



# People as Power: Leveraging Culture and Talent for Sustainable Success



**Suzanne de Janasz, Ph.D.**

Executive Education Consultant  
Affiliate Professor, London  
Business School

“You can't use an old map to explore  
a new world”  
Albert Einstein

# HR in 2015: The Operational Backbone

A faint, grayscale silhouette of a human figure, showing the spine and ribcage, serving as a background for the central text.

**Administrative efficiency**  
**Talent acquisition**  
**Performance management**  
**Training delivery**  
**Policy enforcement**

HR was often seen as a support function—important, but not central to business strategy.

(an improvement over its predecessor: HR as the police)

# HR today: Strategic Architect, Partner, and Catalyst

- ✓ Drive organizational transformation
- ✓ Leverage AI and data analytics
- ✓ Champion diversity and psychological safety
- ✓ Act as culture stewards
- ✓ Lead change and agility



# **We Need to Challenge Old Beliefs about Human Capital**



### **Hire the best and success will follow**

The best employees will leave without a purpose-driven, safe culture and if they're not empowered or having their skills utilized and developed.



### **Spare employees from bad news; it raises anxiety and may cause them to leave**

A lack of transparency creates more anxiety; those who leave before being laid off are usually the most talented



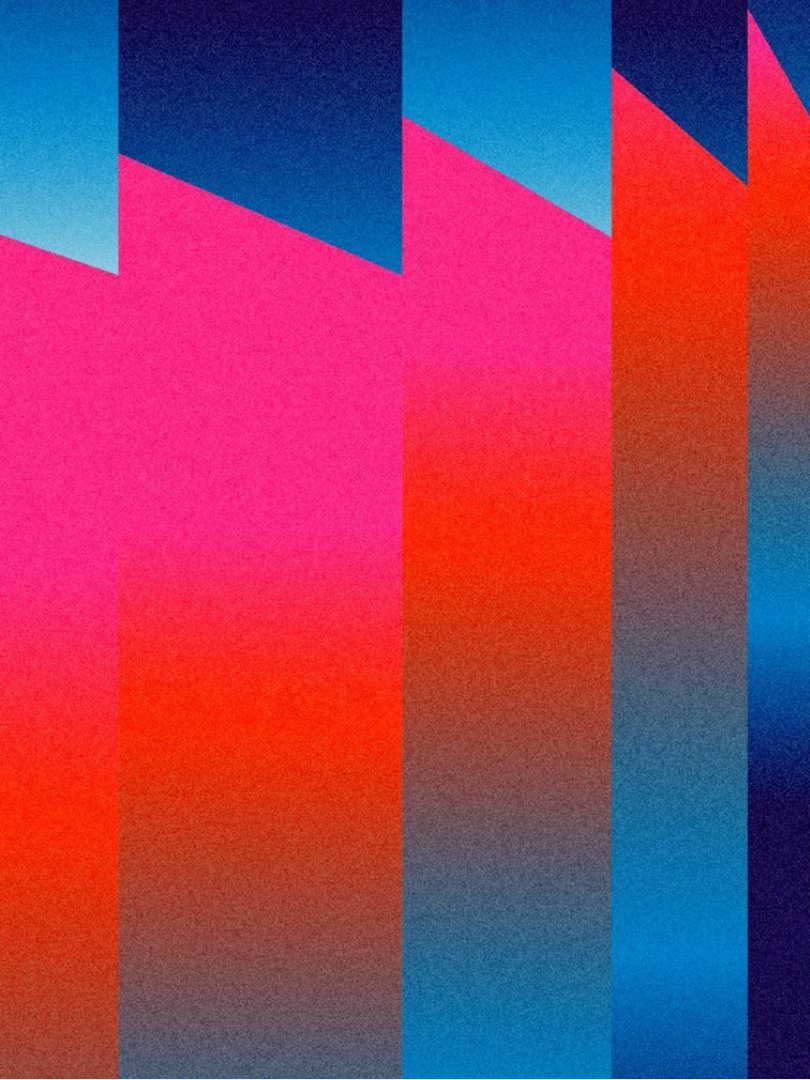
### **Pay top performers well and they'll stay**

Money doesn't engender high performance or commitment; they want alignment, empowerment, and to contribute to something larger than themselves



### **Bring employees back into the office full time to strengthen creativity, collaboration, and culture**

It might, depending on purposeful interactions. In some cases, it creates resentment



How can HR leaders leverage culture for success?

## What Culture Is

- Personality of an organization, ideally aligned with organizational strategy
- Shared values, beliefs, norms, practices, rituals, symbols, stories, artifacts
- Like water to fish
- Ideally, it changes with markets, strategy, and people

## What Culture Isn't

- Catchy slogans
- Posters with soaring eagles
- Friday pizza parties
- Matching merch
- Easily fixable

