



## Issue 196 - July 2019

How big is your organization's aspire/live gap? Does your rhetoric match reality? Is your audio synced with your video?

Research and advisory company, Gartner, recently surveyed 7,500 employees and nearly 200 HR leaders of global companies and had in-depth interviews with 100 HR leaders. They found "on average, 69% of employees don't believe in the cultural goals set by their leaders, 87% don't understand them, and 90% don't behave in ways that align with them."



That's a canyon-sized gap between the values and culture leaders aspire toward and what's actually lived each day. Here are a few other key findings:

- Buzzwords often don't match how the company operates.
- Many employees see their leaders' cultural aspirations as hypocritical.
- Resources often don't match rhetoric.
- Engagement surveys and turnover data can be easily sanitized and made too generic to measure culture.
- The best leaders create an open, feedback-rich environment that encourages -- even pushes -- people to tell their leaders what's really going on.
- Processes, budgets, structures, incentives, and policies must align with aspired values and culture.

Walk the talk is a worn-out, useless cliché. Do you put your money and time where your mouth is? In one of the leadership forums I facilitated, preparation included a homework assignment; participants must review their past month calendar to allocate how much time they spend across a list of activities and the agenda topics of all meetings they'd run.

At the forum, we asked leaders for the biggest culture shift they were trying to make in their team, division, or organization. We then asked them to review how much time they invested last month in activities directly and visibly connected to those culture development goals. Many spent less than 10% of their daily activities and meetings directly connected to the culture shift they were trying to make.

This issue deals with subtle and obvious manifestations of team and organizational culture. Building an agile and change adaptive culture is vital today. Many leaders blindsided by change because of their expertise.

A leader's language is often a subtle indicator of his or her true values. Human capital -- assets with skin -- have a different value than human beings. The opposing cultures created by those values lead away from or toward higher engagement, teamwork, and customer service. Poor customer service is a direct reflection of poor leadership.

Meetings drive many people crazy. With good reason. Most waste time and energy. Many are a disaster. Meetings are a symptom and a cause of culture effectiveness.

Many leaders are frustrated that people in their organization aren't getting the message about the innovation, safety, customer service, teamwork, change, or accountability culture they're trying to build. Not true. Everyone's getting the message. They're seeing it loud and clear.

## How to Avoid Being Blindsided by Change

In 2004, Bill Gates told a group at the World Economic Forum "two years from now, spam will be solved." Right. Like cockroaches, spam could survive a nuclear holocaust.

This is one in an incredibly long list of [expert forecasts](#) that are ludicrously wrong. In 1995 co-inventor of the Ethernet, Robert Metcalfe, told us the internet would "catastrophically collapse" in 1996. Hmm. Not only did it survive that near-death experience, it's driven exponential change at rates the world's never seen.



In 2007, just before Apple launched the iPhone, Microsoft CEO, Steve Ballmer, laughed it off, "there's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share. No chance." Tell that to the executives at Blackberry.

Experience and expertise are a key part of career success. Many organizations benefit from leaders with deep experience and expertise. BBUUUTTT... experience and expertise can also create the failure of success. It's easy to assume what got us here will get us there.

In his *Harvard Business Review* article, "[Don't Be Blinded By Your Own Expertise](#)," management professor and author, Sydney Finkelstein, reports that after studying top executives he's "come to understand that expertise can also severely impede performance."

Finkelstein found these steps can help us "cultivate a beginner's mind to go along with our expert perspective, pushing ourselves to new levels of creativity and performance":

1. Challenge Your Own Expertise
  - Check your ego
  - Methodically revisit your assumptions
2. Seek Out Fresh Ideas
  - Look to teammates as teachers
  - Tap new sources of talent
  - Add a role model or a learning buddy
3. Embrace Experimentalism
  - Pose frequent creative challenges to yourself
  - Learn from mistakes

How are you doing? Are your experience and expertise helping or hindering your change leadership?

As Amair Haque, author of *The New Capitalist Manifesto: Building a Disruptively Better Business*, says, "it's only when you drop yesterday's assumptions that you can glimpse tomorrow's patterns and possibilities. To see deeper, unsee first."

## Are You Managing Human Capital or Leading People?

Is your organization staffed by human capital? Do you talk about head count? Do managers talk about "their people?"

