Belonging Blueprint

BY KATHLEEN HOLTSCHNEIDER

PLAYBOOK FOR BUILDING CULTURE HUBS FOR HUMAN CENTERED CHANGE

Belonging is a business imperative.

The **Belonging Blueprint** is a practical guide with tools that turn culture into connection, creating real belonging. From rituals and recognition to peer networks, storytelling, and feedback loops, the playbook creates engagement pathways that amplify voices, spark connection, and make belonging real in everyday work.

Why Mergers Fail

"**70-90**% of acquisitions fail and integration problems are most severe in cases when the acquisition is a *complementary* business."

"Employees who feel a strong sense of belonging are **3.5x more likely to be productive, resilient and innovative**. In times of disruption, this becomes a competitive advantage."

CULTURE MISALIGNMENT

Experiences shaping beliefs and behaviors, which drive actions and results

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Communication is critical and can connect, or create a lack of trust and engagement

GAP IN GOALS

Lack of clarity in your WHY threatens integration and hinders operational strategy

What is Culture?

"65% of acquirers say **cultural issues hampered the creation of value in their last deal**, it includes the shared values and behaviors that shape employee experience, interaction and morale, **it's how a company gets things done.**"

Values

Beliefs

Customs

Behaviors

Artifacts
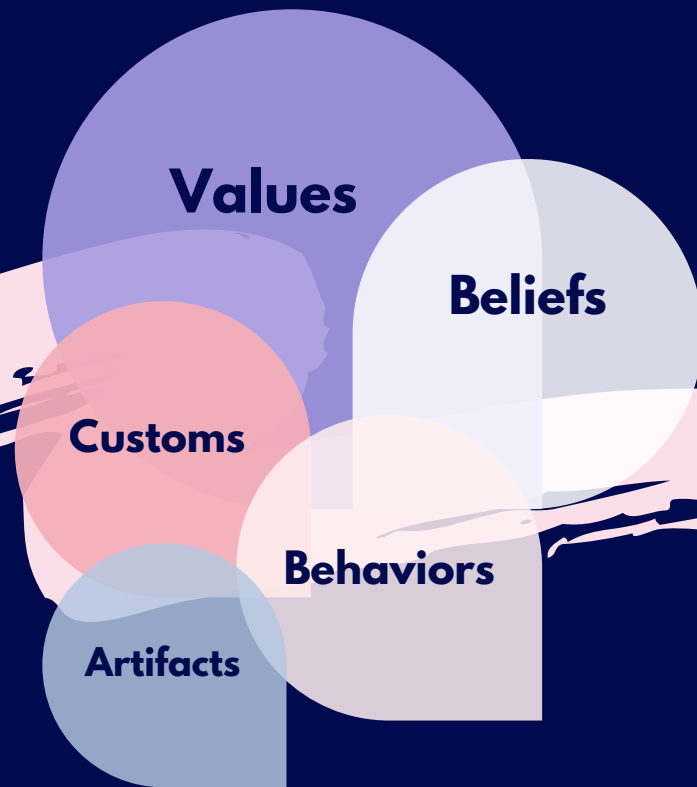
Culture Matters...

"It can foster innovation and exchange of ideas, **or it can promote selfishness and sabotage, damaging the bottom line of the business**.
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It's about actively adapting and responding to **create the culture that represents your purpose and brand**.

It is crucial for building successful, respectful, and inclusive working environments and for creating products and services that resonate with a diverse customer base."

Culture
Connects

"**People** are more than half (58%) of the top critical components of the operating model and development in M&A integration.

Engaging and retaining talent from an acquisition is critical to capturing deal value. Yet taking the right approach — during the integration and for the long term — remains challenging.

Acquirers, regardless of deal type, **must provide clarity** and direction to key people and **manage change throughout the integration**."

Belonging Blueprint

Culture Hubs for human-centered change to bridge belonging, innovation and alignment during transformation.

PURPOSE

Bridge the gap between corporate messages and employee experience with communication that is lived and celebrated.

The Problem We're Solving:

- Mergers Fail More Often Than They Succeed: 70-90% of acquisitions fail, most often due to culture misalignment, poor communication, and lack of employee buy-in.
- Belonging Drives Performance: Employees with a strong sense of belonging are 3.5x more likely to be productive, resilient, and innovative—especially in times of disruption.
- Gaps in Connection: Traditional top-down communication leaves employees feeling disconnected, undervalued, and unclear on their role in the future.

What are your barriers? Often times they are best identified with employee or customer engagement surveys where teams can share open and honest feedback, and suggest alternative solutions. Take a moment to reflect and jot them down below, and always better to ask others, too.

✓ **Barrier Busting:**

Create Hubs

Start with the people, who needs to be in these groups, who leads, and who can offer real, relevant thoughts and efforts toward your barriers?

PURPOSE

Bridge the gap between corporate messages and employee experience with communication that is lived and celebrated.

A **Culture Hub** is a human infrastructure within an organization—strategically placed employees who act as culture translators, engagement activators, and feedback champions. It shifts communication from one-way broadcast to two-way dialogue, building trust and cultural alignment.

Create your Hub with the following assigned leads:

- Communication Translator – Converts corporate messaging into language that resonates locally.
- Story Collector & Amplifier – Surfaces authentic stories of impact and belonging.
- Engagement Activator – Inspires participation in company rituals, events, and initiatives.
- Feedback Champion – Creates a safe channel for honest employee feedback.

