

# Leading organizations in disruptive times

WBCSD Leadership Program  
Class of 2021 - group projects



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# WBCSD Leadership Program 2021



## INTRODUCTION

**The WBCSD Leadership Program is a unique professional and leadership development opportunity that provides current and future business leaders with an in-depth understanding of sustainability challenges and opportunities that will feed into their strategic decision-making. As sustainable businesses continue to lead the way into the future, it is critical for the next generation of leaders to understand the importance of sustainability to their businesses and integrate the opportunities and risks in their core business strategy.**

The Leadership Program focuses on strategy and innovation for sustainable development. When developing a strategy, innovation is key for future-proofing and adapting business models or product and service offerings.

The 2021 Leadership Program brought together 32 high-potential leaders from various sectors across WBCSD member

companies. Given in-person meeting restrictions, participants successfully took part in a series of online sessions, and, in collaboration with INSEAD, an online training on "Leading organizations in disruptive times" — a very appropriate topic given the challenges we are currently facing.

We know that leaders have to take decisions and risks to effect change. They have to use communication and influencing skills to inspire a shared vision and create a culture of change, encouraging people to challenge the status quo. This is not easy and the INSEAD training provided this year's participants with tools and frameworks that can be applied to lead change in their companies.

At the end of the training, participants worked together, in groups, to write this report which summarizes their learning and recommendations on addressing key challenges that businesses face today:

1. Change challenge
2. Decision challenge
3. Political challenge
4. Culture & integration challenge

We look forward to continued collaboration with these sustainability leaders as they build resilient and regenerative mindsets within their organizations to address the future needs of business.



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**Participants came from the following WBCSD member companies:**



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# The change challenge

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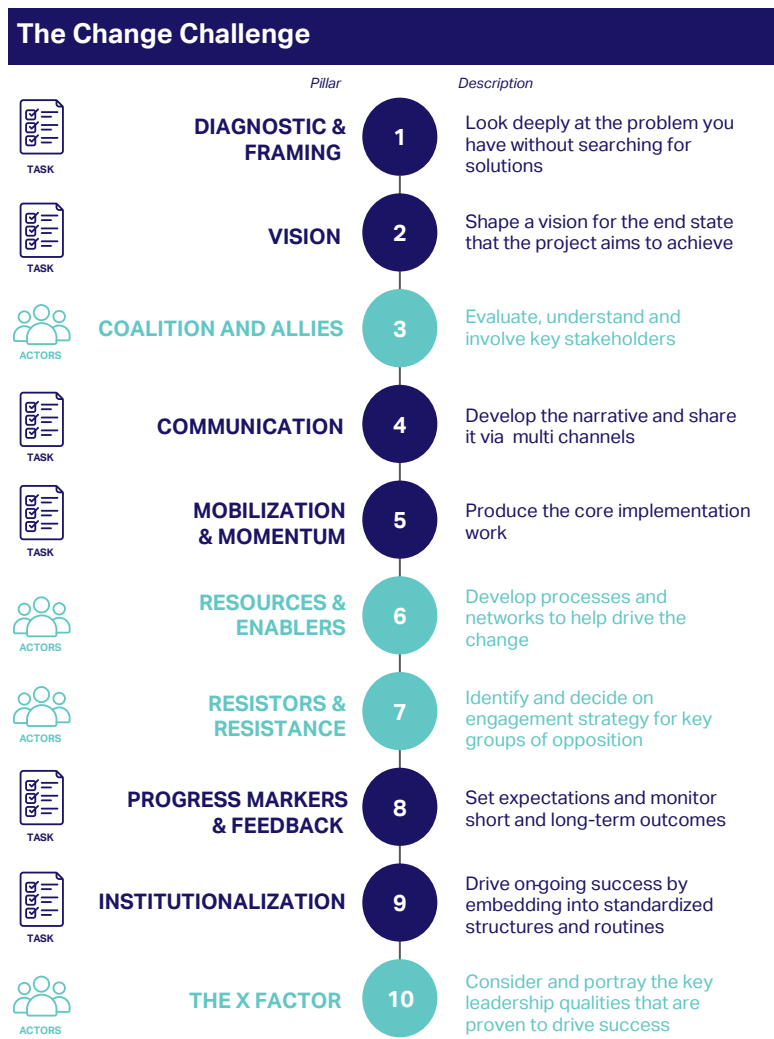
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Implementing change is hard. This is because it's complex, individuals and factions will resist it, and few leaders do it often enough to learn from their experience. This means that "the change challenge" is frequently underestimated, particularly the planning required to identify and avoid biases and to successfully navigate the political, cognitive and emotional landscape.