Phrases like "head count," "human capital," and "my people," dehumanize and objectify. We could push this further and make the same argument for "human resources."

Managers who see others at an "it" or property, might make perfect donors for heart transplants -- their hearts have had such little use!



This year's survey by Deloitte with the badly chosen title of Human Capital Trends, concludes that organizations need to reinvent themselves with a human focus. Overlooking that phrase ("human capital" really is an oxymoron) that dehumanizes people into capital (assets with skin?), this survey flags key issues for today's leaders. The 100 plus page report is entitled, [Leading the Social Enterprise: Reinvent with a Human Focus](#).

The report calls a social enterprise "an organization whose mission combines revenue growth and profit-making with the need to respect and support its environment and stakeholder network. This includes listening to, investing in, and actively managing the trends that are shaping today's world. It is an organization that shoulders its responsibility to be a good citizen (both inside and outside the organization), serving as a role model for its peers and promoting a high degree of collaboration at every level of the organization."

**Based on nearly 10,000 survey responses in 119 countries, here are a few key points that stand out:**

- 86% of respondents believe they must reinvent their ability to learn.
- CEOs rated their number one issue as "impact on society, including income inequality, diversity, and the environment."
- The number one reason people quit their jobs is the "inability to learn and grow."
- As workplace automation increases, "we see a need to put meaning back into work."
- Organizational performance is a team sport.
- Organizations need to move "beyond mission statement and philanthropy to learn to *lead* (their emphasis) the social enterprise -- and reinvent themselves around a human focus."

**The report offers these "benchmarks for reinvention":**

- Purpose and Meaning
- Ethics and Fairness
- Growth and Passion
- Collaboration and Personal Relationships
- Transparency and Openness

How's your team/organization doing against these benchmarks? How are you doing? Are you people-focused? What do your peers and those you lead really think? How do you know?

I was raised on a farm. When I hear managers talk about "head count" I think of cattle. In the community where I grew up, farmers would ask each other "how many head are you farming?" when talking about cows, pigs, or goats.

Strong leaders don't see resources, heads, or human capital, they see people. Most of us want to be treated as a person, not a resource.

In his new book, *Co-Human Harmony: Using Our Shared Humanity to Bridge Divides*, Gudjon Bergmann, writes, "The most important project at this moment in history is to reclaim a social connection to the human persona, to move away from dehumanizing and otherizing in the direction of co-humanizing."

#### Further Reading:

- [Good Companies Are Changing the World and Everyone Profits](#)
- [Thriving Companies Pursue Both Purposeful Profits and Profitable Purpose](#)
- [The Purpose Motive: Why Does Your Organization Exist?](#)
- [Great Places to Work Reflect Great Cultures = Great Results](#)
- [Beyond Performance: How Great Organizations Build Ultimate Competitive Advantage](#)
- [Creating Sustained Performance through Thriving Workplaces](#)
- [Has Your Culture Created a Great Place to Work for All?](#)

## Poor Customer Service: The Writing is on the Wall

Imagine sitting in an overcrowded medical clinic waiting room and spotting this sign on the wall, "When your number comes up, please have your symptoms ready."

You won't likely ever see that sign. It's too honest. But there's a high chance you'll encounter that attitude. Too many organizations are inside out rather than outside in. Instead of designing their processes to flow inward from customer needs, they start with internal needs and an unspoken culture of "we will dictate to you the terms upon which you'll have the pleasure of experiencing our service."



The leader of a rapidly growing company asked us to help "fine tune" their service delivery. He declared that his was truly a customer-oriented company. "After all," he said, "we're in the service industry." He felt customer service was well ingrained throughout his operation. But he agreed to "indulge" us as we studied the organization to see if that was truly the case.

What we found was typical of leaders who assume that service/quality can be ordered up like a room service breakfast. The company featured service in their marketing with convincing and clever branding, they had a customer service department, and they provided extensive service training to frontline staff. When we assessed their operational systems and processes, we found that a customer-orientation was certainly conspicuous in their planning, hiring, promoting, leadership development, and performance evaluations. But it was conspicuous by its absence.

## Who's Responsible for Customer Service?

If you have frontline service providers delivering customer service, what's the rest of your organization doing?

