

Culture eats strategy for breakfast

Contributed by Bennie Pienaar

Recently, leaders in business and other institutions have become aware of how culture impacts the performance of their organisations. Peter Drucker, a Management Consultant, remarked that: **“Most strategies and plans fail when rolled out to the organisation because culture eats strategy for breakfast.”** All it means is that however well thought out your strategy is, however firmly embedded in an organisation, it's all pointless unless your culture is aligned with your strategy and your people are inspired to operationalise it.

What is your prevailing organisational culture?

In their book “Tribal Leadership” (not related to ethnic tribes), Dave Logan, John King and Hallee Fischer-Wright describe five tribal stages that may be found in organisations, schools, government. Depending on where people are located along these five stages, it will all have an effect on your organisation's performance and its ability to innovate.

The following is a brief description of the five tribal stages: (One can imagine what the output of an organisation is when it is sourced from these world views.)

Stage 1: Life Sucks - makes up about 2% of US professionals.

People in this stage are despairingly hostile and talk as if they are alienated from the business. They band together to get ahead in a violent and unfair world. They may create scandals, steal from the company or even threaten violence.

Stage 2: - My life sucks - about 25% of workplace tribes.

Others' lives may work, but their lives suck. They are passively antagonistic, sarcastic and resistant to new management initiatives. They've seen it all before and watched it fail. They do the minimum to get by, showing almost no initiative or passion.

Stage 3: I'm great (and implied - you're not) - about 49% of tribes.

Knowledge is power so hoard it. These people get a personal “hit” from winning. They compete on an individual basis and are lone warriors which means teaming and collaborating is not their first choice.

Stage 4: We're great - about 22% of tribes.

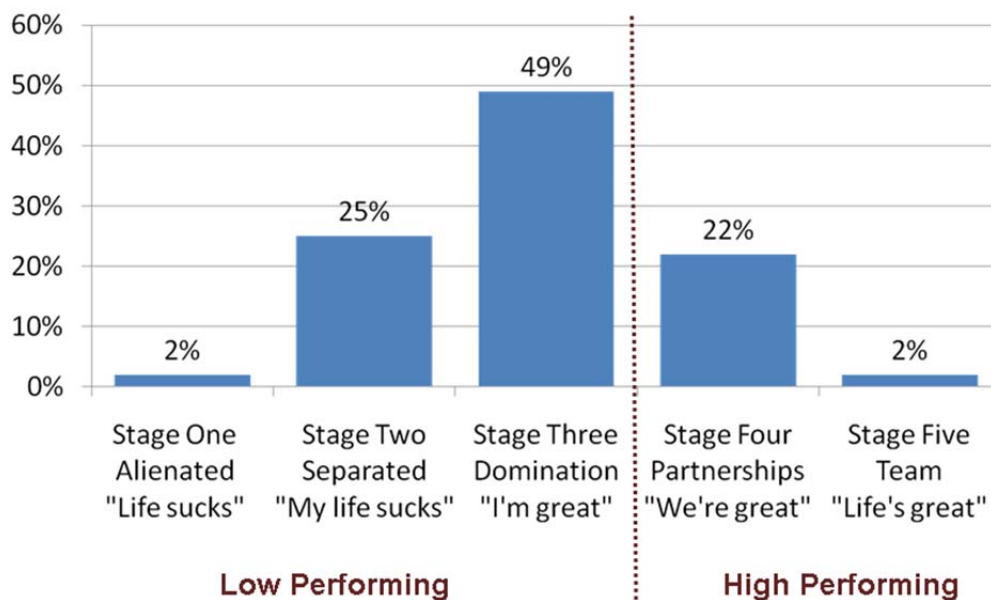
Team members are excited to work together for the benefit of the entire organisation. People seem happy, inspired and genuine. Teams are the norm, focused around shared values and a common purpose.

Stage 5: Life is great - about 2% of tribes.

Language revolves around infinite potential. How the group is going to make history (NOT merely to beat a competitor, but to have a global impact). People can find a way to work with almost anyone, provided their commitment to values is at the same intensity. People have been caught up in an inspiring over-arching goal which is bigger than themselves, the team and even the organisation.

5 Stages of Culture

% of Tribes at each Stage



Suggestions to migrate through the stages

The authors have the following suggestions that may assist in moving people from the various stages:

Stage 1, encourage them to go where the action is (have lunch with co-workers, attend a social function or meeting) or to notice where life works. **Stage 2**, managers can take personal interest in employees' lives in a way that does not seem part of a formula, spot and work one-on-one with those who want things to be different, or spend time pointing out the things people do well and direct them with specific action. **Stage 3**, encourage them to work on projects that are bigger than anything they can do alone (Work that requires partnership) and show them that what has brought them to this point will not be enough to move to the next level.

Emergence of Tribal Leaders

According to the authors, most people hover around the dividing line between "my life sucks" (stage 2) and "I'm great" (stage 3). The key in moving the organisation forward is the emergence of Tribal Leaders. What do Tribal Leaders do?

They:

- find a core set of shared values that truly unite and align people,
- establish a noble cause that resonates with the tribe,
- ensure that outcomes are simple and clear,
- make sure they have the assets to achieve the outcomes, and
- encourage the correct behaviours that will achieve the outcomes.

All of these activities/actions are done in a very collaborative way, not top down.

What are you seeing and hearing in your organisation and can you become a tribal leader in order for you to establish a culture that can support your strategy because culture eats strategy for breakfast.