100 actions 100 organizations

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We hear this simple question daily: What actions do organizations take to improve their culture? This document shows a sampling of 100 different actions that have been taken by 100 different organizations we've worked with over the years. Each action is shown in connection to a corresponding 'index' from the Denison Organizational Culture Model, the diagnostic framework used by our practice.

Some Context on 100 Actions, 100 Organizations

A real science has emerged over the last three decades to inform the conceptualization and measurement of organizational cultures, or in practice-terms, the diagnosis. The measurement side is both in good standing and undergoing a major, technology-driven evolution. As a discipline, the next several years seem primed to keep our collective energy on the diagnosis as we learn how to integrate and take full advantage of predictive analytics, employee listening, pulse surveys, and the like.

And as a discipline, this is both exciting and has the potential to divert our attention away from action in a way that should scare us all, at least a little.

Many of us who work around culture diagnosis are well trained to say – and do believe – that the impact lies in what the organization does with the insights gained. Insight alone can be a very good thing. Insight plus action is surely a much better thing. The same will likely continue to be true even as the way diagnosis evolves.

Perhaps there are some domains in which the actions are self-evident from the diagnosis. If X, then Y. This is rarely true for culture work in organizations. Because culture is manifest in so many different elements and layers, the number of possible actions and the ways in which to go about them, is immense.

And this can be true even when the diagnostic process does its job and gets the organization focused in on a specific issue or priority. Then what? What evidence do we (big "we") have to inform the next set of choices about who does what to whom by when?

Of course, any good process facilitator knows the importance of getting the organization to define the actions in a way that commits their own brainpower and energy in the process. This should be the way of things. However, this doesn't stop clients from asking for "silver bullet" solutions to various problems. And it shouldn't stop us from wanting

an evidence base on which to make some informed recommendations – what we might say are true "best practices."

Today, this knowledge seems dispersed and not all that easily accessible. It lives mainly in consultant experience and intuition, and there are also some written case stories, many of which are good and helpful. This is all good stuff but does seem a ways from "generalizable knowledge base."

One way to get started down the path of creating an organized (if not generalizable) knowledge base would be to document and study the actions that organizations take and the impact those actions have. This was the basic idea behind the first iteration of the 100 Actions, 100 Organizations project.

Noteworthy, this first iteration is more art than science. That was intentional. To start, we simply wanted to document, from 100 organizations we've worked with, one action that each has taken in response to their own cultural diagnosis. We chose one action per organization. Most had several to choose from. We aimed for diversity, so that the actions are unique while also canvassing all elements of the diagnostic model. This turned out to be pretty easy, with a natural symmetry emerging as we increased the sample and got up to 100. We also wanted diversity in terms of the depth, range, and type of actions documented. If you think of Edgar Schein's iceberg, some of these are aiming pretty close to the surface (changing or reshaping the "artifacts" of culture), and some are aiming down in the depths (changing or reshaping the way leaders think and behave).