The "10 Pillars of Organizational Change" model<sup>1</sup> brings together best practice and cumulative experience into one framework, aiming to ensure that all critical aspects of change management are covered in its planning and execution. Our summary splits the ten pillars (P) into two categories: six that focus on key stages within the change process, from inception to implementation to institutionalization (here called "Tasks"); and four covering understanding of the stakeholders, networks, and coalitions that must be developed to give the process a realistic chance of success (here called "Actors").



### P1 (TASK): DIAGNOSTIC & FRAMING

- Early in the process, perform a deliberate diagnosis to detect problems of fit and relevance and to frame the understanding of stakeholders' attitudes and interests.
- Shape a clear narrative, accurately outlining issues from the past, statements about the present, and gaps in the future.
- To avoid biases, look at the problem without favoring solutions and be balanced in gathering information.

**KEY TOOL:** Threats and Opportunities Map (example<sup>2</sup>)

### P2 (TASK): VISION

- Develop a strong vision to motivate and inspire the organization.
- Provide a concentrated description of the opportunity space the change will unlock.
- Create a vision that is clear, connected to a purpose, reasonably specific, and easy to understand and share.

### P3 (ACTORS): COALITION & ALLIES

- Identify and recruit a coalition of allies who will support the project and help overcome resistance.
- Continuously evaluate the status of the coalitions to maintain and expand the support base; careless treatment can turn a valuable friend into an opponent or a fence sitter.

#### **P4 (TASK): COMMUNICATION**

- Communicate the vision and change narrative frequently to help them sink in.
- Utilize two-way communication to create an honest and psychologically safe environment for people to engage with the project; it is important to listen, understand and be responsive to input.
- Employ a variety of communication channels, including digital platforms and social media.

**KEY TOOL:** Communications Matrix (to map out large vs. small audience sizes and virtual vs. in-person channels).

#### **P5 (TASK): MOBILIZATION & MOMENTUM**

- Roll out the project with a strategy to establish the appropriate pace, tactics and level of local empowerment.
- Understand that different levels in the organization have different needs; ensure that those who will be mainly impacted by the change get sufficient attention.
- Create role models and champions to reinforce the narrative – but ensure consistent messaging.
- Develop constructive symbolism to reach larger audiences and communicate the nature of the change.
- Aim to make the change feel like just one thing is being done within the organization, but in many different ways.

#### **P6 (ACTORS): RESOURCES & ENABLERS**

- Develop a network to expand the coalition and help drive the change at all levels in the organization; work together to outline tasks, align on responsibilities and identify short-term wins to build energy.
- Run pilots to ensure success where conditions for change are strongest; early wins will help to communicate the feasibility of wider change.
- Share and embed the knowledge in programmatic waves; it takes time to spread key learning about the change.
- Create a steering committee with a “cold eye view” to give impartial advice.

#### **P7 (ACTORS): RESISTORS & RESISTANCE**

- All change efforts will encounter some form of resistance (some open, some hidden), which must be addressed.
- Many stakeholders will be swayed towards a position at the start; participation and engagement can attract them.
- Where the creation of adversaries cannot be avoided, confirm their position and postpone confrontation until you have built a sufficiently large positive coalition to help bring them on the journey.

