Achieve Lasting Change Through a Values-Driven Workforce

By The Poirier Group

Sustainable change eludes most organizations. It depends critically on attitudes, values and beliefs — not just skills, tools and processes.

What would it take for companies investing heavily in transformational change, both in time and money, to achieve truly sustainable results?

The answer lies in a combination of, not just toolsets and capabilities, but buy-in from management and workers. What intentions do employees have when they come into work in the morning? What purpose or meaning do they derive from their work? What attitudes do they have around the organization and their co-workers?

Questions of intention like these are among the most important any of us in business can ask. Intention is key to achieving sustainable change management and competitive advantage. Strategy, tactics, processes, systems; these are important, too, but without intention, you have a rocket with no booster; no way of leaving orbit.

65% of organizations have an agreed-upon strategy for corporate change management, yet

14% of employees understand the strategy, and

less than **10%** Successfully Execute[1]

[1] Larry Myler, Forbes.com, *Strategy 101: It's All About Alignment,* October, 2012

Harnessing the Power of Intention

Intention concerns the attitudes and beliefs that management and employees hold about their work, roles and relationships with others, and the values underlying them. Intention may be conceptually abstract, but it can translate to real results—provided the right systems and processes are in place.

Too many organizations, unfortunately, get it wrong. Traditional change management initiatives often fail due to an absence, or weakness in, intention. Even when immediate objectives are achieved, there may be larger lost opportunities.

> *"Strategy, tactics, processes, systems; these are important, too, but without intention you have a rocket with no booster; no way of leaving orbit."*

Change management initiatives rooted in intention, however, can deliver benefits far beyond stated objectives. They can ramify cultural change throughout the business, positively infect other groups and divisions, and improve organizational behaviour and competitiveness overall.

This is true change management.

In this article, we look closely at intention, what it is, the values and beliefs underlying it, and why it's critical to long-term sustainable success in any change management initiative. Further, we'll look at the steps companies can take to establish, uphold, nourish and maintain cultures of right intention to create lasting change.

Traditional Approaches

For decades, companies have been run largely as mechanisms: their systems, processes, functions, departments and people seen as so many cogs and drive belts in a giant machine. Businesses have been successfully built, restructured, reinvented, combined and disassembled based on this paradigm. And for many, this approach continues to be the default. But in an age in which there is greater worker mobility than ever and where a skilled and engaged workforce has never been more valuable, the model is insufficient.

Traditional change management is outmoded for the same reasons. Whether implementing new processes or technology upgrades, too many businesses rely on models that focus narrowly on systems, roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies. They may strive to gain buy-in and raise awareness of the need for change, but they do so without understanding how to tap into what motivates employees. In such cases, organizations have failed to ask why change needs to happen and what success looks like beyond immediate objectives. Over the medium and long term, most traditional change management efforts are unsustainable.

Competency Model

The Competency Model shown below distils organizational success and failure to three key ingredients: competency, intention and mechanism. We'll be returning to this model a few times in this article:

1. Competency: The foundation of all change and company success in general. You need people with the right skills to effect desired changes. (A nurse practitioner's desire to be a doctor is not enough. They need specialized training.)

2. Intention: Employee attitudes and how they identify with the organization in terms of service, goals and success. Collectively, an organizational will to succeed.

