. If what you need to become isn't already working, even if only part of the time in some places, you can't create it. Affirm and reinforce success. Make sourcing best-practice (inside and outside of the organization) an abiding imperative. Become a storytelling organization. Share stories to amplify the leadership competencies. Use stories to make the organization's values come to life. They shouldn't be in conflict but don't confuse personal and organization values (guiding principles). In an organization setting, values aren't rules ... they give people permission to act. Part company with anyone (anyone, regardless of results) who doesn't live the organization's values.



8. If you can't coach, you can't lead! What you believe is what others will perceive; believe it WILL happen; care about people; manage the grapevine; make candour a way of life; be humble. Above all else, learn to work at the level of mindset. As we move into an unprecedented era of 'exponential change', nothing is more important than creating the conditions for learning to flourish. The only truly sustainable competitive advantage is to learn faster than your most innovative competitor. Companies that do what others say cannot be done don't have a culture – they are their culture.

9. Tomorrow's successful organization will, of necessity, be focused, flat, fast, flexible and fertile to new ideas. A strong and agile culture is built around purpose-driven and agile teams. In taking the team to the next level, four questions have primacy: (1) As the team leader, what do I need to do differently? (2) In what ways does the context support diversity and inclusion? (3) How do we measure team effectiveness? (4) How and in what ways can we fold blended, virtual, gig, millennial and iGen employees into, what it means to be, a great team?

10. Without inspirational leadership from those at the helm, you ain't got much! To 'inspire' means to make tomorrow's culture come alive in the room today. **Passion** means to **pass**-inspiration-**on**. Know that there is a reason it's called leader**SHIP**. 'Delivery' is never optional.





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*“Organization’s
don’t have a
culture – they are
their culture.”*

– J. O. Burdett

JOHN O. BURDETT has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world’s largest corporations. In 2019, his work with ABB’s top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year.

His ongoing partnership with TRANSEARCH International means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached numerous executive teams around the world in how to coach. He

currently coaches a select group of CEOs.

Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award. John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, he has published 16 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His Leadership Beyond Crisis Series came out in 2021. In 2022, he brought out a fully revised version of his international bestselling book on executive integration: *Without Breaking Stride*.

Go to the TRANSEARCH International website to download John’s books and articles (gratis). The site also has a number of webinars.

