



*DRIVING RESULTS
THROUGH AN
ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTITUTION*

S. CHRIS EDMONDS

Is your workplace frustrating and lifeless or is it engaging and inspiring?

When you think of your work environment, what descriptors come to mind?

For many people, descriptors such as “dreary,” “discouraging,” “fear-based,” or “missed promises” describe their organization’s culture.

Today, people spend more time at work than with their best friends or family members.

When their workplace is an inspiring, respectful, creative place to be, people engage deeply, serve customers effectively, and produce quality goods and services consistently.

The problem? Most leaders put greater thought into their organization’s products and services than they do its culture. Yet culture drives everything that happens in an organization each day.

Leaders don’t want a dreary or frustrating organizational culture but most don’t know what to do about it. They’ve seen inspiring workplaces but have never been taught how to create or maintain one.

Of course, understanding the need for a safe, inspiring culture is one thing. Creating and managing a productive, engaging culture is entirely another.

How does a leader go about creating something that, on one hand, is so important, but, on the other hand, seems so amorphous?

Leaders can build a high performing, values aligned culture through an organizational constitution.

An organizational constitution is a formal document that states the company's guiding principles and behaviors. These liberating rules present the best thinking on how the organization wants to operate. It's a "North Star" that outlines the company or team's defined playing field for employee performance and employee values.

Your organizational constitution describes exactly how its members will engage with each other, suppliers, vendors, and customers, as members act to fulfill their team or department's purpose, values, strategies, and goals.

An organizational constitution outlines your team's purpose, values, strategies, and goals. It paints a vivid picture of success, values, and behaviors. It maps out how to work from that picture each day.

An organizational constitution gives employees' jobs and roles meaning and clarity.

The organizational constitution eliminates unspoken assumptions. There is no more confusion about what the “integrity” value really means or why a decision was made.

Through their organizational constitution, leaders make expectations explicit and describe what a good job and good citizen look like in specific, tangible, observable terms.

Once your organizational constitution is written and shared, leaders must model it, live by it, lead it, and manage to it. Once leaders embrace the constitution, the rest of the organization’s leaders and team members will be drawn to it.

Your constitution provides the organization’s managers and employees a clear understanding of how they can do their best work, treat others respectfully, and help the organization prosper.

“An organizational constitution outlines your team’s purpose, values, strategies, and goals. It paints a vivid picture of success, values, and behaviors. It maps out how to work from that picture each day.”

What does a high performing, values aligned culture look like?

You sense it the moment you step onto the Southwest Airlines plane.

Flight attendants greet you with a hearty, “Welcome aboard!” They look you squarely in the eye and give you a big smile.

One asks how your day has been and genuinely listens to your answer as they walk with you up the aisle to your chosen seat.

What you sense and feel so readily is that Southwest Airlines employees care. They enjoy what they do. They enjoy their teammates. They enjoy their customers.

They willingly engage with customers and teammates... and have fun with both. And, they have fun while flying customers safely to their destinations, consistently on time (arrivals and departures), and with one of the lowest incidences of lost luggage in the industry.

Southwest delivers top performance while WOWing customers daily.

Or, you may be shopping on Zappos.com. You don't see the shoe model you'd like online so you call their toll-free phone number (which is prominently displayed on every page). As you dial, you realize it's 1:00am.

No worries. Zappos team members are available 24/7. Carman answers the phone and cheerily asks how she can help you. You explain that the web site doesn't show the shoe you're looking for.

Carman says, "Let's see if I can find a shoe that you might love!" Within moments Carman suggests two models with similar features and styling. She points you to their web page on Zappos.com so you can view them and decide if you'd like to try them.

You tell Carman you would like to "hold them in your hands." She arranges free shipping of both pairs so you can try them on at home.

Carman says, "Keep the pair you love and ship the other pair back to us. Free!" She explains that if you don't like either pair, ship them both back for a full refund.

Zappos delivers top performance while serving customers happily.

Both of these successful, service-driven, and unique companies have formalized their purpose and values.

These companies, and others, are intentional about workplace inspiration. They don't leave their company culture—or the treatment of employees and customers—to chance.

