

FEB 2026

Leadership Access

T H O U G H T L E A D E R S H I P

LEADERSHIP MEET

The Oberoi
Gurgaon, India

Driving Purpose
and Brand Equity
through Culture

STARRING:

Bhaskar Pramanik
Shiv Shivakumar
Gautam Sinha
Atul Dhawan
Saurav Adhikari

REPRESENTING LEADERSHIP ACCESS LLP

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Sunandan Bhanja Chaudhury

(Managing Partner, Leadership Access LLP)



The sole purpose of **Leadership Access LLP (LA LLP)** is to attempt to make “*The corporate world a better place*”.

We believe that great leaders have 3 things in common-

A-Great courage and self belief

B-Great appetite for curiosity and learning

C-Great compassion for people, they work with internally and externally.

But great leader can flourish, only when they work in an environment, which allows them freedom to work, fearlessly.

Hence, culture, plays a fundamental role in driving great leadership and allowing great leaders to have great achievements.

It was with that intent that we had our first management meet with some of the tallest leaders in the country to debate and to express their thoughts on the importance of culture in an organisation.

Hence, the topic- “Driving Purpose and Brand Equity through Culture”!

What emerged in that meeting was a confluence of great ideas and thought leadership.

Our Newsletter attempts to capture the conversation and and share the thought leadership of these eminent leaders!

Enjoy the conversation and the great pieces of advice.

This is our small attempt at simplifying the business of building leadership.

Brick by Brick.

Because there are some things that money cannot buy!



The Foundation of Success

In the corporate world, conversations often revolve around the top line, bottom line, and growth metrics. While these indicators are critical, one foundational element often remains underexplored — corporate culture. Culture influences how strategies are executed, how decisions are made, and how people show up every day at work.

This leadership meet brought together five industry veterans with diverse backgrounds and perspectives to explore how culture shapes organizations from within. The discussion focused on how leadership behavior, shared values, and organizational purpose collectively create resilience, adaptability, and long-term success. Participants reflected on real-world experiences, highlighting that culture is not a soft concept, but a decisive business driver.

Beyond Profits: Defining Purpose

Organizations that last beyond a single generation must exist for more than just making profits. The evolution from vision statements to statements of purpose represents a critical shift in how companies define their role in society. Purpose-driven organizations create impact that matters—for their people, clients, and communities.



Shiv ShivKumar
(Ex. CEO PepsiCo India
and Ex CEO Nokia
India)

I would say culture in my experience is the only sustainable advantage a company truly has. Every other advantage will go before time. But culture evolves, as you evolve, it is also the only sustainable advantage. The trouble with culture is you cannot outsource it. You cannot do a BPO on it.

Number two, culture is not easy to build, but it is very easy to lose. The way most companies look at values is it's a poster somewhere in the CEO's office and the reception. The way we should define value is something you would die for. That's a value.

Four Variables That Define Success

Purpose Statement: Defines why the organization exists beyond profits and provides a clear sense of direction for all activities and decisions.

Value System: Represents non-negotiable principles that remain constant over time and guide leadership behavior, decision-making, and accountability.

Culture Definition: The living expression of values in action. Culture must evolve with changing contexts while continuing to shape behavior across the organization.

Strategic Execution: The alignment of business models, operating structures, and KPIs with the organization's purpose and culture, ensuring consistency between intent and action.



KEY INSIGHTS & CULTURE DISCUSSION

CULTURE AS COMPETITIVE EDGE

From Lever's benevolent yet demanding culture to PepsiCo's high-performance environment, each organization develops a unique cultural identity. The question isn't whether culture is good or bad—it's whether culture aligns with strategic objectives and enables velocity in execution.

LEARNING FROM GLOBAL GIANTS

Microsoft's transformation under Satya Nadella demonstrates how culture change can revitalize an organization. By shifting from a "know-it-all" to a "learn-it-all" company, Microsoft redefined its purpose: to empower every individual and every organization on the planet to do more. This wasn't just rhetoric—it required fundamental changes in values, leadership behaviors, and organizational structure.

FOUR CULTURAL FOCUS AREAS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Growth Mindset: Stop being a know-it-all company and become a learn-it-all company. Embrace continuous learning, allow mistakes, and nurture talent.

Customer Obsession: Make customer focus a behavior, not just a statement. Integrate customers into your processes and offices.

One Company: Break down silos between business units. Ensure everyone works toward unified goals rather than competing internally.

Making a Difference: Every employee must feel ownership and connection to the company's success and impact.



Bhaskar Pramanik
(Former Chairman
Microsoft India. Board
Member SBI.)

I wanted to share some insights on the profound impact that leadership behaviors have on our organizational culture. It's fascinating how culture can either propel or hinder the speed at which a function operates. By pinpointing the areas where our organization is slowing down, we can rev up the engine that drives our innovation, growth, and ultimately, our financial success. This is the essence of how exceptional leaders craft and harness culture to achieve and sustain excellence.

Leaders play three pivotal roles: they create clarity, generate energy, and deliver success. This formula was masterfully applied by Satya Nadella to transform Microsoft into a 4 trillion-dollar powerhouse. He redefined the company's purpose, revamped its strategy, and altered leadership behaviors to shift Microsoft's culture from a fixed to a growth mindset. He placed a relentless focus on customer obsession, fostered unity across the organization, and leveraged the diversity within Microsoft to ensure everyone could contribute meaningfully.



LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES & CLOSING THOUGHTS

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Culture is the only sustainable advantage a company truly has. Every other advantage fades with time. But culture evolves as you evolve—it's the day job of leaders. You cannot outsource it, you cannot BPO it. Culture building is not easy, but it's very easy to lose.

VALUES: WORDS THAT DEFINE BEHAVIOR

Nokia's approach to values offers a powerful framework. After conducting 70 cafes globally with employees defining what values should be, leadership learned that values need clarity beyond words. What does integrity mean? What does teamwork mean? The breakthrough came in defining not just what values are, but what they are not.



Gautam Sinha

(CEO SimpleO.ai, Ex-CEO at Times Internet)



A strong culture is a force multiplier. It attracts and retains the right talent, keeps them motivated, and drives consistent performance while acting as the moral compass for the company. Leadership is a continuous craft, not a destination.

Purpose and empathy matter more than position.

Today's leadership isn't about copying models or playbooks; it's about self-awareness, adapting to your environment, and staying authentic to your values and context.

THE MODERN CULTURAL CHALLENGE

Today's leaders face unprecedented challenges: technology reshaping business models at breakneck speed, multi-generational workforces with vastly different expectations, shortened patience from markets and investors, and the rising importance of license to operate within society.

MANAGING GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS

The younger generation thrives on daily feedback, values communication, and decides when to dispense energy—not when you demand it. They look for two things in leaders: can they use your knowledge and experience quickly, and can you open doors and opportunities for them?

Innovation: The Y Board PepsiCo created a Youth Board of ten millennials, voted by peers, empowered to decide cultural events, speakers, and company initiatives—giving ownership to the next generation.

Customized Benefits: One company offered top managers the same budget but allowed them to design their own compensation packages based on personal needs—housing, education, and healthcare.



Unlocking Value for Clients & Brands

THE PATH FORWARD

Relentless Alignment Is Non-Negotiable

Building a strong and enduring organizational culture requires relentless alignment between leadership intent and everyday behavior. Culture is not shaped by one-time initiatives or well-crafted statements alone; it is reinforced through consistent leadership actions, shared accountability, and clarity of expectations over time.

Leadership Alignment at the Top

Regular CEO and leadership summits play a critical role in strengthening cultural coherence. By bringing together top managers and decision-makers, these forums enable honest dialogue, reflection, and recalibration. When senior leaders are aligned on priorities, values, and strategic direction, culture cascades more effectively across the organization.



Atul Dhawan
(President TiE Delhi NCR, Former Chairman, Deloitte South Asia.)

Values are what stay constant in any organization — they're our foundation. But culture has to evolve, because that's what shapes how people behave and think every day. When our strategy grows from our culture and purpose, it naturally defines how we do business and what success really means, measurements for which go far beyond just the financial numbers.



Saurav Adhikari

(Tech Advisor & Investor. Founder & Sr. Partner at Indus TechEdge Fund)



Culture is the “forgotten frontier” in high performance firms. The traditional focus has been on operational and financial metrics, which are easier to measure. Culture more difficult to quantify.

I run a tech fund where revenue growth, EBITDA and valuation are critical metrics. However we focus as much on the softer dimensions of culture and leadership as that ultimately catalyses the quant metrics. We mentor young founders to focus more holistically on what creates great businesses.

From Values to Visible Behaviors

Culture is defined by how values appear in daily actions. What leaders model, recognize, and reward shapes decisions, collaboration, and performance.

Measuring What Truly Matters

Culture must be measured beyond financial results. Engagement, trust, collaboration, and leadership effectiveness reveal cultural health early.

Creating Culture as a Strategic Advantage

Aligned purpose, behavior, and execution turn culture into a sustainable competitive advantage.





Questions:

1. Who said, “I never lose. I either win or learn.”?
Ans:
2. Which American President built a cabinet made up of his political rivals?
Ans:
3. Which Corporate Leader believed great leaders don’t hire “yes-people.” His mantra: hire smart people and let them tell you what to do.
Ans:
4. Who coined the term “servant leadership” in 1970?
Ans:
5. Which Leader never held formal political office—yet led one of the largest mass movements in history through moral authority alone?
Ans:



Answers:

1. Nelson Mandela
2. Abraham Lincoln
3. Steve Jobs
4. Robert K Greenleaf
5. Mahatma Gandhi





DID YOU KNOW? 1



Hammurabi created one of the earliest written leadership codes—laws carved in stone so rulers couldn't change them on a whim.



Ramses II ruled for 66 years and used monuments as leadership branding—the ancient version of PR.

2

3



Confucius taught that leaders rule by moral example, not fear—radical thinking for his time.



Chanakya argued that a king's power depended on economic strength and public trust, not birth alone.

4

5



Niccolò Machiavelli separated leadership from morality—arguing outcomes matter more than intentions.



Napoleon Bonaparte promoted leaders by merit, not nobility, changing military leadership forever.

6

7



Abraham Lincoln led during civil war by combining empathy with resolve.



Mahatma Gandhi proved leadership without authority could defeat an empire.

8



Unlocking Value for Clients & Brands