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I Changing HR's culture

By **Karen Jaw-Madson**

When an organization needs a culture change, sometimes HR is charged to lead—or worse, it's frozen out altogether. Both circumstances (and everything in between) are fraught with pitfalls, and it's hard to figure out the starting point. Regardless of the scenario and contrary to most, culture change must start at home, within HR. This is especially the case if the function wants to play any meaningful role, lead or otherwise, in the life of the organization. For whatever we in HR do, we must do so from a place of strength, one where our collective capabilities are both evident and demonstrated. After all, what credibility or voice comes with a broken, dysfunctional, and divided HR?

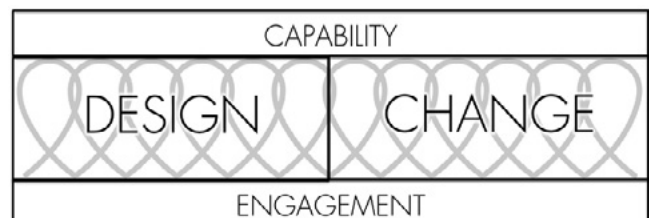
Culture change eventually needs to spread throughout the organization and will take time to get there. A large initiative as part of an organization-wide effort can be taken, but it may also begin small, even within a single team. Consider HR the pilot, if you will, or perhaps the experiential lab where strategies, ideas, and approaches maybe developed and tested in a learning environment while honing people's culture-building skills. There are so many targets where HR can start:

- A miniaturized version of what needs to happen company-wide
- Intra-/inter-departmental trust, communication and/or collaboration
- HR employee engagement and/or retention
- Development of HR Talent
- Re-design of any experience within the employment life cycle where HR is in charge (recruitment, onboarding, compensation and benefits, employee relations, performance

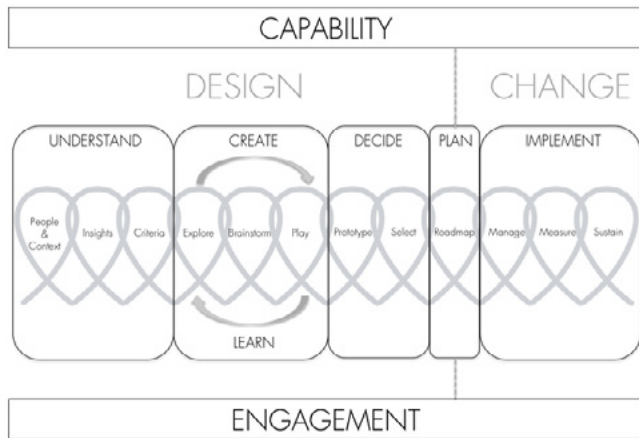
management, recognition, transitions, succession planning, off-boarding, retirement, etc.)

All that being said, the best way to determine where the smallest amount of effort will net the biggest impact (along with priorities, in order) begins with a deep dive into the current state of HR in your organization. A Culture Study will go beyond what people think they know to “what is”, uncover the complexities and the conditions that create them, and develop unprecedented levels of understanding about the experiences working with and within HR. Design of Work Experience (DOWE) begins this process and takes you all the way through designing, implementing, and sustaining a new culture.

Design of Work Experience (DOWE, pronounced [dü wē]) is a co-creation model, framework, and process that “partners employees with their employers to co-create customized and meaningful work experiences that set the conditions for people and business to thrive.” It provides the much needed, step-by-step “how to” for culture and employee experiences. There are 4 main components: the combination of DESIGN and CHANGE processes enabled by ENGAGEMENT and CAPABILITY throughout.



These are arranged as a series of 5 phases, each with progressive learning loops of specific activities.



Ultimately, the model yields an in-depth understanding of the current state, a strategy for the future state, and a plan for how to get there.

All aspects that factor into how one is satisfied at work can be purposefully designed (or co-designed), including: behavior, interactions, climate, people practices, workspace, processes, etc. Unlike much of what's out there in the world of "human resources best practices," DOWE is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Its remarkable power comes from designing solutions out of a deep, empathetic understanding of an organization's unique context, rendering solutions that are relevant and impactful. Nothing is "off the shelf" here.

Everyone involved can benefit from this. When engaged in great experiences they help create, employees are bound to find meaning in their work, leading to more productivity and higher performance. This, in turn, translates to business success.

So when it comes to deciding whether HR needs a culture change, think about whether the function has met its full potential with energized, engaged, and inspired employees who take the entire organization to a higher level. If things are not at their best, there's no question. Do something to prevent further

deterioration and make it a turnaround story for the ages. Even if all is well, think about the potential left on the table in the absence of a culture initiative to provide that extra boost.

In the midst of whatever else is going on in the greater organization, now might be the chance to do something about HR's culture. Should enough change take hold, people will pay attention and look to HR as the example or beacon for everyone else. Maybe then we will no longer be the shoemaker's children, for we are finally taking care of ourselves before everyone else.

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Organizational expert **Karen Jaw-Madson** enjoyed success as a corporate executive before pursuing a 'portfolio career' comprised of research, writing, consulting, teaching/speaking, and creative pursuits. As a versatile leader across multiple industries, Karen developed, led, and implemented numerous organizational initiatives around the globe. Today, this East Coast transplant to Silicon Valley (via Ireland and the Midwest) is principal of Co.-Design of Work Experience, where she enables organizations with innovative approaches and customized solutions for intimidating challenges. Focus areas include culture, organizational change, and people strategies. Her book, [Culture Your Culture: Innovating Experiences @ Work](#) (Emerald Group Publishing) was released in June, 2018.



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