

# Wass Consulting Group, Inc.

## *Management Insight*

<http://www.wcginc.com>

Vol. 10, No. 5

### Is Culture the Culprit? Aligning Your Company to Improve Business Performance

This is the fifth and final *Management Insight* on the topical series, “*Is Culture the Culprit?*” In the first four articles, we discussed “*Why should you care?*” about your company’s culture, “*What are the symptoms and indicators?*” of an inappropriate culture, and “*How can you tell (for sure)?*” (in two parts) if you have a dysfunctional culture and need to modify or transform it. This *Management Insight* answers the question, “*How Do You Align Your Company to Improve Business Performance?*” so that all elements of your business, culture, strategy, organization, and business processes are in sync, and are working together to improve bottom-line business performance and results. Assuming that the Wass/Trenkle Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> discussed previously indicated a misalignment between your business and cultural attributes and your business’s Key Leverage Factors and/or business results, this *Management Insight* discusses how the appropriate actions and interventions are best developed to adjust, adapt, or transform your organization to improve performance and to achieve your intended results. It also lists a number of the items you need to keep in mind during the process of implementing business and cultural change.

It should be recognized from the beginning that an entire corporate culture cannot be completely changed overnight. This has been a common pitfall of conventional approaches to cultural change. Fortunately, it doesn’t have to. The real strength of the Wass/Trenkle Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> is that it allows you to identify discrete cultural attributes that have the most impact on your organization’s KLFs, and to concentrate on these. Thus, you can immediately take the first steps to success by

focusing your efforts on critical areas of high opportunity. By using a highly-targeted approach to cultural change that yields demonstrable improvement, organizational momentum is created that stimulates enthusiasm for further change. To begin the process, you need to (1) know where you are strong and where you are weak, (2) understand the linkages between your organizational weaknesses and your KLFs, and (3) have an internal commitment to change. Thus, you can focus your initial efforts on improvement areas that give you the biggest bang for your investment of effort, time, and money.

This is the reason that the Wass/Trenkle Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> discussed in previous *Management Insights* is so important - even critical. Rather than simply feeling uneasy about your company’s culture, you can quickly and definitively determine whether your culture supports your company’s bottom-line performance, or in fact detracts from it. More importantly, it provides you with a clear and easy to understand picture of your strengths and weaknesses that are relevant to the Key Leverage Factors that drive your business performance. Because the business and cultural attributes assessed in the Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> are linked to business results, and because your organization’s attributes are compared to a large database of approximately 600 other companies across a broad spectrum of industries, you know with confidence where to apply your resources and where to concentrate your change efforts.

For example, if the Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> indicates comparative weaknesses (i.e., low percentile scores) in certain cultural attributes, interventions that

address those weaknesses are candidates for action. Similarly, cultural as well as business attributes (i.e., strategies, organizational elements and structure, business processes, policies, and procedures) that impact on Key Leverage Factors and other issues identified earlier in the process also are candidates for further evaluation, analyses, and possible change. The Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> quickly and accurately pinpoints these areas of strength and weakness, as well as areas where improvement would result in the greatest improvements. Once the relative strengths and weaknesses of your company's business and cultural attributes are known, the actual implementation steps to be taken, their sequencing, and a timetable for action can be more easily determined.

The good news is that successfully shifting and aligning business and cultural attributes with your KLFs helps to reinforce and sustain behaviors and results you want. The bad news is that you can't do it with cold, impersonal logic and planning alone; you can't simply engineer or reorganize a cultural attribute as you would a physical plant. Logical thinking and analysis can help you to identify what's there, what works, and what doesn't. Getting those things to change involves what people believe, think, and feel, and because these crucial elements are shared in a culture, they are systemic. People may think the company's management team is smart, thoughtful, and have their employees' interests at heart, but their willingness to go into uncharted territory requires more than what they simply think. They have to believe in their leaders, deep down; they need to see management "walk the talk." Other things are important as well, such as trust (earned credibility), respect/admiration, and hope outweighing doubt and skepticism. None of these is based on logic alone.