**KEY TOOL:** Trust and Agreement Matrix ([example<sup>3</sup>](#))



## P8 (TASK): PROGRESS MARKERS & FEEDBACK

- Demonstrate progress as the process unfolds; humans are motivated by progress.
- Measure and track outcomes (ideally also behaviors and learning), connect short-term wins to longer-term goals, and avoid the use of biased metrics.
- Adapt to changing circumstances along the way by adjusting the plan and updating markers.

**KEY TOOL:** Checkpoints, indicators and reviews by independent bodies to monitor and communicate progress.

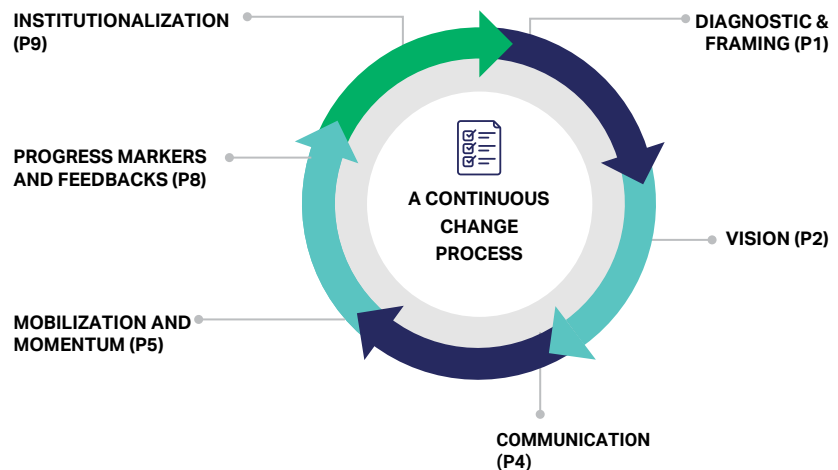
## P9 (TASK): INSTITUTIONALIZATION

- Continuously acknowledge the change and the reasons supporting the same, until it becomes self-sustaining.
- Keep broadening the coalition; resistors can be confronted and removed after new norms are established.
- Keep up continual communication to reinforce the vision and spread best practices.
- Plan for management succession so that new vehicles for regeneration will be ready when required.

## P10 (ACTORS): THE X FACTOR

- Change paths are not formulaic; make efforts to embody three common attributes of successful change agents:
  - Resilience: since resistance is to be expected, tolerance for conflicts is necessary.
  - Contagious positivity: a leader's emotions will affect stakeholders and can build positivity and pride.
  - Broad perspective: the ability to step outside of the immediate context can help keep the project on track.

**In summary**, implementing a change or transformation in an organization is a complex challenge that is frequently underestimated. The "10 Pillars of Organizational Change" model provides practical, tangible steps to orchestrate a change process along multiple dimensions, while building successful coalitions based on a strong understanding of stakeholders. In today's fast-moving world, this can be taken a step further and applied as a continuous improvement process, building on success over time to drive long-lasting desired outcomes.



ACTORS

For each step of the process understand and follow key internal and external stakeholders and their roles:

- COALITION AND ALLIES (P3)
- RESOURCES AND ENABLERS (P6)
- RESISTORS (P7)
- THE X FACTOR (P10)



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# The decision challenge: the fair process leadership model

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## INTRODUCTION

*"One of the fundamental things leaders have to do is to bring an organization to a decision," says Charles Galunic, Program Director at INSEAD. How this is done depends on the organization. Often, resistance builds around a decision mainly because of "how" the decision was made rather than "what" the actual decision is. We can avoid this using the Fair Process Leadership Model (FPLM).*

### What is the decision challenge about?

A decision is defined as a resolution reached after considering single or multiple actions to resolve a problem or need. The challenge in this process is how to get an effective and fair decision for the organization and all its stakeholders through an inclusive and equitable process that facilitates and enables action towards the desired outcomes and goals.

## BENEFITS, RISKS, KEY LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPANIES

The following summarizes five key steps to apply the Fair Process Leadership Model (FLP) towards just and transparent decision-making.