100 ACTIONS, 100 ORGANIZATIONS
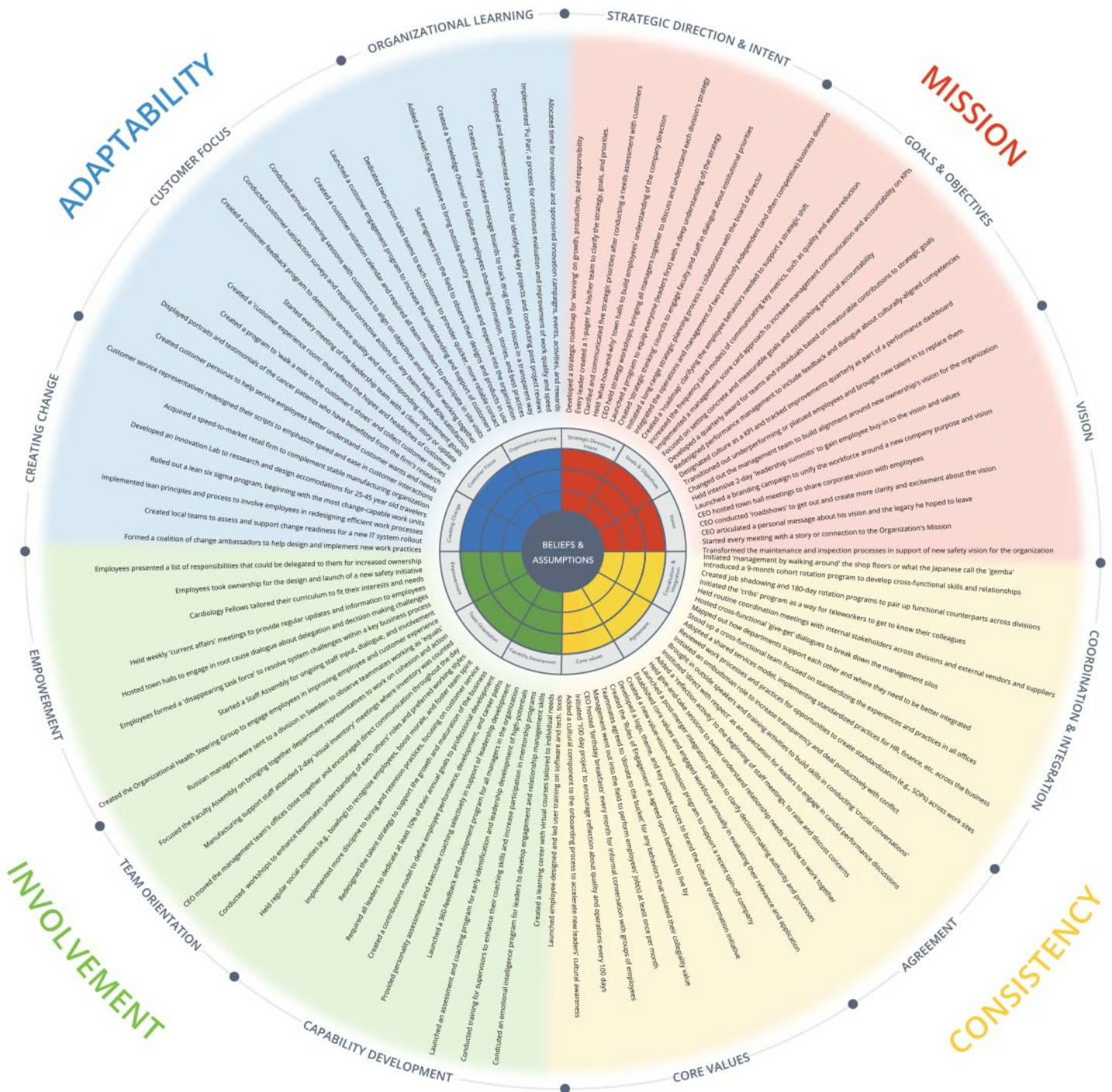
[Click on the graph to open it at full screen]

So what change are you looking to achieve in your organization?

Take a look at the hundred actions (from the graphic above) to improve the Mission, Consistency, Involvement and Adaptability of your organization, then…**take action.**

Mission

Strategic Direction & Intent

1. Develop a strategic roadmap for 'winning' on growth, productivity, and responsibility
2. Every leader create a 1-pager for his/her team to clarify the strategy, goals, and priorities
3. Clarify and communicate five strategic priorities after conducting a needs assessment with customers
4. Hold 'what-how-and-why' town halls to build employees' understanding of the company direction
5. CEO hold strategy workshops, bringing all managers together to discuss and understand each division's strategy
6. Launch a program to equip everyone (leaders first) with a deep understanding of the strategy
7. Create 'strategic thinking' councils to engage faculty and staff in dialogue about institutional priorities
8. Initiate a long-range strategic planning process in collaboration with the board of directors
9. Integrate the operations and management of two previously independent (and often competitive) business divisions