✔ **Key People & Roles:**

Design a Hub
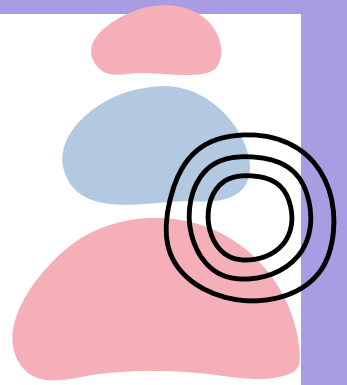
Culture Hub *Roles Map:

Belonging Beacon (Hub Lead)
- Guides the hub's vision and ensures alignment to purpose.
- Acts as the visible light keeping the hub oriented toward belonging and clarity.
- Connects regularly with leadership to elevate hub outcomes.

Communications Champion
- Adapts leadership messages into engaging, human-centered stories.
- Keeps employees informed with clarity and authenticity.
- Serves as the hub's "voice amplifier."

Story Collector
- Tunes into everyday employee stories, signals, and patterns.
- Gathers examples of where belonging thrives—or where it needs attention.
- Brings these stories into the hub to spark conversation and recognition.

Engagement Activator
- Designs rituals, celebrations, and peer activities that spark participation.
- Energizes employees through micro-moments of connection.
- Acts as the creative spark for engagement pathways.

Pulse Keeper
- Maintains a steady feedback loop from employees to leaders.
- Tracks surveys, sentiment, and participation metrics.
- Ensures the hub remains responsive to evolving needs.

*Hubs aren't one-size-fits-all. Reflect on your organization. Magic happens when you name and shape roles in ways that embody your values, brand, and culture of where it is and where you want it to go. Roles may lean creative and playful ("Spark Starters" or "Story Weavers") and or others, may highlight employee resource groups or specific arms of the organization ("Budget Busters"). By customizing hub roles employees see themselves as active creators of culture and belonging, and organizations align their needs.

Tools & Tactics

Each Culture Hub uses the following methods to design their plan to build connection and belonging over time:

- **Engagement Pathways**: Small group sessions, peer learning, and cross-team meetups.

- **Rituals & Celebrations**: Consistent, culturally relevant moments to reinforce shared values.

- **Peer Networks**: Relationship-building between teams, functions, and locations.

- **Open Forums**: Spaces for candid discussion, both virtual and in-person.

- **Recognition Moments**: Shining a light on contributions that advance shared goals.

- **Feedback Loops:** Regular pulse checks and sentiment tracking to inform leadership action.

To Do: Host a brain mapping session with key leads to align what it is you want these Hubs to accomplish, what current systems or channels are already in place, and identify any additional tools or resources that may need to be built, included or created to allow for clearer pathways and progress.

✓ Tips for Success

- Rotate roles to build new skills and shared ownership.
- Each Hub has an executive sponsor who listens, and advocates at the senior level.
- Hubs have the autonomy to design new activities while staying connected to enterprise culture goals.
- Start with a simple ritual or recognition moment to build momentum, gain buy-in and increase visibility.
- Share metrics, stories, and testimonials across collaborative teams regularly to reinforce value.

Implementation Roadmap

Assess the Current State:
- Conduct surveys, focus groups, and listening sessions.
- Map cultural strengths and friction points.

Design the Hub Network:
- Identify natural connectors and influencers across the organization.
- Ensure diversity of perspectives, roles, and geographies.

Equip and Empower Hub Leaders:
- Create a Culture Hub training toolkit specific to your goals.
- Align on goals, resources, and decision-making authority.
- Leverage current resources or tools and create teasers.

Launch & Activate:
- Create buzz and introduce the Hubs organization-wide with the WHY and employee incentive.
- Begin with quick-win engagement activities to build momentum and celebrate.

Integrate into Business Rhythm:
- Connect hub activities to key business goals and change milestones.
- Make hubs visible in regular leadership updates.

✔ **Create Buzz:**

Belonging: A Business Imperative

Belonging is a unifying force in a divided and disconnected world.
It creates the conditions for people to connect, contribute meaningfully, and be more resilient through complexity."

RETENTION

Belonging keeps talent from walking out the door, protecting institutional knowledge and reducing costly turnover

PERFORMANCE

Belonging drives discretionary effort, innovation, and alignment to goals — directly impacting business results.

✓ Define your WHY:

Measuring Success

✓ Pulse Surveys

- Short, frequent check-ins that capture employee sentiment in real time.
- Provide a quick "temperature check" on belonging, clarity, and engagement, allowing leaders to respond before challenges escalate.

✓ Participation Metrics

- Tracks how many employees are engaging in hub activities, rituals, and forums.
- High participation indicates cultural resonance, while lower numbers can highlight areas needing new energy or tactics.

✓ Qualitiative Feedback

- Collects rich, story-driven input from employees—what's working, what's missing, and how they feel.
- Narratives bring context and meaning to the numbers, helping leaders understand the why behind trends.

✓ Sentiment Analysis

- Uses language patterns from surveys, forums, or open comments to gauge emotional tone across the workforce.
- Reveals whether people are hopeful, anxious, or inspired—providing leaders with deeper insights into the cultural undercurrent.

Scratch Pad:

Tip: Common language anchored in your organization's "why" creates clarity, consistency, and connection. When employees hear values in simple, shared terms, they see how those values apply to their work and decisions. It shifts culture from abstract ideals into lived experiences, helping people understand what the organization stands for, and how it benefits them through belonging, purpose, and growth.

THANK YOU!

Please share any feedback as you implement the Belonging Blueprint with Culture Hubs at your organization so we can continue to create shared values, driven by humans, centered on connection, together.

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