3. Mechanism: The tools, technology, processes, methodologies and systems that enable change and the achievement of peak performance levels.
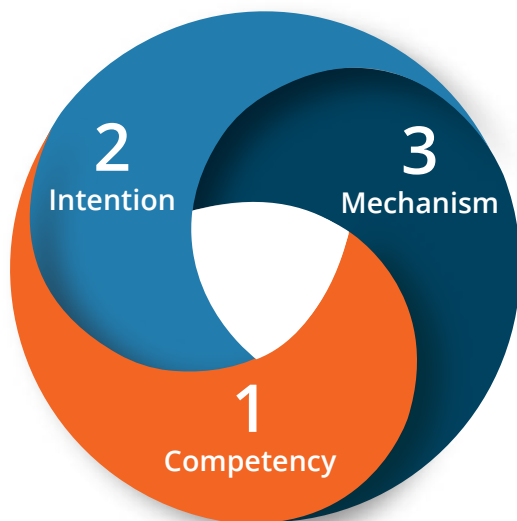
In order to thrive, companies must be highly functioning in—not one or two—but all three areas. Intention without mechanism means that organizations are highly motivated but have nowhere to go. Mechanism without intention, on the other hand, provides a clear process for reaching a target state, but no sense of urgency, excitement or ownership. Combine mechanism and intention with the right competencies, however, and you can get extraordinary results.
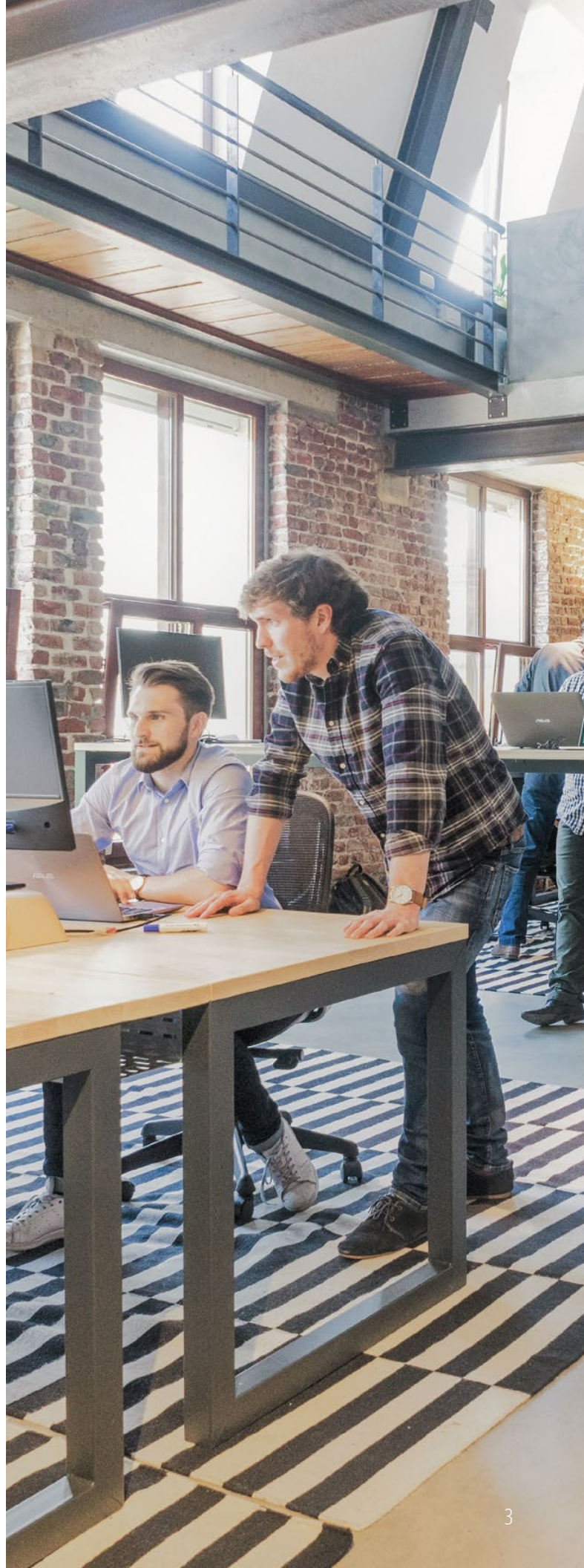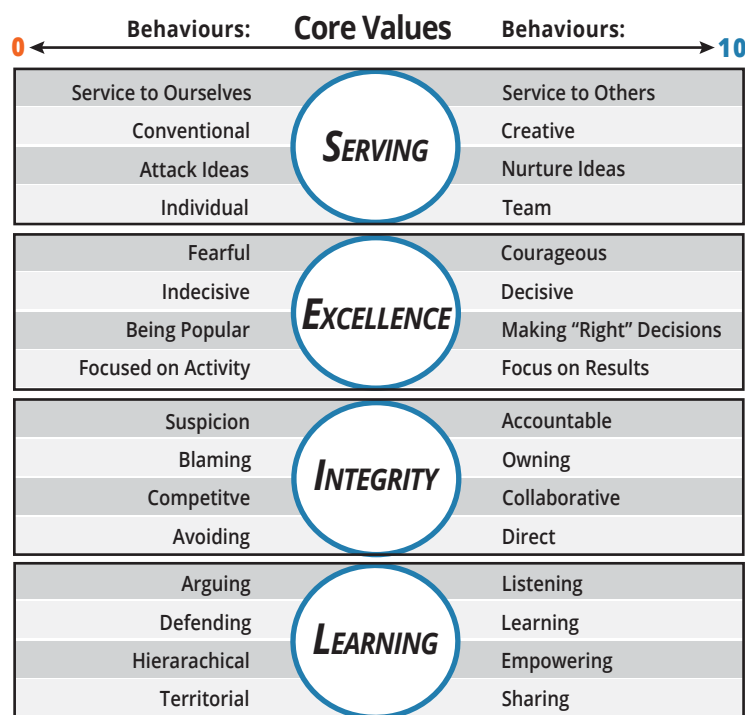
Core Values