Southwest Airlines staff and Zappos team members engage willingly, pleasantly, and enthusiastically with customers because they love serving people. Southwest Airlines and Zappos hire people with a service mind-set and a servant heart. Team members who don't embrace the values of these organizations don't stay.

In these organizations, there is no space for team members who don't align with the company's values and who don't enjoy serving others.

You may have experienced other providers that have “it,” that unique, friendly, authentic, inviting environment that envelops you as a customer.

It might be your favorite independent espresso house or your local dry cleaners.

You might not stop to think about it; you might just bask in it!

And, maybe you have thought about it.

You may have asked yourself, “How do they do that? How do they create such an inspiring workplace, with employees who love their work and love their customers?”

What companies like Southwest Airlines and Zappos do is make workplace inspiration—the employee experience—as important as performance and profits.

Just as you can sense the customer-focused culture when stepping onto a Southwest Airlines plane or speaking with a Zappos customer service team member, you can gauge the culture of your team or company by walking around your operation, by listening to what is important to staff, and by observing the quality of interactions between leaders, followers, and customers.

Most leaders look exclusively at profits and production.

And, results are not the only important product of an organization. How people are treated—and how they treat others—is a vitally important element of workplace inspiration that needs proactive and intentional tending.

“Results are not the only important product of an organization. How people are treated—and how they treat others—is a vitally important element of workplace inspiration that needs proactive and intentional tending.”

How healthy is your work environment?

The culture refinement process starts when leaders—of teams, departments, divisions, or entire companies—evaluate the effectiveness of their work culture and choose to refine their culture to benefit the business, its employees, and its customers.

Leaders evaluate their work environment by listening to how team leaders and members treat each other daily... watching how team leaders and members cooperate or compete to get things done daily... watching how customers are referred to and treated each day, etc.

Leaders must pay attention to how team members and leaders behave. If tantrums occur—even periodically—team members won't feel trusted, honored, and respected.

If unfairness occurs—rules are bent or ethical standards are ignored—team members won't feel workplace safety or inspiration.

If team members are not consistently treated with dignity and respect, they won't give their best to serve the company, their teammates, or their customers.

A formal workplace evaluation can be found in *The Culture Engine* in the form of a Culture Effectiveness Survey (or CEA). Leaders can use the CEA's fifty questions to quickly and thoroughly assess the health of their team or department's work environment.

When a leader finds gaps in the way his or her work culture currently operates, the next question is, “What do I do? How do I fix it?”

Most leaders have never experienced successful culture change in their careers. A select few leaders have led a successful culture change.

My book, *The Culture Engine*, answers the question, “How do I fix it?” It provides leaders with a framework for crafting a high performance, values aligned work culture. That proven framework is creating, then managing to, an organizational constitution.

Let’s look at the three phases of culture refinement through an organizational constitution—the design phase, the align phase, and the refine phase.

The Design Phase

The first step to building a high performing, values aligned organization is to specify the foundational elements of your desired work environment.

For simplicity’s sake, we’ll use examples for designing a *team’s* organizational constitution. The same steps and process apply to crafting an organizational constitution for larger entities like departments, divisions, regions, and entire companies.

The elements of an organizational constitution include your team's purpose, values and behaviors, strategies, and goals.

Your team's purpose statement is its "raison d'être," its present day reason for being. An effective purpose statement is an inspiring and compelling description of what your team does, for whom, and "to what end." The "to what end" piece explains why customers should care about what your team does and what your team stands for.

Most teams don't have a formal statement of purpose. The assumption is that "everybody knows what we make or do here."

I suggest you poll your team members. Ask each person, "What is the purpose of our team?" You'll probably get answers that fall into one of these categories:

- We make catalogs (or automobiles or coffee, etc.).
- We make money.

Is "making catalogs" inspiring and compelling for team members? Probably not.

Do either of these answers address whom you're making catalogs for? No.

Is “making money” the best “reason for being” for your team? It’s important—every business team needs to operate profitably (even non-profits and government teams do; they may use different measures, but they have budget requirements that must be met). But, is “making money” a differentiator, a reason for being that separates you from other providers of similar products and services? No. Is “making money” compelling and inspiring for most employees? They might link “making money” to their personal job security, but does it positively impact day-to-day employee activity? No.