### 1. Engage

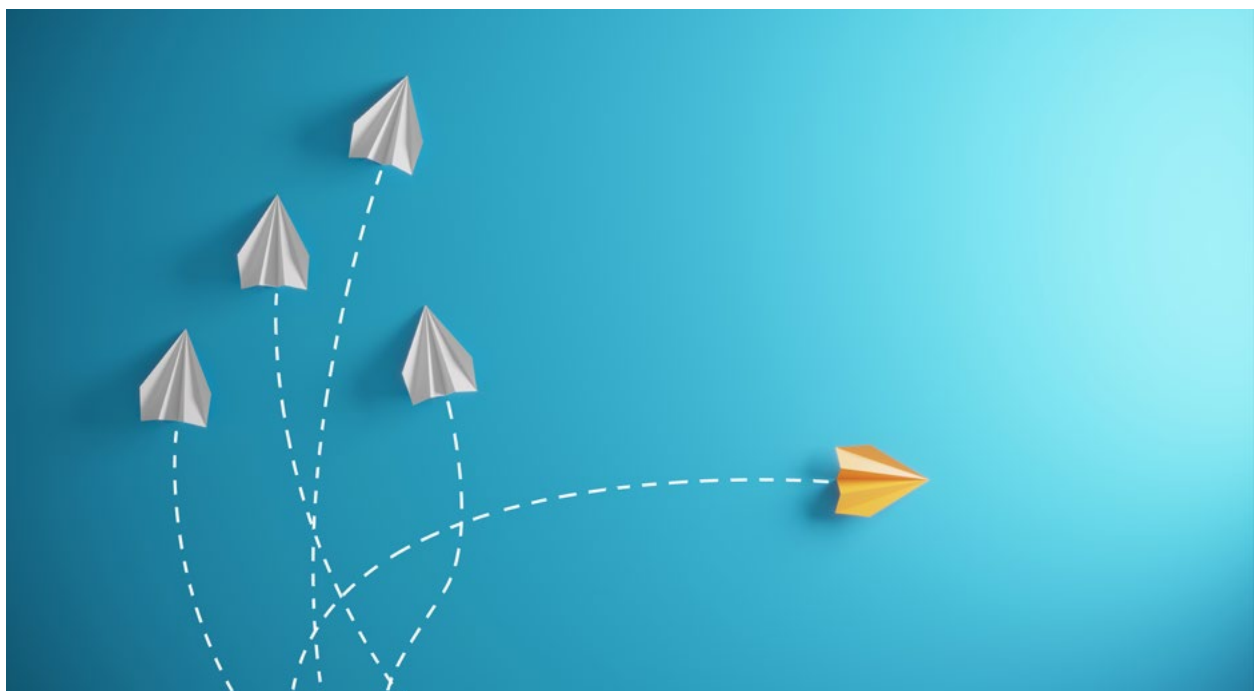
Leaders need to learn not to offer solutions first or to let solutions chase the problem. Leaders should stay with the problem for as long as possible and engage the team to find the solution together. Leadership, in essence, is asking instead of telling. Engage the team by sharing the diagnostics and asking them to describe the real problem, asking for opinions on the knowledge needed to solve the problem, exploring who are the right people to connect with and what is the best way to frame the problem to find the logical solution.

This process will invite participation, resulting in different ideas, creativity, and ownership as people feel they are part of the solution rather than being instructed what to do. It will give them a more positive outlook towards the implementation process of the solution later.

In the 'asking' mode, we provide the team room to create or disrupt ideas, rather than limiting them to think within a limited framework if we choose to engage with a solution as the first step.

### 2. Explore and debate

The first step identified the problem. The second step assesses the different solutions within the boundaries of the problem.



All possible options should be explored, starting with wild and out of the box ideas, ensuring all voices are heard and opportunities are given to debate the pros and cons of each solution. Why is this so important? Tolerance to wild ideas proves the process is truly fair and open, therefore confirming the fairness the audience is looking for.

