

Organisational culture: Driven by businesses' competitive advantage and by companies' leadership

By [Terri-Leigh Cassell](#)

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It is simply not the case that said organisational culture is outside the control of executives and a company's leadership teams; rather workplace culture is and should be driven directly by a business's competitive advantage.



Source: © 123rf [123rf](#) Terri-Leigh Cassell, managing director at Shift Design Agency says it is simply not the case that organisational culture is outside the control of executives and a company's leadership teams

From defining competitive advantage and purpose to determining values and setting boundaries for behaviour, the role of leadership in driving workplace culture is undeniable.

Far from being outside the control of executives and company leaders, culture is instead a powerful asset in a business' commercial growth and success. Workplace culture is downstream from leadership.

“ *It's safe to say that there is a direct link between competitive advantage and commercial growth* ”

A company's competitive advantage determines its values. The values of a business shape its behaviours. And those behaviours are the key drivers of workplace culture.

The power of competitive advantage

Let's start by unpacking the power of competitive advantage to influence culture.

A competitive advantage is the one thing a company does best. It is what sets your company apart from competitors and why customers will choose you.

Therefore, it's safe to say that there is a direct link between competitive advantage and commercial growth.

So, why would a business not want to drive a culture around its competitive advantage? If this is what differentiates you, why would you not centre your values on it? Where to begin, though?



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Defining your purpose

It all comes down to defining your purpose, the direction that allows you to assert very clearly what you are best at.

There is power in a compelling purpose statement: it drives engagement through belief.

But, purpose alone does not drive growth and profitability. A business needs an action plan that puts purpose to work, one that must be derived from what it is best at in its industry.

Design thinking is a powerful tool

Design thinking is a powerful tool for uncovering purpose and creating an action plan.

More than simply revealing a competitive advantage, this approach provides a business' leadership with valuable insights into both their internal and external stakeholders' wants, needs and problems.

Through identifying these, organisations are in a strong position to define their purpose and create an action plan.

In truth, purpose cannot be realised without an action plan, and an action plan should be inspired by what you are or can be best at – your competitive advantage.



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Nelson Mandela as an example

Let's consider the example of Nelson Mandela, whose purpose was to bring about freedom for all South Africans regardless of their background, sex or ethnicity.

This was his driving direction – his big audacious goal in his lifetime. One can argue whether freedom was fully realised and acknowledge that there is, perhaps, still a long road to travel to get there.

But what cannot be denied is the competitive advantage through which Madiba set his purpose into motion: his focus and persistence; his unwavering devotion to the cause that set him apart in the minds and hearts of a global audience.

Underpinning both his competitive advantage and purpose, of course, were his unwavering values.



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Leaders to set boundaries

An organisation's values determine how it will operate, but it remains with a company's leaders to set boundaries for behaviour.

This direction has an impact on both internal and external stakeholders. How staff members undergo performance assessment clearly rests on both a business' values and behaviours.

While internal engagement is important, how staff members interact with external stakeholders is equally critical for business growth.

Values drive behaviour, and behaviour is how we show up for our colleagues, our partners and our customers – it is a way of being and acting.

By modelling and instilling desirable behaviours across an organisation, leadership, therefore, plays a direct role in driving organisational culture.

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