Goals & Objectives

10. Create a 'roadmap' clarifying the employee behaviors needed to support a strategic shift
11. Increase the frequency (and modes) of communicating key metrics, such as quality and waste-reduction
12. Implement a management scorecard approach to increase management communication and accountability on KPIs
13. Focus on setting concrete and measurable goals and establishing personal accountability
14. Develop a quarterly award for teams and individuals based on measurable contributions to strategic goals
15. Redesign performance management to include feedback and dialogue about culturally-aligned competencies
16. Designate culture as a KPI and track improvements quarterly as part of a performance dashboard
17. Transition out underperforming or plateaued employees and bring new talent in to replace them

Vision

18. Change out the management team to build alignment around new ownership's vision for the organization
19. Hold intensive 2-day 'leadership summits' to gain employee buy-in to the vision and values
20. Launch a branding campaign to unify the workforce around a new company purpose and vision
21. CEO host town hall meetings to share corporate vision with employees
22. CEO conduct 'roadshows' to get out and create more clarity and excitement about the vision
23. CEO articulate a personal message about his vision and the legacy he hopes to leave
24. Start every meeting with a story or connection to the Organization's Mission
25. Transform the maintenance and inspection processes in support of new safety vision for the organization

CONSISTENCY

Coordination & Integration

26. Initiate 'management by walking around' the shop floors or what the Japanese call the 'gemba'
27. Introduce a 9-month cohort rotation program to develop cross-functional skills and relationships
28. Create job shadowing and 180-day rotation programs to pair up functional counterparts across divisions
29. Initiate the 'cribs' program as a way for teleworkers to get to know their colleagues
30. Hold routine coordination meetings with internal stakeholders across divisions and external vendors and suppliers
31. Host cross-functional 'give-get' dialogues to break down the management silos
32. Map out how departments support each other and where they need to be better integrated
33. Stand up a cross-functional team focused on standardizing the experiences and practices in all offices

34. Adopt a shared services model, implementing standardized practices for HR, finance, etc. across the business
35. Review work processes and practices for opportunities to create standardization (e.g., SOPs) across work sites

Agreement

36. Initiate an ombudsman role to increase transparency and deal productively with conflict
37. Bring in outside speakers and training activities to build skills in conducting 'crucial conversations'
38. Institute 'direct with respect' as an expectation for leaders to engage in candid performance discussions
39. Add a 'reflection activity' to the beginning of staff meetings to raise and discuss concerns
40. Hold give-and-take sessions to better understand relationship needs and how to work together
41. Launch a post-merger integration program to clarify decision-making authority and processes

Core Values

42. Establish core values and engage workforce annually in evaluating their relevance and application
43. Create a new value-vision-and-mission program to support a recent spin-off company
44. Develop a logo, theme, and key positive forces to brand the cultural transformation initiative
45. Create the 'Rules of Engagement' as agreed upon behaviors to live by
46. Teammates agree to 'donate to the bucket' for any behaviors that violate their collegial value
47. Management goes out into the field to perform employees' job(s) at least once per month
48. CEO hosts 'birthday breakfasts' every month for informal conversation with groups of employees
49. Initiate '100 day project' to encourage reflection about quality and operations every 100 days
50. Add a cultural component to the onboarding process to accelerate new leaders' cultural awareness

involvement

Capability Development

51. Launch employee-designed and led user training on software and tech tools
52. Create a learning center with virtual courses tailored to individual needs
53. Conduct an emotional intelligence program for leaders to develop engagement and relationship management skills
54. Conduct training for supervisors to enhance their coaching skills and increase participation in mentorship programs
55. Launch an assessment and coaching program for early identification and leadership development of high-potentials
56. Launch a 360-feedback and development program for all managers in the organization
57. Provide personality assessments and executive coaching selectively in support of leadership development
58. Create a contributions model to define employee performance, development, and career paths
59. Require all leaders to dedicate at least 10% of their annual goals to professional development
60. Redesign the talent strategy to support the growth and maturation of the business
61. Implement more discipline to hiring and retention practices, focusing on customer service

Team Orientation

62. Hold regular social activities (e.g., bowling) to recognize employees, boost morale, and foster team spirit
63. Conduct workshops to enhance teammates' understanding of each others' roles and preferred working styles
64. CEO move the management team's offices close together and encourage direct communication throughout the day

