

# Culture captains



By [Jane Stevenson](#)

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There is always an interesting debate around organisational culture and what is its true value. This is indeed more prevalent when times are tough and focus is on financial pressures.

Here is the harsh truth: culture underpins everything in an organisation - and I mean everything.

It dictates how employees engage with clients and with one another. It dictates the ethical integrity of the organisation. It is the difference between people wanting to come to work rather than having to. It is the enjoyment factor... the reason for being... the purpose we all work towards. And this has a direct impact on the bottom line.

A motivated, focused individual will go to war for a company that treats its employees well. A person simply there to earn a salary will do what is asked with less focus and attention. And, will have a direct, impact on results.

## Organisational success

Culture is the personality of the organisation. It's the feeling you get when you enter a company and there is a "buzz", people are focused and happy, and there are shared values and beliefs. All coupled with goals that are aligned to these values.

Culture is key to achieving organisational excellence, it shapes the manner in which people interpret and respond to any organisational situation.

Culture is the foundation that enables business to embrace change. A growing business faces many challenges along its journey of growth. These challenges necessitate changes. If there is a solid culture, there is trust. People will work with leadership to move in different directions, with the belief that it is for the good of all.

You may say that's idealistic - I disagree. There are many case studies of companies who have done this so well. It takes time, it requires consistency, and it takes leadership to completely immerse itself into building a culture.

## Embracing culture

So who is responsible for culture? Of course, the success is a result of everyone embracing it. But the leadership of an organisation is 100% responsible for creating, implementing and measuring organisational culture.

Culture is based on core values: a set of behaviours that determine the way we would like our organisation to be seen internally and externally. It's easy to put values in a frame in reception... you can Google that in two seconds. The litmus test is in living these values daily in order for people to see and feel them without listed on paper.

According to Alison Treadaway, MD of Striata, the following four areas are a good place to start:

**Define and align company values:** in true tradition of human behaviour, we like to belong to or be part of something bigger than us. Something that creates a unified vision. Ensuring that each employee understands (not just the words but their role) the values of your business makes for a solid foundation.

**Work ethic:** Do you have a clear code of conduct or is it loosely applied and therefore open to interpretation? If it's not clearly articulated, you don't have one. This is a guideline - set of boundaries - to the behaviours expected by the company.

**Growth:** Each person needs to understand their journey of growth within the company. It should be discussed, documented with a clear indication of what the expectations are from both the individual and the company

**Make work fun:** Sounds simple, but having fun at work is good for productivity, motivation and loyalty. People should enjoy being at work. An organisation should have a sense of humour.

Financial prosperity is the end result of great culture, solid values and focused goals defined and led by leadership. Can you afford to ignore your organisational culture?

## ABOUT JANE STEVENSON

Named by CEO publication as SA's most influential government businesswoman in the SME sector in 2012, she's big on vision, strategy and effective communication. Start with a successful business strategy and executive coaching consultancy to leading national brands... add the experience of being a Board and EXCO member of the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber; and stir in some fearless Scottish roots and a dedication to building organisational vision. The result? A motivating, passionate teamplayer.

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