



Fruitful alliance

“In nuclear physics, fusion is the reaction that happens when two atomic nuclei come together. Nuclear fusion releases large amounts of energy...” In this exclusive interview, Denise Lee Yohn talks about fusion of a different kind—wherein integrating brand and culture unleashes immense organisational power.

When an organisation employs people from diverse backgrounds, how can it create a culture that will be appreciated and adhered to by all? What is the role of the leader in shaping this?

The CEO must take full responsibility for creating the ‘glue’ that binds the company’s diverse workforce. The CEO’s first step is to clearly articulate and explain core values to guide the mindset and behaviour of every person in the organisation. Then, since employees are in the best position to figure out how the values can and should be adapted and expressed differently by different groups or people, leaders should seek out their input and engage in conversations with them about it.

How important is employee brand engagement and when is the best time to do this?

Employee brand engagement is about aligning and engaging employees with the organisation’s brand identity. It involves cultivating a positive, multi-dimensional connection between employees and the brand so that employees understand what the brand stands for, are emotionally committed

to it, and know how to reinforce and interpret it appropriately with their actions.

Employee brand engagement is critically important because you want everyone in the organisation to help it fulfill its purpose, live out its core values, and create on-brand customer experiences. When employees are engaged with the brand, they will think and act in the specific ways that produce the specific results the company is seeking.

You must initiate it during the recruiting process so that you and the prospective employee can discern whether or not there is a fit between him/her and the brand. Once they are on board, you should cultivate it on an ongoing basis throughout their tenure with your company.

How critical is it to engage middle managers for cultivating culture?

Middle managers play a vital role because they wield the most influence on an employee’s daily experience of the culture. Middle managers must talk and walk when it comes to communicating and living out the core values of the company and they must translate the

company's desired culture into experiences for their employees. Most importantly, they must align their people decisions—who to hire, fire, promote, and develop—with the company's core values. This will not only ensure that the right people come to and stay with the organisation, but also communicates to everyone how important the values are.

How does employee experience (EX) aid in achieving the desired culture? How does integrating it with customer experience (CX) help?

When you deliberately design and carefully manage EX to embody your desired culture, your employees experience it daily and personally. To design culture-building EX, you should segment employees into groups you can target specifically, prioritise those interactions

or stages in the employee journey that are most influential, apply a design model to help you identify and organise the elements of EX that you should design, and then design specific experiences (specific interactions for specific employees) that deliver on your core values and other elements of your desired culture.

Employees will only deliver to customers what they themselves experience, so you should explicitly integrate your EX with your CX and directly connect employees to customers whenever possible. As employees have on-brand experiences and receive the benefits of the brand themselves, they gain the motivation and the knowledge of what it takes to deliver them to customers. And if they see a gap between their actions or capabilities and what CX takes, they usually develop an interest in closing that gap by learning new skills and working

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with others on new ways to do so. Ultimately, they feel [a higher degree of] ownership for delivering on your company's brand promise.

What kind of investment should an organisation make while infusing culture into its brand?

To be successful, brand-culture fusion must be a strategic priority for an organisation. And like any other strategic priority, brand-culture fusion requires ongoing leadership. It does not necessarily require additional monetary investment because it usually only involves doing differently what you are already doing. But it does require leaders to be patient, focused, relentless, and disciplined.

You will be addressing the fundamental drivers of brand and culture, not their superficial appearances, so it is hard work and takes time. Any culture change requires strong and committed leadership, but fusing your brand and culture requires an even-longer-standing commitment because as the market, your competitors, and your customers' needs and wants change, so do the requirements for your brand and therefore your culture. So you will need to constantly evolve both.

Brand-culture fusion is a journey, not a destination.

Should MNCs maintain a uniform culture across their offices? If they put in place unique cultures adhering to local values what happens to the brand identity, since a change in culture could mean a change in brand identity too?

Every organisation should embrace an overarching purpose and a single set of core values that drive, align, and guide everything it does across regions, offices, managers, and employees. As noted previously, though leaders must make sure that the purpose and values are understood and lived out appropriately in different locales.



For example, WD-40 Company operates in nearly 200 countries and territories worldwide. Their leaders say their people are a ‘tribe’ and they foster a ‘tribal culture’ through ‘folklore, warriors, ceremony, meaningful work, evolving norms, teamwork, community learning, and a strong sense of accountability’. They know, though, that the word ‘tribe’ could be misinterpreted in regions such as France where the word has strong associations with the indigenous culture. So they work hard to help employees understand the meaning behind the word and to develop a tribal culture that is aligned with the rest of the organisation.

In what way do an organisation’s core values impact its growth and revenue?

If your organisation has a healthy culture grounded in clear, differentiated, and active core

values and your culture is integrated and aligned with your brand identity, you can grow more quickly and successfully because you benefit from:

- Increased workforce alignment—The efficiency of your entire organisation and the quality of your outcomes increase. You and your people do not waste time trying to figure out what’s the right thing to do or working at cross purposes.
- More sustainable competitive advantage — You create intangible value for your customers and employees that is difficult for competitors to imitate, undercut, and to compete against.
- Improved brand perceptions—You ensure customers perceive your brand as authentic by truly being on the inside what you say you are on the outside. Better brand perceptions translate into greater sales, profits, and market share.

INTERVIEW

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- Goal attainment—By fusing together your brand and culture, you are able to move your organisation toward its goals more quickly, easily, and successfully. You are able to attract and retain people who are motivated by your overarching purpose and everyone who works in your organisation working toward the same cause.

Salesforce's growth into a \$9 billion company in less than twenty years has been fuelled by its unique culture which is rooted in *ohana*, the Hawaiian concept of family

and the strong, supportive bonds that form within families. This culture inspires employees to unite and align and ultimately produce phenomenal results. Salesforce has also been named by *Forbes* as one of the World's Most

Innovative companies six years in a row and *Fortune* has listed it as one of the World's Most Admired Companies and Best Companies to Work For.

How can customers help an organisation strengthen its brand?

When customers experience CX excellence from a company, they do the company's marketing by generating positive brand perceptions and increased brand consideration through word of mouth in social media and on review sites. That is why it is so important to ensure your CX is designed to the last detail and delivered with discipline to bring your unique brand attributes to life. 

(As told to Ashutosh Gotad)

(This interview is based on the book *Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*.)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denise Lee Yohn is a consultant, speaker, and author of *What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest* and *FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*.