### 3. Deciding and explaining

Deciding and explaining is an integral part of the FPL model as it sits between the planning and execution steps. It is seamless in nature. Explaining is more than communicating as it provides the 'why' context and determines the 'how'. Providing evidence and facts can be motivational in supporting the decision-making process and assisting people with understanding the context of why a decision was ultimately taken. Explaining needs to be very focused and conducted as early as possible as it provides a perception of fairness, inclusion and removes the fear factor in the change process. The 'why' explained clearly and succinctly also allows for people to appeal. Explaining a core strategy based on decisions taken also provides closure on options not taken. Explaining thus deals with trade-offs (options not taken) and why the path taken is the best option and strategy for those involved. Leaders who skip steps one and two of the FPL model potentially risk alienating people, resulting in disengagement and possible resistance. This can negatively impact the subsequent stages of the FPL model, jeopardizing the final desired outputs and goals.

### 4. Execute

Execution is key in the entire process; the hard-working plan is finally put into operation. The process through the previous steps gives the company confidence in what was previously planned, demonstrating that it is achievable by creating consistency and trust throughout the process. Creating a narrative provides a way to connect various actions, explains how the multiple activities fit together, and prevent a perceived lack of integrity.

The narrative creates a story of the process and must link actions and establish clear roles. It is important to give support during the whole execution process to check that all the previous steps are well studied and carried out.

Consistency is critical to execution; if those responsible don't support the team involved, the team can feel abandoned and distrust the integrity of the process. There is a long road to perceive a process as fair, and a short step is enough to destroy that long road travelled.

The recommendation for the execution phase is to have a realistic assessment of how to put all the previous steps into practice, with a deep analysis of the decision challenge, the roles, the resources, and the action plan.

The only way to achieve success is to have an in-depth study of the execution step that supports the result.

### 5. Learning

The only way for a company to succeed is to make the best use of resources to create value. Resources include capital and time, while people are the ones that unlock value through the effective use of resources. Once planned and executed, any decision needs to be critically and deeply evaluated to extract key learnings, which can then be built upon to move forward.

Critical thinking is crucial to properly examine how things went, what could be improved, what can be considered a success to be replicated, and how people performed. In the long run, sustainable value creation needs detailed learning that also includes a transparent and fair celebration of the best performers because people need role models, routines, and good examples to follow.

No company can afford to start from scratch every time.

## CONCLUSION

To successfully bring an organization to a decision, leaders must engage and recruit all stakeholders through a just and thorough process. Exclusion, confusion, disconnection, and resistance can all build around a decision if "how" the decision is reached and actioned is not managed in an equitable, informed, and inclusive manner. Application of the FPL model can provide leaders with a structured and effective process to follow to create a successful and fair decision for their organization.

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# The political challenge

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## INTRODUCTION OF CHALLENGE

Each of us in our professional and personal lives needs to work with people. The inherent challenge in this is that there are usually opposing views on what should get done, conflicting priorities and limited resources. In order to be successful, we must understand how to get things done when our resources do not meet the requirements of our goals. Navigating these challenges successfully is the job of the manager. Politics often comes with negative connotations in business, but at its core, it is the art of getting things done with and through others. It is the art of influence. Thus, it may be the most important to understand.

## WHAT IS CHALLENGE ABOUT

The political challenge has multiple dimensions.

1. We begin with well-known notions of **hard and soft power**, each of which comes with pros and cons.
2. Either form of power allows access to different forms of what really matters – “**currencies**” or political capital – like inspiration, task facilitation, inclusion, personal development, access to power. These currencies are key elements with which to “barter” for the resources needed to execute work.
3. Also familiar is the notion of personal and professional **networks** and whether they are small and interconnected versus expansive and diverse. Again, each of these comes with pros and cons, and they will shape what “currency” one has and how it can be deployed.

Together, these dimensions form an individual's scope for action.

Within this scope then, the manager must consider two questions:

1. What do I need from others to achieve my goal?
2. Since nothing in life is free, what do I have to give in order to secure those resources?

