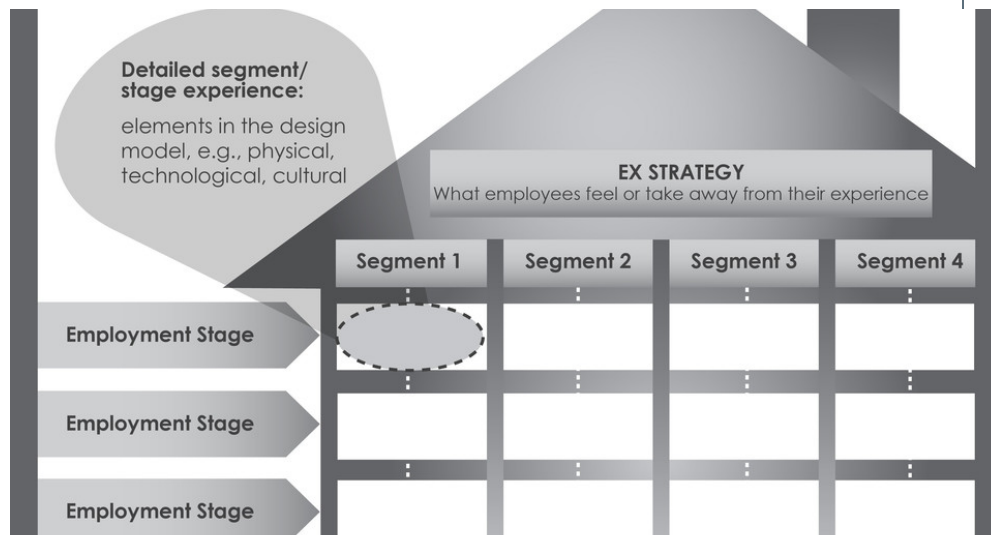How to deliberately, clearly, and carefully design and manage employee experience to cultivate your workplace culture.

Brand+Culture
How and why to integrate your external brand identity & internal workplace culture
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Cultivate Culture Through Employee Experience

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For this week's entry in the Brand+Culture Series, I thought I would post a service-type piece, outlining a tool that you can use to cultivate your workplace culture. Because, while corporate culture can't be dictated or decreed, you can shape and influence it.

In fact, business leaders should deliberately, clearly, and carefully design and manage employee experience (EX) to support your overarching purpose, express your core values, and cultivate your desired culture. EX is everything an employee experiences throughout his or her connection to your organization—every employee interaction, from the first contact as a potential recruit to the last interaction after the end of employment.

When your company's purpose and core values are imbued into employees' daily experiences, they are able to soak them in and reflect them back with their own behaviors and attitudes. As the values come to life for your employees, a virtuous cycle emerges in which they contribute to the desired culture and create experiences that interpret and reinforce it for customers and other employees.

You can apply the same methods and tools that produce successful customer experience (CX) to design EX. Here are four main steps to take:

Messaging
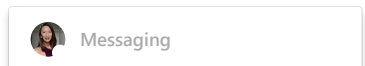
3.   **Adopt a design model**

4.   **Design experiences to support the desired culture**

Step 1: Segment Employees

When designing great experiences for customers, most companies first ide[ntify] groups of customers based on their different wants, needs, and value to the business. Employees differ in similar ways and these differences don't alwa[ys] themselves by role, level, or department, so employee segmentation someti[mes] distinct groups of employees that don't correlate with an organizational cha[rt].

For example, different employees view their jobs differently. Some might s[ee]—their work as a way to make a difference in the world, whereas others provide for their family and others see it as a way to learn new skills and de[velop] themselves. A different segmentation approach might identify groups of em[ployees by] the value they contribute to the company, with one group of employees who contribute unique knowledge or skills that are key to the organization's competitive advantage and another group who contribute at a more functional or core operational level.

The objective of this step is to identify meaningful distinctions within the employee base so that your EX will be targeted and relevant to employees.

Step 2: Prioritize Interactions

It's difficult, if not impossible, to provide an excellent experience for every employee and for every interaction he or she has with the company—and it's not necessary. Instead, EX design should be focused on addressing the needs and wants of employees who represent the most value to the organization and those interactions that have the most influence on the culture.

An Employee Experience Architecture (EEA) helps identify and prioritize the specific interactions that should comprise the EX at an organization. Like an architecture used to build a house, an EEA provides a structure for planning.Being developing your EEA with a short statement that defines the foundation of the "house"—the desired culture—and another for the roof—the overall EX strategy, the feeling or takeaway employees should glean from their entire experience with your organization. (Go to http://deniseleeyohn.com/fusion to download an architecture template and a worksheet that walks you through the steps of filling it in.)

interactions that comprise your EX. For example you might identify the following interactions at your organization:

1. sourcing and recruiting

2. pre-boarding (after the job offer is accepted but before work begins)

3. onboarding (orientation and initial training)

4. compensation and benefits

5. ongoing learning and development

6. ongoing engagement, communication, and community involvement

7. rewards and recognition

8. performance planning, feedback, and review

9. advancement

10. retirement, termination, or resignation

These interactions serve as the rows in the EEA and the employee segments from Step 1 make up the columns. Within the grid that forms between the rows and columns, prioritize the intersection of each segment and interaction. Prioritize based on its potential impact on the culture, the importance of the employee segment, and the size of the gap between what the interaction currently delivers to employees and what employees feel the interaction should deliver to actually address their needs.

Step 3: Adopt a Model

The next step to simplify and organize EX design is to determine the categories of elements to be designed. For example, there might be the environment category which includes elements of the physical workplace plus everything else that employees see, hear, touch, taste, or smell; for example, posters in the hallways, flowers or other decorative items, and food and drinks. Then there might be a category of tools including the technology and other instruments or materials that employees use, such as software applications, reference guides, and office supplies. And finally an intangibles category might include elements that impact the way employees think and feel, including communications, leadership styles, and policies.

You don't have to adopt this specific model, but you should select one so that you have a clear outline of the experience categories that need to be specified.

Step 4: Design EX
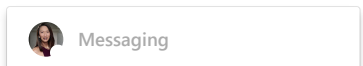
If, for example, you placed a priority on designing the intersection of the re interaction and the segment of employees who engage with customers face daily basis, then use the categories in your design model – say, environmen intangibles -- to determine the elements of that interaction.

"Environment" elements might be designed to include a special place wher are conducted, the design of the room or space, and leave-behinds such as brochure or thank you gift. "Tools" of the experience might be the online a personality tests, and other elements used during the process. And for the " elements, the tone and manner of the invitation to interview, of the intervie the follow-up to the interview might be designed.

Each element should be imbued with the core values and other unique aspe desired culture. The specific behaviors and mindsets that the organization or achieve its brand identity must be expressed and/or reinforce in every en interaction.

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Each step of this four-step process should be taken deliberately so that you develop an EX that is definitive and distinct. Ultimately this process provides the roadmap that leaders can use to design the EX that cultivates the culture and advances the brand identity that you desire.

This post was adapted from my book *FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*. Please check out Chapter 5 for more detailed instruction on each step and examples of EX in action. And you can download the EX architecture framework and a worksheet to help guide you here.

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