Intention is anchored in values and beliefs, which in turn impact attitudes and behaviours. Individuals who exhibit four core values in their behaviour best exemplify and attract trust. These values are foundational to The Poirier Group's approach and are as follows:

Serving: Finding fulfilment by helping others. Ego concerns are set aside. Employees counsel and coach each other.

Excellence: The drive to perform a task to a high standard. Results, though influenced by external factors, depend on individual effort. People who score highly in this area tend to see mistakes as learning opportunities rather than reflections of self-worth.

Integrity: Keeping our commitments to others and oneself. Valuing and treating others well. Freely expressing views and feelings while respecting the opinions of others.

Learning: An individual's desire to grow and self-actualize. The quest for personal fulfillment. A balance of realism and creativity.

Behaviours:	Core Values	Behaviours:
0 ←		→ **10**
Service to Ourselves		Service to Others
Conventional	**SERVING**	Creative
Attack Ideas		Nurture Ideas
Individual		Team
Fearful		Courageous
Indecisive	**EXCELLENCE**	Decisive
Being Popular		Making "Right" Decisions
Focused on Activity		Focus on Results
Suspicion		Accountable
Blaming	**INTEGRITY**	Owning
Competitve		Collaborative
Avoiding		Direct
Arguing		Listening
Defending	**LEARNING**	Learning
Hierarachical		Empowering
Territorial		Sharing

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Business at the Speed of Trust

Think of the core values (center column) in the diagram above as being on a scale from 0 to 10. The behaviours associated with each value on the left represent a 0 (e.g. arguing) and on the right a 10 (e.g. listening).

As Stephen R. Covey details in his book The Speed of Trust,[2] businesses with employees who exhibit 10 out of 10 behaviours are more likely to succeed. Employees are more motivated, enjoy greater work satisfaction, and find meaning in relationships and teamwork. Further, they find fulfillment in getting results, whether in terms of quality, customer service, profitability or sales growth. Their positive behaviours lead to positive results.

[2] Covey, S. M. R., & Merrill, R. R. (2006). *The Speed of Trust: The one thing that changes everything.* New York, N.Y.: Free Press.

Putting the Concepts to Work

The Poirier Group often uses this diagram in facilitated working sessions with companies. It's extremely useful in challenging each individual's assumptions about what they and, by implication, the business are capable of.

Almost everybody agrees that organizations that exhibit behaviours on the right-hand side produce better results over the medium and long term. People are happier there. They feel more engaged and willing to contribute. They also understand – and this is key – *how* the behaviour on the far right is exhibited. Almost everyone knows someone who is a 10 out of 10 in one or more of the values above who can serve as a model for them to follow.

That said, there are impediments in people's lives that prevent them from being a 10 out of 10 every day. Organizations, as a result, are hampered in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Removing these impediments is key to long-term sustainable success.

Where do you and your organization fall on the scale and what are the things impeding you from attaining a 10 out of 10 in each of these values?

Going through this process helps executives and employees gain clarity on the obstacles to reaching their own path to full potential and begin to clear them away. Do that on a large enough scale and—again, providing the mechanisms and competencies are in place—the entire organization shifts.

This is not a one-off exercise. The process is reinforced through practice. Organizations must manage intention consciously from the top down and make it clear what must be accomplished. Otherwise, old habits will prevail, and people will snap back like elastic bands to the familiar. Executives must be prepared for the challenges they will face in the transition by ensuring the vision of the long-term solution stays front and center for everyone.

