

# TALENT +

To drive business performance, we must master **cultural alchemy**

  
FLEISHMANHILLARD

# TRANSFORMATION

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Today's business leaders are facing chronic disruption — inflation and cost pressures, AI and the digital revolution, geopolitical instability and societal issues. It's taking its toll on business performance and heightening the pressure to transform now and for the future in an environment where the expectation is to somehow deliver more with less.

Data shows that the most pressing challenge for global executive leaders is staying profitable in a difficult climate amid fierce competition. But maintaining morale and retaining staff – both essential for productivity and profit – aren't far behind<sup>1</sup>. ***To manage these priorities many leaders are re-examining their business culture with a view to improving business performance and driving stronger results.***

While there's no question that the right culture can help achieve a business objective, there is no such thing as a 'performance culture' (or for that matter, an 'innovation culture' or a 'growth culture'). The fact is, while a business's objective might be singular, culture – as a means of getting there – is never just one thing. It's always a combination of elements. This is why cultural alchemy is the key to achieving inimitable competitive advantage.



## WHAT IS **Cultural Alchemy**

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Cultural alchemy is the art and science of blending the unique elements of your organisation to ensure that your ownable, differentiated culture is clearly defined and — when activated in the right way — naturally powers and progresses business objectives like performance and innovation by way of an engaged, aligned and inspired workforce.

## WHY WE NEED IT NOW MORE THAN EVER

In the wake of the pandemic and Great Resignation, leaders majored on wellbeing, inclusion and purpose, assuming that employees who feel supported will perform better. But this meant they over-rotated on these areas to the detriment of others, failing to consider what else employees need in order to thrive. While they may have stemmed the flow of resignations, “quiet quitting” trended instead. You’d forgive leaders for thinking their employees are fundamentally disenchanted and disengaged, but there’s more to the story.

Here’s some of the workforce intelligence (and implications) dispelling that narrative.

Gen Z leads the pack on ambition, being the generation most likely to describe themselves as:

|                                       |                                  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Career-focused</b><br><b>(53%)</b> | <b>Ambitious</b><br><b>(41%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

They’re also most likely to say that:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Being successful</b><br><b>(62%)</b> | <b>Challenging themselves</b><br><b>(51%)</b> |
|---|---|

is important to them.

The scarce and highly skilled talent that all employers are fighting for (data scientists, engineers, and tech developers) want to be stretched — 56% say they value being challenged, and they’re most likely to say that learning new skills is important to them (73%)<sup>1</sup>.

It seems that while workplace cultures have been addressing certain expressed needs of their people, it’s been at the expense of intrinsic motivations and other critical desires. To feel inspired. To be stretched. To learn and grow. To be successful. **By focusing on certain elements of culture to the detriment of others, organisations have thrown their ‘cultural alchemy’ out of balance. And out of balance means out of impact.**

## THESE THREE TENETS OF ALCHEMY WILL HELP UNLOCK THE POWER OF CULTURE AND GET IMPACT BACK:

1

**Alchemy is equal parts science and art. But science needs data — the *right* data.**

Culture drives performance when it creates the conditions for people to succeed. But to do this, you must get to know your employees as people. What do they really need — or better yet, want? This means understanding the things they care about, the topics, trends and social issues that impact them, and the beliefs and values that drive them. Things traditional data sources like employee engagement surveys won’t tell you.

By analysing data that matches your employee demographics and profiles, and understanding real communities in real time, it’s possible to build a much richer picture of who your audiences are — thereby imbuing your culture strategy with the human insight it takes to truly resonate.



2

## The magic of alchemy lies in the blending of elements.

It's the connection and interplay between different elements of company culture that make them powerful. For example, consider how inclusion can lead to innovation when people feel able to confidently contribute ideas and take risks. Or how trust between team members allows for challenging conversations and feedback that leads to performance breakthroughs.

**Employees may not make these connections on their own. Leaders must recognise and own their role in creating culture and collaborate to ensure that it's greater than the sum of its parts.** From the commercial KPIs determined by the CFO and the operational processes set by COO to how DE&I priorities and talent strategies come to life under CHRO direction, all these elements together impact one another and influence the cultural dynamics of a firm.

Leadership teams that approach culture as a collective, and whose decisions are truly informed by the codified behaviours and values that drive their vision and strategy are true cultural alchemists, leading a powerful and differentiated culture that creates advantage.



3

## Creativity is the vital activating ingredient in cultural alchemy.

The world's biggest brands invest millions in creative ways to engage and connect with their customers. Because they know creativity cuts through and evokes emotion that inspires action. Yet when it comes to their employees — their most critical stakeholders — creativity is sorely lacking. **Culture gets activated through emails that get lost in the depths of Outlook, SharePoint sites that never get clicks, and Townhall meetings watched with half an eye.**

Bringing culture to life with impact takes insight-led creative that delivers experiences and fuses bits of culture into a bigger whole. Creativity is the multiplier for talent investments. It drives transformation ROI and catalyses cultural movements that make way for ambition and greatness. What could be a more powerful performance advantage than that? Than a movement that unites people behind vision and purpose; drives engagement; and inspires the actions, behaviours and commitment that define individual and collective success?





# REBALANCING CULTURE FOR BUSINESS IMPACT

So, to all those leaders out there grappling with how to stay competitive through disruption by reigniting performance, ask yourselves this question: is your cultural alchemy out of balance? Do you know what your people really desire? Are you missing an opportunity to tap into their ambition and their appetite to learn? Are you combining and aiming your unique cultural strengths at your goals? Are you using creativity to unlock desire?

And ultimately, are you inspiring a movement?



CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CULTURAL ALCHEMY.

1. Research conducted by FleishmanHillard's TRUE Global Intelligence using data from Global Web Index, May 2024

## MEET THE BRAINS BEHIND CULTURAL ALCHEMY



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Nick is expert at developing compelling messaging and coaching senior leaders to communicate internally with impact.

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FleishmanHillard UK is a leading integrated communications agency delivering public relations, reputation management, brand marketing, digital and social strategy, public affairs and brand strategy to UK, EMEA and global clients.

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