



Defining Your Culture and Creating a Brand

It may seem incongruous to start a conversation targeting emerging organizations with a discussion of Microsoft's organizational culture, but what makes it relevant is that Microsoft once comprised of two men with a dream working out of a Seattle garage.

The core values defined by Microsoft for its human capital guide their 99,139 employees worldwide across 113 countries and 689 locations:

"Great People with Great Values - Delivering on our mission requires great people who are bright, creative, and energetic, and who share the following values:

- *Integrity and honesty.*
- *Passion for customers, partners, and technology.*
- *Open and respectful with others and dedicated to making them better.*
- *Willingness to take on big challenges and see them through.*
- *Self-critical, questioning, and committed to personal excellence and self-improvement.*
- *Accountability for commitments, results, and quality to customers, shareholders, partners, and employees."*

Even as an early stage organization, your firm will benefit from a well-articulated credo that will guide your long-term talent philosophy and support your business and human resources strategies. There are those who may feel that mission and value statements often sound pretentious and imitative, but if you view them as guiding principles – a constitution of the firm, perhaps – that are used as a yardstick for reference when forming strategies, these values can and do inspire, influence and direct the organization to operate by its credo.

Studies have shown that organizations with stated human resources strategies tend to be more successful than those that do not. A written strategy provides a tool to translate intent into action such as generating:

- an accurate selection system that sources, recruits and selects the most suitable candidates
- an effective performance management system that rewards desired behaviors
- a compensation system that aligns individual motivations with business objectives

Having a well-crafted talent statement will help with your employment branding as well by helping form a workplace culture that current and future employees find attractive.

As important as forming a great credo is, of course, living by it! You can only expect your employees to adhere to these values and demonstrate desired behaviors if the values within the statement are not observed by employees in their dealings within the organization. Don't just talk the talk – walk the walk. You signal compliance with your stated standards by rewarding the types of behaviors that support it. By hiring and rewarding those that adhere to these standards, you are modeling desirable behavior within your organization.

As an exercise, drawing from your own and your leadership team's experience and understanding of the industry, sector and niche that you operate within, write down the attributes that will be most desirable in an employee and meld well with your mission statement. Arrange them in order of priority, and then write out draft statements that best capture the essence of the range of attributes and values. Your statement should be specific enough to be actionable, yet broad enough to still be applicable over time through future organizational growth and environmental changes. Seek feedback from trusted advisers. Compare and contrast your statement with those of organizations you admire and wish to emulate. Picture the statement (or an attractive catchphrase derived from it) being included in your job descriptions, your website, Facebook pages, and other communications – make it catchy, if possible. Then roll it out, and start building an employment brand around it.