Depending on the feasibility of those answers, a manager may follow up with two additional questions:

1. Is this the right time with respect to stakeholders, information, assets, etc.?
2. Is there a less resource-intensive way to reach the goal?

Armed with this analysis, a manager can begin to barter and pull the available levers of power to move toward his/her goal.

The political challenge seems especially relevant to sustainable development as sustainability projects usually focus on the long term and return on investment is not always clear. Resources are limited and motivation or buy-in can vary dramatically across a company. In the face of complex, ecosystem-level challenges, progress requires strong internal and external mobilization, collaboration and partnerships more than ever.

## BENEFITS AND RISKS FOR COMPANIES

Influence, beyond the simple imposition of hard power, can help maximize the resources of organizations and leverage the full value of networks by unlocking the spirit, the engagement of the individuals that constitute the organization or network. The danger is, of course, that politics masks hidden agendas or selfish ambition and creates toxic environments over time. Excessive reliance on hard power, without influence, is a dangerous path because it can lead to a sense of oppression and exploitation. However, with no access to hard power, reliable financial and time allocations are likely to be insufficient, limiting investments needed to realize meaningful and lasting change. Leaders are well served to be sensitive to the need for sufficient hard power that is balanced by honest soft power and authentic deployment of political capital.

### Benefits of leveraging politics and influence in sustainable development

- A combination of engaged internal and external networks can help promote successful sustainability strategies and faster progress. Internally, this ranges from dedicated sustainability teams to business unit leaders. Externally, this covers the value chain – including customers, investors and governmental agencies. Broader networks can also lead to a larger pool of available resources.

- Upskilling talent in organizations with the ability to navigate politics can create more pull for sustainability across an organization. This is in contrast to a push from the top down. Consider pilot projects in areas of the company with higher concentrations of employees who already support sustainability because a track record of results opens minds faster to change.
- Developing common goals within organizations can also allow for a broader pool of dedicated resources. As larger parts of the organization engage in sustainability targets, additional hard power resources can be leveraged to accelerate change.

Risks of leveraging politics and influence in sustainable development

- Political influence can be perceived negatively or even abused by those who have power, resulting in missed opportunities for some people, or undesired / destructive tensions and coalitions.
- Lack of inclusiveness in networks can lead to solutions that are not realistic for the broader population or stakeholder bases.
- Sustainability as an agenda item needs to have the support of senior leaders but also have appeal throughout the organization. A balance must be maintained between leaders reinforcing the 'message' and change agents 'socializing' the topic.

**KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPANIES**

The political challenge is inherent within human societies. Companies and individuals are well served to spend the time and energy building positive cultural dynamics that enable employees to work effectively through differences in their perspectives and approaches. Several insights stand out:

- Authority and higher-level roles often come with more financial and people resources for execution. That said, true progress occurs when people speak to the heart and unleash common goals – frequently soft power influences others to act because it encourages and motivates.
- Diversity and inclusion can catalyze the ability to influence. Leaders are well served to build broad networks, internally and externally, that generate a well-rounded perspective and connections.

- As it relates to sustainability, receptivity may be inconsistent from one team or country to another. Maturity assessments (which include network mapping, adoption assessments, gap analysis and implementation plans) can help adapt approaches to the different circumstances and equip those leading change with the necessary power bases to be successful.
- Dedicating effort to individual development through tools, training and coaching can support the organization in building influencing skills. The Social Capital Questionnaire from INSEAD serves as a good example of a reference tool.
- Focus initially on supporters and build momentum with them. Avoid attributing to detractors more influence than they realistically have, and instead draw attention to the successes of your initiative.
- The greatest failure is not trying.