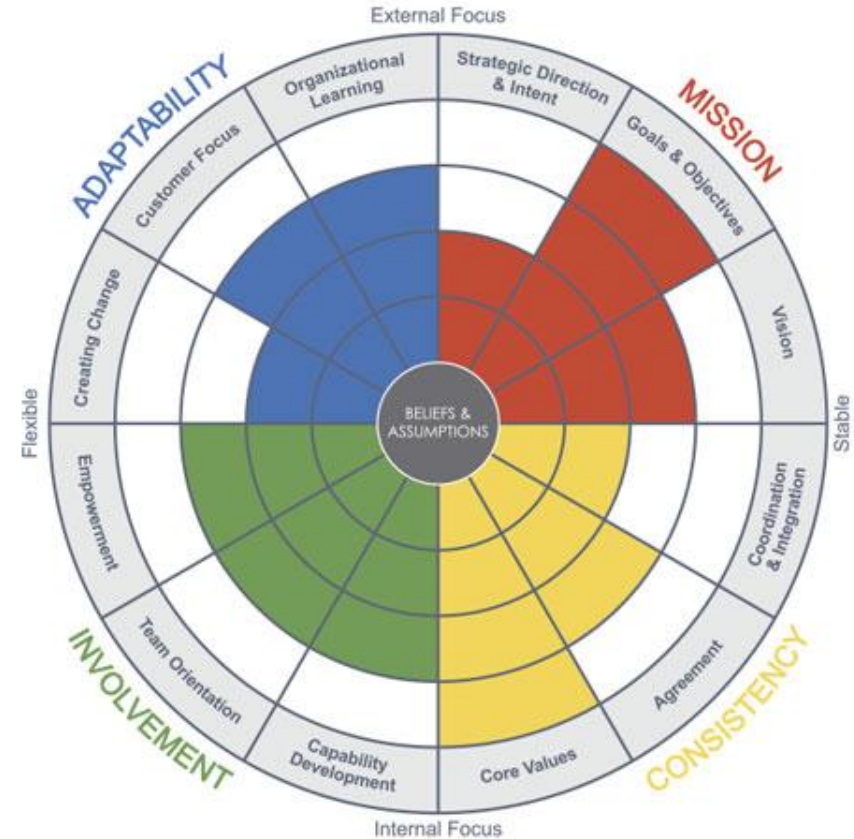
When HR leaders treat culture as a living system that directly affects performance, they become architects of sustainable success.

# Leveraging Culture for Success: Challenges

- You can't change (or leverage) culture unless you first understand it
  - Use a tool to enable assessment
  - What gets measured gets done

# Measuring Culture - Four Key Traits (Denison)

- **Mission:** The clarity of the organization's direction and purpose.
- **Involvement:** The engagement and ownership of employees at all levels.
- **Adaptability:** The organization's ability to respond to changes and learn from experiences.
- **Consistency:** The alignment of values, systems, and processes within the organization.



# Leveraging Culture for Success: Challenges

- You can't change (or leverage) culture unless you first understand it
  - Use a tool to enable assessment
  - What gets measured gets done
- Without clear strategic alignment, “culture” can be seen as manipulative
  - HR is the steward that
    - Helps leadership “see” the culture as is (currently) and aspirationally (e.g., what culture do we need in 2030 or 2040?)
    - Facilitates conversations about closing the gap throughout the organization
- Evolving culture is difficult but necessary
  - Recognize that change is necessary
  - Change occurs bit by bit, in actions, not words; it's neither top-down nor bottom-up.
  - Failure happens, and transparent communication—early and often—is key

# Enhancing the Culture/Talent Connection

- **Work to build trust and autonomy.** Communication and consistency are key.
- **Ask employees what they want** to enhance their well-being...remember that **small things matter.**
- Embrace new ways of **learning and connection.**
- Create or enhance **intentional culture rituals**—onboarding, team-building, and leadership visibility—to enhance cohesion, even in hybrid setups.
- Create **collective effervescence** through shared *moments that matter* — emotional and psychological signals in everyday experiences

## Be Intentional: One thing/experience you can create....

Refine or create a ritual with 3 Ps:

- Presence – sharing time, space, attention
- Purpose – clarify the why to align and channel energy
- Participation – actively engage all; energy is shared, not siloed

What ritual will you create or enhance?

Presence

Purpose

Participation

# Aligning Culture and Talent for Sustainable Success

- **Assess: Do we have the talent we need, now and in 2030, 2040?**
  - Yes? What are we doing to empower, engage, challenge, grow, involve?
  - No? What are the project/business needs? Do we buy, build, or borrow?
- **Attract: Be creative and intentional**
  - Sourcing – where, when, how; don't “spit into the wind.” Use current employees!
  - Tell the brand story (while building the brand)
    - Internally
    - Externally
- **Retain/Leverage: Align, invest, upskill per strategy and culture**
  - Build shared identities
  - More expensive to replace than retain...

People as Power: Leveraging Culture  
and Talent for Sustainable Success

Suzanne de Janasz, Executive Education  
Consultant and Affiliate Professor, LBS

# Next Steps



Elevate  
your people.

# Top Things That HR Leaders Can Do

- Become a strategic partner and culture architect: design experiences that shape how people feel, engage, and grow.
- Create intentional culture rituals—*moments that matter*—throughout all of HR’s touchpoints.
- Be a role model for the rest of the organization: Communicate transparently, wear values, collaborate visibly, lead authentically
- Play to win as opposed to not to lose. Use your power to make someone want to stay.

*How do you feel valued, seen, respected?*

## People as Power?

Only if HR leaders actively engage as architects of tomorrow's workplaces

Culture is not words on a wall...it's what you do.

What action will you take...

Every day

To ensure people come, stay, thrive, and give their best?

# Takeaways? Questions?

## Connect with me!

I post regularly about negotiation, leadership, and culture on LinkedIn.




Suzanne de Janasz

[About](#) [Services](#) [Popular Topics & Courses](#) [Publications & Media](#) [Contact](#)

## Suzanne de Janasz, Ph.D.

#8 IN WORLD'S TOP 30 NEGOTIATION EXPERTS - GLOBAL GURUS 2025



Empowering Teams to Negotiate Smarter, Not Harder

TRANSFORMING PROFESSIONALS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO ACHIEVE MORE THROUGH STRATEGIC NEGOTIATION.