It could take a few years to build an organizational culture like this but, once these values and behaviours are established, it's extremely hard for the competition to seize and replicate. You can't steal or copy a culture like this, but you sure can feel the difference, and your customers will too.

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Conclusion

Too many leaders forget that their organizations are comprised of people who yearn for purpose. They focus, instead, on change strategies centered on mechanism. Change without vision is a Band-Aid fix. The priority must be on leading employees toward the behaviours associated with the four core values described above and hiring new workers that best exemplify those behaviours.

Sustainable change – change with the greatest potential to benefit the organization broadly – requires competency, intention and mechanism in combination. Intention must be about much more than getting buy-in and support or building consensus. It must be about shifting the organizational culture towards both personal and organizational purpose and values. This is what makes the fundamental difference.

The Poirier Group is committed to partnering with clients to achieve transformable, sustainable change over the long term. This is achieved through implementing the tools, technologies, programs, structures and team skillsets (mechanisms) to create results, conducting training on those programs (competency) and driving intention through engagements and team building sessions. We want to leave an enduring benefit to your organization.

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CASE STUDY

A Story of Transformation

The following case study concerns a large Canadian retailer. These events took place well before the founding of The Poirier Group, in the 1990s, but are as relevant today as then. It led to an epiphany for the firm's founder, David Poirier, and left him with the profound conviction, reaffirmed in every consulting engagement since, that competency and mechanism without intention is wasted effort.

The president of the retailer had observed that functional silos in the organization lacked cohesion. The executive team, while possessing the required tools and competencies in their roles, needed to be better aligned around a common purpose and vision. He set out to make that happen. Executives were sent on a week-long training session led by some experts in personal development. During the workshop each executive evaluated themselves and the organization relative to four assumed core values of high performance: achievement, self-actualizing, humanistic-helpful, and affiliation.[3]

Executives left the experience feeling changed and energized and were inspired to train the rest of the organization on aligning to these values, as well.

A five-year strategy to train the entire organization was then created. The executive team met after it was done. Each was handed a piece of paper, at the top of which read, "Each of us is fully committed to achieving Vision 1998". Underneath were 10 lines for executives to sign.

After each executive had signed the document, there was no applause, no cheering … total silence. Everyone was left mute by the weight of responsibility, accountability and tasks that lay before them. The power of intention had carried the team to a milestone moment, and you could have cut the atmosphere with a knife.

That strategic plan was executed with dedication and commitment. The retailer exceeded ambitious sales, profit and share price goals. Further, the company went on to train thousands of employees on intention.

Employees were surveyed both before the training and then, again, two years into the five-year plan. Before the process had begun employees ranked the business at 7. Afterwards, the same: 7. Initially, everyone was dumbfounded. It appeared there had been no movement at all. But then someone realized that a question had been omitted. Employees were then asked, with the benefit of two years' hindsight, where they thought the company had stood two years earlier. They said 2.

Their perception of excellence had shifted. The goal posts had moved.

[3] Dr. Robert A. Cooke, Ph.D. CEO and Director of Human Synergistics International. Model of Organizational Culture

CASE STUDY

Building a Strong Connection with Intention

An aircraft training and manufacturing company had grown rapidly but not invested sufficiently in business infrastructure. TPG was engaged to help put in place a new IT infrastructureand strategy, travel and expense system, various flight operations projects, and asked to architect an overall communications and change management strategy. It was clear from the outset that sustainable project success would depend critically on shifting intention in the organization, starting in the C-Suite with management values of trust and accountability. They would have to change the way they spoke to and led the organization.

Project work involved:

- Holding a strategic planning and culture workshop to help create and embed the company's mission, vision, values and ground rules
- Adopting and integrating a practice of active feedback and accountability – both top-down and bottom-up
- Preparing training material for and delivering workshops on the OKR (objectives and key results) methodology. These were used to change how objectives were set, results managed and accountabilities implemented
- Creating change management roadmaps (mechanism), and
- Identifying change sponsors for all key organizational projects.

One year later the company was operating at record capacity and had gained millions of dollars in value. These exercises enabled and supported the organization in implementing the broader strategic objectives of the project. Management and employees at all levels not only felt, but demonstrated a greater commitment to teamwork, accountability and the achievement of results.