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# The culture & integration challenge

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## INTRODUCTION

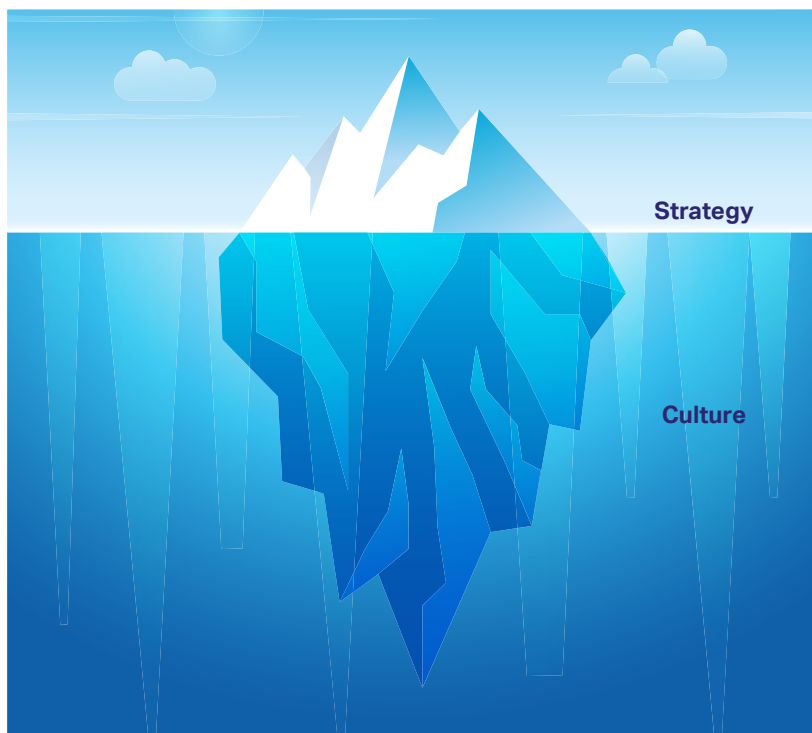
With climate change and resource scarcity being one of the megatrends reshaping the world we live in, according to PwC<sup>4</sup>, sustainability has become a key element of the strategies of many companies today. The strategic goals often target specific measures within the framework of sustainability. In this context, sometimes overlooked is a holistic approach to defining the path towards sustainable development, defined as the ability to meet today's needs without impairing future generations in meeting their own needs. Embedding sustainability and sustainable development in a company is critical to retaining one's license to operate, attract new talent, and compete in the marketplace.

The transformation towards sustainable development is complex from a technical and legislative perspective and brings less obvious challenges, such as the cultural challenge. Culture represents the values and beliefs that are widely shared within the organization. The most obvious components are the espoused values that are openly shared on corporate web pages and brochures. The hidden parts are the assumptions and the artifacts inside of the organization. Assumptions form the beliefs and inner rules, while the artifacts are routines, habits, structures, or symbols that give evidence for the underlying assumptions and help to interpret them.

## WHAT IS THE "CHALLENGE" ABOUT?

Effectively embedding sustainability in an organization requires a significant 'change and engage' program, beginning at the top and impacting all levels. Insights and understanding of the company culture are critical to enabling effective engagement. Conversely, misunderstanding the culture makes implementing effective change impossible. The challenge, then, is to truly understand the corporate culture, looking beyond strategy statements and espoused values and understanding the artifacts and assumptions that underpin the culture.

A company's culture can take years or even generations to shift. These cultural shifts can occur unintentionally as a company matures or through intentional change. Espoused values provide a useful starting point, as these are the values the company wishes to have. However, espoused values focus on positive attributes, so they do not give an understanding of potential blockers to change. Effective cultural analysis requires time and effort and is an exercise in humility, as understanding values is more challenging than understanding strategy. Verifiable data is critical and access to internal staff surveys may be instructive, as is developing a checklist of potential artifacts to shape a hypothesis of company culture. These assumptions or deep-seated beliefs can then be tested via interviews to gain multiple independent viewpoints.





## BENEFITS & WATCH-OUTS FOR COMPANIES

### Must-do's

Prioritizing sustainable development will require a guided and intentional shift in corporate culture for many organizations; and given the urgency of global change, this cultural shift will need to be done at speed.

