

OFF THE SHELF

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FUSION: HOW INTEGRATING BRAND AND CULTURE POWERS THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMPANIES

BY DENISE LEE YOHN (NICHOLAS BREALEY, 2018)

Here's some good news: culture and brand are the nuclei of your organization, the biggest drivers of the hard results your company produces daily. No longer are culture and brand seen as the "soft stuff" in business led by HR and marketing, respectively. HR has known all along that culture isn't incidental to business performance; it's the foundation upon which success is built. Lee Yohn proposes the same thing.

If you've been in HR for any length of time, you know that creating and developing a great culture starts long before a new hire comes on board. It starts with how your company is positioned and branded in the marketplace. And to a large extent, HR controls that message. Culture can be a powerful magnet in recruitment efforts. Whether HR works closely with the marketing department or not, most of us strive to make our culture attractive.

Amazon's culture was described as "bruising," "relentless" and "painful" in a 2015 *New York Times* article. Its approach to managing staff was described as "purposeful Darwinism" with stories of employees crying at their desks. Yet, Yohn argues, despite Amazon's "gladiator culture," its constant drive for innovation is rooted in a competitive, demanding, exacting organizational culture. Amazon succeeds, she argues, because its internal culture and its external brand are unified. Amazon's "distinctive" culture encourages a performance-driven environment that fires up employees to innovate in pursuit of an outstanding, continuously improving customer experience while its brand identity is built on delivering that same innovative customer experience. This is fusion: the full integration and alignment of external brand identity and internal organizational culture.

Market saturation makes it more challenging for a company to sustain product leadership over time and to differentiate its brand on product features or performance alone. But a definitive brand identity expressed through superior customer service experiences can help build long-term customer relationships and maintain higher profit margins.

Brand-culture fusion improves your competitive advantage because it embodies the unique *why* and *how* of what you do "as people increasingly make decisions about which companies to work for or to buy from based on meaning and shared values, deliberately linking your brand to your culture can increase your organization's perceived relevance, differentiation and appeal."

After a blog post outing the culture of sexism and sexual harassment at Uber, customers' trust and esteem of the company



was eroded. Contrast this to Amazon, whose highly competitive culture made sense to customers: whether they approved or not, customers could see how the culture produced the benefits they enjoyed.

Brands must live up to their promises and stated ideals in order to be seen as authentic. Customers and employees expect to see companies act authentically in the way they operate and the customer experiences they deliver. When organizations align the values and behaviours of their employees with what is expected and experienced by their customers, you attract and retain employees who "feel an emotional commitment to your company and brand."

Many HR professionals will find this book resonates with the culture development and attraction and retention work you are already doing. *Fusion* is a useful complement to your work and is a solid platform from which to gain executive collaboration on HR management and to demonstrate its applicability to brand-culture fusion. ■