

# ALIGN STRATEGY WITH CULTURE

Jay L Brand, PhD,  
Professor Leadership, Higher Ed &  
Organizational Studies, Andrews Univ

## Introduction

Research, design & development groups (R&D) need flat, flexible organizational cultures to encourage creativity and nurture innovation.

Arbitrary, totalitarian or risk-averse leadership based solely on minimizing costs & risks can destroy the potential of even teams with highly qualified, capable members.

Alignment between leaders and cultures that nurture creativity & innovation is critical for long-term success – especially when faced with disruption(s).

## Research questions

What happens to an R&D group when led by an arbitrary, authoritarian leader?

How can leaders avoid such negative outcomes and prepare their organizations & institutions for an uncertain, ambiguous future?

## Findings (case study)

Soon after an arbitrary, authoritarian senior leader replaced the manager of a creative, innovative R&D group, that team's members dispersed to pursue other available opportunities at other companies.

That organization's creative, innovative potential has never recovered, resulting in losing 1/3 of their global work force following the disruption of COVID19

## Terms

Risk-averse: Leaders focus on controlling costs rather than strategic investment

Arbitrary leadership: top-down, unilateral decision-making

Disruption: An unpredictable yet influential change in business climate

Innovation: *problem-solving; solutions*

Flat organization: egalitarian; non-hierarchical; expertise-as-leadership

Cultural alignment: leadership style & strategy fit culture of the teams & groups

## Implications

Creative, innovative groups or teams need flexibility to explore, examine & experiment. Such strategic investment in the future can pay off in unexpected, unpredictable ways.

When leaders make decisions affecting such self-managed teams or groups, they should seek input from the group and achieve consensus before proceeding.

Creativity and innovation do not thrive under command-and-control, hierarchical leadership styles, organizations or institutions.

## Summary & Conclusions

Misalignment among organizational strategy, leadership style and a creative, innovative culture can destroy the potential contributions of R&D teams with even highly qualified members.

### Four Characteristics of Organizations that Thrive Long-term:

1. Genuine sensitivity to & concern for their environment
2. Highly cohesive; leaders promoted from within; enjoy positive social identity
3. Tolerant of experimentation & change
4. Stewardship; preservation of capital