Communication is key – repeating key messages and adjusting delivery to best resonate with the audience are important considerations to ensure internal audiences understand and adopt the new culture. Shifting towards a sustainable development culture, or taking on any new cultural values, can offer an added benefit of building a stronger employee community by framing the messaging in words and actions that resonate. Consistent reinforcement of those messages will help build a cohesive sentiment of working towards a common goal by holding the cultural value as a central priority.

### Watch-out's

Strategy implementation in the sustainable development context is a large change management exercise. Organizations tend to underestimate the culture element and its impact on a change journey of such magnitude. They should make proper efforts to understand the organizational culture which is not a straightforward undertaking. It's a common pitfall to take stated organizational values (e.g., respect, integrity, collaboration, customer first, etc.) as the key cultural elements. In reality, they might be different. Another aspect

companies should be watchful of is the variance in culture by country or region and different departments. A proper cultural analysis with data covering different aspects and views across the organization must be carried out.

Understanding culture is a complex task but changing or adjusting culture could be even more difficult. The stronger the culture, the more difficult it is to change and adapt. Top leadership should be actively engaged to drive the cultural changes if required for the strategy implementation.

## KEY LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key learnings

Although culture is perceived as a soft topic, the coevolution of culture and strategy is critical to the success of any company goals. Focus is often placed on espoused values which are not always reflected in habits, routines, and company structure. The transformation to more sustainable processes, solutions, and ways of working warrant an agile and holistic view on cultural influences, including both company and societal culture. Understanding and influencing constructive culture means bridging the gap between artifacts and espoused values. This takes both humility, since culture is about people and should be evaluated from the inside perspective, and courage to address the unspoken or forbidden aspects.

### Recommendations

If companies are to remain competitive and succeed in these disruptive times, sustainable development must be embedded into business culture. The following emerge as core recommendations:

- **Spend time asking, learning, and listening to cultural challenges and opportunities:** Don't rush to solutions without fully understanding needs and scope. Collection methods for ideas, feedback, and employee sentiment should be diverse and foster candid engagement.
- **Build with an agile mindset:** Commitment to supporting adjustments in corporate culture takes investment (e.g., financial, time, emotional, etc.). The ability to pivot as required should be an integral part of the process.
- **Develop a narrative that resonates:** Thoughtful, unified, and relatable messaging positively reinforces connectivity, consistency, and receptivity – both internally and externally.
- **Identify champions at all levels:** Leadership sponsorship and alignment are a must, but so is buy-in from your employee base.
- **Establish accountability mechanisms (qualitative and quantitative):** Ensure your efforts are clearly linked to company goals and demonstrate progress through KPIs, scorecards, or other measures.
- **Recognition and reward:** Acknowledging employee contributions that drive culture change for the better remains critical and helps with motivation.

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## ABOUT THE WORLD BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (WBCSD)

WBCSD is the premier global, CEO-led community of over 200 of the world's leading sustainable businesses working collectively to accelerate the system transformations needed for a net zero, nature positive, and more equitable future.

We do this by engaging executives and sustainability leaders from business and elsewhere to share practical insights on the obstacles and opportunities we currently face in tackling the integrated climate, nature and inequality sustainability challenge; by co-developing "how-to" CEO-guides from these insights; by providing science-based target guidance including standards and protocols; and by developing tools and platforms to help leading businesses in sustainability drive integrated actions to tackle climate, nature and inequality challenges across sectors and geographical regions.

Our member companies come from all business sectors and all major economies, representing a combined revenue of more than USD \$8.5 trillion and 19 million employees. Our global network of almost 70 national business councils gives our members unparalleled reach across the globe. Since 1995, WBCSD has been uniquely positioned to work with member companies along and across value chains to deliver impactful business solutions to the most challenging sustainability issues.

Together, we are the leading voice of business for sustainability, united by our vision of a world in which 9+ billion people are living well, within planetary boundaries, by mid-century.

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