

## **SUSTAINABILITY: Enduring into the Future**

*How do we create a culture of adaptability and agility?*

The “roof” of the culture house is made up of two cultural capabilities every organization must have in order to endure. Every organization must (1) develop their human potential and the next generation of leaders and (2) must be agile, quickly sensing change and responding quickly.

### **Sustainability through feedback**

The more “brain-based” our economy becomes the more dependent success is on helping people learn and grow. We have always needed a strong pipeline of leaders; now we need strong talent throughout the firm. Cultures where feedback is frequent, honest, and constructive are vital. Developing a “culture of feedback” is difficult, but the payoff is forever.

Almost all companies are re-thinking their performance management system, trying to make it more discussion and feedback-rich and less focused on simply assigning a rating. The recent book on Deliberately Developmental Cultures – [The Everyone Culture](#) – shows the power of massively feedback-rich environments where employee development is front and center.

### **Sustainability through Agility and Adaptability**

What do these names have in common - Blockbuster, Kodak, and Blackberry? All seemed to lack what Kotter and Heskett found to be cultural attributes essential to corporate performance – agility and adaptability. Agility is connected to a culture of feedback – only when every voice is heard do organizations have a chance to remain agile enough and “smart” enough to survive.

What do these names have in common - Blockbuster, Kodak, and Blackberry? All seemed to lack what Kotter and Heskett found to be cultural attributes essential to corporate performance – agility and adaptability. Only when ideas move easily and every voice is heard do organizations have a chance to remain agile and “smart” enough to survive. Nimble, agile organizations have

A theme throughout most writing on culture is the power of leaders to shape culture. In the video that accompanies this article you'll hear Alex Gregory, long-time leader of YKK, say that “Leaders drive values, values drive behavior, and behavior drives culture.” [Click here to view video](#)



That power is evident in all “Full House” cultures – leaders take very seriously their impact on the culture. This [post](#) on Slack founder Stewart Butterfield makes it clear that he has focused on a foundation of trust and respect for employees, knows when to pivot strategically, and has infused the culture with the DNA of agility and innovation.

I doubt that my sister’s surgeon ever considered his impact on culture, but the culture he created has left its mark on our family. She lived, but had a long, arduous recovery from what should have been much simpler surgery, and lives with scars and pain from the tissue damage.

Culture doesn’t just eat strategy for lunch; it’s literally the difference between life and death. To build a sustainable enterprise, a create a strong foundation of character, align culture and strategy, and make adaptability a North Star. A Full House always wins.



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