Here’s an example of a very effective purpose statement from one of my culture clients:

“Our purpose is to deliver quality, on-time merchandising solutions that drive our customers’ success.”

Does this statement specify what they do? Yes—they “deliver quality, on-time merchandising solutions.” This is an evolutionary step from “we print catalogs”—which is how they saw themselves before engaging in our culture process.

Does this statement specify whom they do it for? Yes—for their customers. (They could have been more specific by saying, for example, “deliver quality, on-time merchandising solutions to our patrons,” but employees told their leaders they know exactly who they’re serving.)

Does this statement specify to what end? Absolutely—their solutions “drive our customers’ success.”

Is driving your customers’ success inspiring and compelling? Absolutely.

Once you draft your team’s purpose statement, share it with team members in draft form. They may have ideas for refining it—and their involvement will increase their buy-in.

Values and behaviors are the next element of the organizational constitution. Values are a vitally important contributor to workplace inspiration. Teams with formalized and demonstrated values and behaviors enjoy greater civility, trust, respect, and skill application.

Unfortunately, few teams formalize values. Those that do define those values in vague, lofty terms that are difficult to translate into day-to-day interactions.

“Values are a vitally important contributor to workplace inspiration. Teams with formalized and demonstrated values and behaviors enjoy greater civility, trust, respect, and skill application.”

Only 28% of 470 global respondents of my [Performance-Values Assessment](#) agree that their team has defined what a good citizen looks, acts, and sounds like.

To make values observable, tangible, and measurable, they must be defined in behavioral terms. By creating clear values expectations in the form of valued behaviors, you make values as measurable as performance.

Here is an excellent example of a value, its definition, and specific valued behaviors from one of my retail clients:

Value: Service

Definition: Our customers are the reason we're in business. By giving them superior service at every opportunity, we exceed their expectations. When we exceed their expectations, we're at our best.

Behaviors:

- I initiate friendly hospitality by promptly and enthusiastically smiling and acknowledging everyone that comes within ten feet of me
- I passionately exceed customers' expectations by offering solutions to their needs.

- I ensure each customer is assisted in finding requested items.
- I deliver a clean, fast, friendly experience to every customer.

Is it clear what this retail client wants demonstrated by team members regarding their customer service values? I hope you say, “Yes!”

Are these behaviors measurable? They are. Any team member can be rated by their boss, peers, and even by customers on the degree to which they’re modeling these behavioral expectations.

This section is where leaders will spend the most time. They’re usually starting from scratch since so few organizations have defined desired values. Even fewer organizations have defined values in behavioral terms.

As with the purpose statement, leaders need to create a draft of values, definitions, and desired behaviors to share with team members. They then invite feedback from team members. They’ll incorporate employees’ good ideas—then “publish” the “operating draft” of their team’s values and behaviors.

Strategies and goals are typically the easiest elements to incorporate into your team’s organizational constitution. Most teams have performance targets in place. They may not have strategic plans that are up to date or relevant, so some investment of time may be required there.

Your strategic plan is a formal statement of your team's desired path to success. Strategies typically outline evolving customer expectations, market opportunities, and such.

Strategy is where your team's vision of the future intersects with the realities of the now, where traction is gained one product test and one happy customer at a time. Strategy is the foundation of team goals and individual team member goals. Aligned goals ensure that the declared strategy gains traction over time.

If you're interested in a more detailed approach to strategic planning, you'll find my recommended five point strategic planning wheel and process in *The Culture Engine*.

With the four elements of your organizational constitution in place—yes, in draft form—communicate these new expectations thoroughly and regularly.

Once everyone in the organization understands these new expectations, it's time for the second phase—align.

“Strategy is where your team's vision of the future intersects with the realities of the now, where traction is gained one product test and one happy customer at a time.”

The Align Phase

With purpose, values and behaviors, strategies, and goals formalized, it's time to live the new agreements.

Whether you lead a small team or a large team, you are the person who must embrace “culture champion” responsibilities. You can't delegate this responsibility to anyone else—the leader of the team must be the banner carrier of the desired culture.