The very existence of most organizations depends on customers willing to continue paying for its products and services. So, customer service is everyone's responsibility. A deep ethic of "If you're not serving customers directly, you need to serve those who are" must pervade the organization.

Leaders with a deep servant leadership or service ethic lead organizations with consistently high service levels. They serve the servers.

This sign on the wall of struggling diner points to a root cause of poor customer service, "Customers who feel our servers are rude should see the manager."

### Further Reading:

- [Boost Customer Service with a Culture That Serves the Servers](#)
- [Most Brand Management is Misguided and Makes Things Worse](#)
- [Put Employees First to Delight Customers](#)
- [Blame Management for Poor Service](#)
- [Want to Improve Customer Service -- Treat Your Employees Better](#)

## End Meeting Madness: Decide How to Decide

In a senior leadership team [retreat](#) last week, decision-making and meeting effectiveness emerged as a barrier during our [moose hunting exercise](#).

Meetings are more important than ever in our complex and interconnected world. Research clearly shows that when run effectively, groups make better decisions than individuals do. Effective meetings involve and engage participants in problem-solving and planning.

But too many meetings are ineffective. Many are a disaster. That's why many people hate meetings. How often do you hear comments like, "I could get a lot more of my work done if it wasn't for all these \*#\*\*! meetings?"



Confusion around meeting decision-making trips up many meeting leaders. There are three basic ways along the "3 C continuum" for a team or group to make a decision:

1. **Command** - made by the manager, project, or team leader with little input from other team members.
2. **Consultative** - made by the manager, project, or team leader after consulting others who have expertise to share or need to own implementing the decision.
3. **Consensus** - made by the entire team as a group through either "majority rules" or unanimous agreement.



The further the team moves toward the consensus end of the continuum, the more buy-in or commitment there is to the decision. Decision-making time is longer. But implementation time and effectiveness dramatically improve.

A common source of frustration and conflict is when the type of decision-making method being used isn't clear to everyone at the outset of the discussion. Meeting leaders will often add to the problem by leading what seems to be a consultative or even consensus discussion when he or she has already made up his or her mind. This comes across as a "guess what I am thinking?" exercise. Or it can look like the leader is trying to manipulate the team into the "right decision."

Less effective managers, project or team leaders with weak leadership skills will intimidate team members into "forced consensus" (an oxymoron) and leave the discussion genuinely believing that the team is united in the decision.

Some agenda items are for information, and some are updates. But whenever decisions are needed, avoid confusion - and lots of frustration - by ensuring everyone is clear about the type of decision-making process you're using.

#### Further Reading:

- [Do Your Meetings Suck? How do You Know?](#)
- [Are You Suffering from Binge Meeting Disorder?](#)
- [Ten Essential Vitamins to Avoid Meeting Indigestion](#)
- [Meetings Showcase Organizational Culture](#)
- [Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm... on Meeting Effectiveness](#)

## Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Articles



This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets about online articles or blog posts that I've flagged as worth reading. These are usually posted on weekends when I am doing much of my reading for research, learning, or leisure. You can follow me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JimClemmer>

My original tweet commenting on the article follows each title and descriptor from the original source:

Get the latest research and insights for leveraging this vital coaching and development tool.

[Back to the Future of Feedback](#), archived webinar by Jack Zenger and Jared Harding

Despite decades of research, too many managers are still trying to bribe rather than lead.

[Forget Cash. Here are Better Ways to Motivate Employees](#), Ashley Whillans, *Harvard Business Review*

*"In today's tight job market, employers must focus on how to attract and keep top talent. Giving away stacks of money may not always be the best incentive."*

## Read *The Leader Letter* in Weekly Installments



The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my weekly [blog](#) during the previous month.

If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published over twelve months, you'll have read the equivalent of a leadership book. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

## Feedback and Follow-Up

I am always delighted to hear from readers of *The Leader Letter* with feedback, reflections, suggestions, or differing points of view. Nobody is ever identified in *The Leader Letter* without their permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations of any of my material for your team or organization. Drop me an e-mail at [Jim.Clemmer@ClemmerGroup.com](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@ClemmerGroup.com) or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or my [blog](#)!

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