A plan to change all or part of a company's business and/or cultural attributes requires a commitment, involvement throughout the affected organization (i.e., department, plant, division or corporation), awareness that a change is taking place, and diverse actions that reflect and reinforce the new changes. Above all, it requires top management's demonstrated commitment to change. No simple,

linear plan will work, and every organization's experience will be different, just as every organization is different. People pick up cultural cues through their own experience and observation. Some of the culture may be formally conveyed, but it's the ongoing, persistent behavior that tells us what the "walk" is, and gives us a window into culture and how to change it. People can tell if they line up, and whether or not they reflect the same values and intentions as the rest of the organization. The more focused and visible that your change efforts are, the faster you will achieve significant performance improvements.

In summary, the Wass/Trenkle approach to **"improving business results through cultural change"** is unique, and is distinctive from other approaches in several ways:

- The combination of consulting tools, techniques, and mixture of assessment tools provides a much more accurate and focused method than other approaches for determining if culture change is required, and where it should be best applied.
  - An approximate 600 company database to compare/benchmark your business and cultural attributes against is a key part of our consulting toolbox.
- Our customized KLF assessment methodology is unique and proprietary, and connects your company's business and cultural attributes directly to the Key Leverage Factors that are most important to achieving your business success.
- The Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup> represents the collective expertise of the Wass Consulting Group and Trenkle and Associates, both innovators in the area of business performance improvement.
- Extensive knowledge and experience with utility companies as well as with other industries such as automotive, aerospace, chemical, education, electronics, energy, engineering, government, health care, high tech, labor management, manufacturing, not-for-profit, publishing, steel, and telecommunications.
- A proven track record in making a difference and in producing results.

- A process whose implementation brings both near- and long-term results (e.g., more than \$1 billion in client savings through past consulting efforts).
- A strong emphasis on successful implementation and change.
- A deep commitment to helping you get the significant results expected in an expeditious and foreseeable manner.

This series of five *Management Insights*, which are all available on our website at <http://www.wcginc.com>, is intended to stimulate your thinking, and to give you some new and useful ideas for improving your organization and its business performance. Each of the articles could have been book length, and they provide only an overview of the many elements of the process. If you want to embark on improving your business performance by improving your culture, and want help in doing so, we at the Wass/Trenkle group of companies can help. Our preferred way of working is to transfer our knowledge and skills to our clients so that the improvement action planning is complete and thorough, and implementation is conducted thoughtfully and skillfully. Our aim is to leave you not just with recommendations, but with the capacity and capability to sustain the changes you need to drive your future success.

We hope you've found these *Management Insight* articles useful, and we welcome hearing from you regarding them. Thus, if you have comments or questions regarding any of the five *Management Insights* of this series, or on the topics addressed in them, please feel free to contact either Len Wass or John Trenkle by phone or e-mail.

Leonard R. Wass  
Wass Consulting Group, Inc.  
(800) 601-9277  
[lwass@wcginc.com](mailto:lwass@wcginc.com)

John F. Trenkle  
John F. Trenkle & Associates, Inc.  
(800) 929-5380  
[jftrenkle@aol.com](mailto:jftrenkle@aol.com)

**The Wass/Trenkle** group of companies is a collaborative initiative of the **Wass Consulting Group** and **Trenkle and Associates**. Our combined resources are unique, and are aimed at helping our clients *“improve business results through cultural change.”*

We are innovators in this field and have developed a unique and proprietary **Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup>** that enables top management to readily identify the current state of its organizational culture and to identify its specific strengths and weaknesses. This enables top management to take targeted actions to improve those cultural and business attributes that will have the greatest impact on business results. This puts management in the driver's seat by providing them with the information needed to decide upon and begin targeted performance improvements. Skilled and experienced professionals support these efforts, complementing existing organization resources to move toward better results at a very high tempo of improvement. Until the Wass/Trenkle initiative was launched, management had no reliable way to tackle the monumental task of energizing the corporate culture to improve business results. Our approach lets management focus on key aspects of their business and culture, and identifies the actionable improvements that bear directly on their business results.

Our unique blend of skilled and mature consultants provides an array of proven consulting tools, techniques, methodologies, and mixture of proprietary assessment tools and approaches. We provide an extraordinarily accurate method for determining if cultural or business change is required, the extent of such change, and where such changes should be best applied. We combine the well researched and documented survey methodology, organizational diagnosis, and organizational development consulting capabilities of Trenkle and Associates with the more traditional general management consulting experience and knowledge of the Wass Consulting Group. This provides our clients with the skill and experience needed to diagnose and implement cultural transformation that results in improved business performance.