Alignment starts with clarity of expectations. Share the organizational constitution with team leaders and team members so they understand what behaviors are expected of them.

You will also need to communicate why you're embarking on a culture change. People will think, “What's wrong with the ways we've been doing things?” (Even if the old ways created a frustrating work environment.)

Tell them that you've learned about creating a safe, inspiring, respectful AND high performance work environment, and you need everyone's help to create it in your team.

Then, you, as leader, must embrace the values and behaviors in every plan, decision, and action.

Once you do that consistently, next level leaders will see you mean business about this values alignment process. Coach them to model the values and behaviors consistently.

Alignment requires that you hold everyone on your team (yourself included) accountable for demonstrating your team's valued behaviors.

Accountability means praising and celebrating aligned plans, decisions, and actions and redirecting (promptly) any mis-aligned plans, decisions, and actions.

Accountability means seeking feedback from employees on the degree to which they see you and other team leaders demonstrating the values and behaviors every day.

The best tool for accurate feedback on values alignment is a custom values survey that gathers employee perceptions—and shares those perceptions with team leaders and team members.

Your first values survey should be administered six months after your draft organizational constitution is published. That first run will ask employees to rate their team's leaders on the degree to which they live the valued behaviors.

Each leader gets a profile of their scores. Every team member gets a summary of overall ratings for each behavior. The profile will reveal great, values aligned leaders—and some leaders who have values gaps that must be addressed.

The values profile provides undeniable data about values alignment—just as performance metrics provide undeniable data about performance contributions.

With both performance data and values data, leaders can refine their behaviors to serve team members more effectively while driving performance and aligning to the team's valued behaviors.

The values survey is repeated twice a year, with the second run (and all successive runs) of the survey allowing team members to not only rank their leaders on values alignment but their peers and themselves.

This powerful data helps everyone understand how well the work environment reflects desired valued behaviors.

Alignment is successful when everyone on your team—leaders and team members—embraces your valued behaviors willingly and demonstrates them daily, with each other and with customers.

“You, as leader, must embrace the values and behaviors in every plan, decision, and action.”

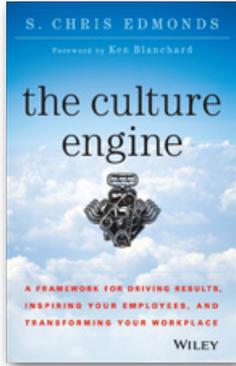
The Refine Phase

Refinement of your organizational constitution should occur at least annually. Refine elements that are “off track” or “out of whack.” Here is how most clients approach refinement:

- **Purpose:** rarely need refining unless your business model shifts or customer demands change significantly.
- **Values and behaviors:** Values will rarely need refinement; if anything, definitions might be tightened up over time. Behaviors may well change! They are the most tactical descriptions of your desired culture. Over time, your original behaviors will become natural and new behaviors may be desired to keep your culture evolving, performing, and genuinely inspirational for all members. Look at behaviors annually and refine as needed.
- **Strategies and goals:** both of these will likely change frequently. Look at these at least annually; refine them as needed to take advantage of changing customer needs, market opportunities, innovative products and solutions you develop, etc.

Is an organizational culture right for your team? Evaluate your team’s performance, teamwork, and civility. If they’re not where you’d like them to be, change expectations by looking for more than just performance. **Create a work environment built on trust, respect, and dignity for all team leaders and members, and you’ll enjoy greater employee engagement, higher customer service, and higher profits.** 📌

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [The Culture Engine](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | S. Chris Edmonds is the founder and CEO of [The Purposeful Culture Group](#). After a 15-year career leading and managing teams, Chris began his consulting company in 1990. Since 1995, Chris has also served as a senior consultant with The Ken Blanchard Companies. Chris provides high-impact keynotes, executive briefings, and executive consulting and coaching. He has authored six books, including *Leading At A Higher Level* with Ken Blanchard. His new book, *The Culture Engine*, helps leaders craft workplace inspiration with an organizational constitution.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on October 22, 2014 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Veer](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

800ceoread

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).