

## 02 12 CEO Adviser

**HEAD: The Critical Convergence**

**DECK: How leadership drives culture and strategy for sustainable growth.**

**WEB: Collective Leadership drives sustainable growth.**

**BY JOHN BOYLE**

The first decade of the 21st century taught us that the world is flat and fraught with peril. The new certainty is uncertainty. And there's so much that executives and entrepreneurs simply can't control as they seek to create value, accelerate growth and sustain high performance within their companies and throughout the global marketplace.

One variable that can be controlled in the drive for sustainable revenue and enriched profits is leadership. If an organization develops and maximizes its leadership acumen as a collective, particularly at the top, then the company can best understand how to mold, shape, guide and transform its people's behavior. It can tune its strategy, remake its business and bring the full power of the culture together to succeed—even in today's unpredictable environment.

It's no longer just about making the right decision, but *how* that right decision is made, *who's* making it and the tradeoff among several *right* things. In sheer practical terms, it's imperative that companies start getting more leadership capacity out of what they have in order to compete efficiently and effectively.

Addressing critical issues like this takes strong leadership from executives, focused attention on leadership and the ability to work as a collective. We've found that embracing these three variables goes a long way toward igniting possibilities in the organization and making things happen in the market.

Connecting leadership, culture and strategy synergistically in a company is essential, but it's hardly easy. The key to this crucial connection is leadership in its collective sense, particularly at the top. Culture and strategy are both necessary, but not sufficient. Leadership, especially in its collective form, affects and influences individuals, teams and the overall behaviors of an organization; and those behaviors are reinforced in culture and aligned in well-executed strategies that boost revenue and drive sustainability.

One Seattle-based professional services firm in the design and construction world, for example, has weathered the downturn fairly well but understands the importance of leadership to stimulate future growth. Weaving the best strands of what's currently in place with new and more insightful threads, the firm is in the process of crafting a cohesive and collaborative cultural tapestry that will align and entwine senior partners and employees for years to come. This blending of leadership, values and culture is already reflected in crisp strategy and confident execution that clients across the board feel and appreciate.

The takeaway from this case study is that truly networked organizations with genuinely open and sharing top executives are the ones that can drive deepest and hardest into today's ultracompetitive marketplace. But what kind of leadership is actually needed to achieve this goal?

Let's start with a truism. Traditional, or top-down, leadership has always played a meaningful role in the success or failure of companies. And it still does. But we have been forced to broaden our concept of leadership in many organizations as the 21st century unfolds. It's now about having more of the right people in the right places doing the right work in the right way; more heads and hearts solving problems; and more points of view making key decisions. It means greater interactivity and interdependence, as well as distributed influence and fluid collaboration. And it means shared responsibility and accountability up, down and across the organization.

This is the notion of collective leadership. Collective leadership stimulates and reinforces interconnected behaviors and the human value resident in an organization to bring the best people—those with the top-tier skills and abilities—together around real work, the work that matters most to the organization. And, when this starts to happen in a disciplined way on an ongoing basis, and the guideposts for organizational behavior are solidly hammered into place, you have the strong makings and foundation of a corporate culture that is working in holistic harmony.

In the end, it all comes down to executives' making sure that collective, transformative leadership drives the necessary elements of culture and strategy so they come together, rather than collide, to drive change worth having in the 21st century's global marketplace.

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**PULL QUOTE:**

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