65. Manufacturing support staff attend 2-day 'visual inventory' meetings where inventory is counted
66. Focus the Faculty Assembly on bringing together department representatives to work on cohesion and action
67. Russian managers go to a division in Sweden to observe teammates working as 'equals'

Empowerment

68. Create the Organizational Health Steering Group to engage employees in improving employee and customer experience
69. Start a Staff Assembly for ongoing staff input, dialogue, and involvement
70. Employees form a 'disappearing task force' to resolve system challenges within a key business process
71. Host town halls to engage in root cause dialogue about delegation and decision-making challenges
72. Hold weekly 'current affairs' meetings to provide regular updates and information to employees
73. Cardiology Fellows tailor their curriculum to fit their interests and needs
74. Employees take ownership for the design and launch of a new safety initiative
75. Employees presented a list of responsibilities that could be delegated to them for increased ownership

Adaptability

Creating Change

76. Form a coalition of change ambassadors to help design and implement new work practices
77. Create local teams to assess and support change readiness for a new IT system rollout
78. Implement lean principles and processes to involve employees in redesigning efficient work processes
79. Roll out a lean six sigma program, beginning with the most change-capable work units
80. Develop an Innovation Lab to research and design accommodations for 25-45 year old travelers
81. Acquire a speed-to-market retail firm to complement stable manufacturing organization
82. Customer service representatives redesign their scripts to emphasize speed and ease in customer interactions

Customer Focus

83. Create customer personas to help service employees better understand customer wants and needs
84. Display portraits and testimonials of the cancer patients who have benefitted from the firm's research
85. Create a program to 'walk a mile in the customer's shoes' and collect customer stories
86. Create a 'customer experience room' that reflects the hopes and headaches of customers
87. Start every meeting of the leadership team with a client story or update
88. Create a customer feedback program to determine service quality and set corresponding improvement goals
89. Conduct customer satisfaction surveys and require corrective actions for any teams below 80% satisfaction
90. Conduct annual partnering sessions with customers to align on objectives and values for working together
91. Create a customer visitation calendar and require all team members to participate in site visits
92. Launch a customer engagement program to increase the understanding and support of customers
93. Dedicate two-person sales teams to each customer to provide quicker, more reliable contact

Organizational Learning

94. Send engineers into the field to observe their designs and products in use
95. Add a market-facing executive to bring outside industry awareness and expertise into the organization
96. Create a 'knowledge channel' to facilitate employees sharing information, stories, and best practices
97. Create centrally located message boards to track drug trials and issues in a transparent way
98. Develop and implement a process for identifying key projects and conducting post project reviews

99. Implement 'Fu Pan,' a process for continuous evaluation and improvement of work quality and speed
100. Allocate time for innovation and sponsored innovation campaigns, events, activities, and rewards

An example of one organization that took action

The Cardiology Fellowship Training Program at the University of Michigan faced a unique challenge in building a strong culture in spite of high turnover as fellows graduated and moved on. The program was already among the top tier within a highly competitive subspecialty of medicine. But the program leaders felt they could improve upon the old apprentice model by which many fellowship programs are run to create a more dynamic training model. They wanted a culture of builders which would empower the motivated, and they used the rapid employee life cycle to energize the culture work.

Find the people who have the energy, and hand them the keys to the car. The "car" you put them in should give them a rhythm for reflection and dialogue about the culture and should show them how to translate their ideas into action.

The action they took was to find the people who had energy and hand them the keys to the car. It started with small things that added up to the big things.

They threw tailgates with the faculty, had a fellowship reunion at the national conference, met every month to talk about how to make the program better, and gave everyone fleeces with the fellowship logo to remind them what they were a part of. As a result, the percentage of Fellows who rated the program "very positive" went up nearly 20 points, to an overall rating of 80%.

The Cardiology Fellowship Training Program at the U of M (click here for a full case study) provides a fascinating example of the meaning and management of culture in an organization whose members are always on the move. What they have learned about how to create and sustain their program's culture holds strong relevance for many organizations today, including some (like Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb) who are defining new organizational forms, as well as to many others who are grappling with a high-churn millennial workforce.

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