



## CASE STUDY

# SDLC PARTNERS A BALANCED APPROACH TO CULTURE TRANSFORMATION



### STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

SDLC Partners is a business and technology consultancy, based in downtown Pittsburgh, that specializes in delivering customized digital solutions to transform organizations. Since 2004, SDLC has been providing clients with high-quality business and technology services that accelerate performance through smarter solutions.

Together, the talent, processes, and leadership combine into a high-performance culture focused on working with customers to realize their vision and delivering measurable improvements and enduring solutions.



### MERGER & ACQUISITION

That culture is built to empower, resource, and recognize people who are SDLC's greatest asset and uniqueness. They believe that engaged and active employees create the foundation of the firm's success, ensuring they deliver value to the client, company, and each other. In 2018, when SDLC saw potential areas for improvement, they made investigating and pursuing cultural growth a strategic priority.



### TRANSFORMATION & TURNAROUND

#### **Focusing on Our Culture to Better Serve Our Clients**

Culture change efforts are never easy and developing a cohesive culture is an even greater challenge when a majority of employees are often working within client sites. In fact the nature of the work is such that many SDLC employees become embedded in, and often identify with, their client's culture. The firm's leaders believed that creating a stronger connection to SDLC would result in a firm that was better positioned to leverage the full talent of the firm and deliver the highest quality services to their clients.

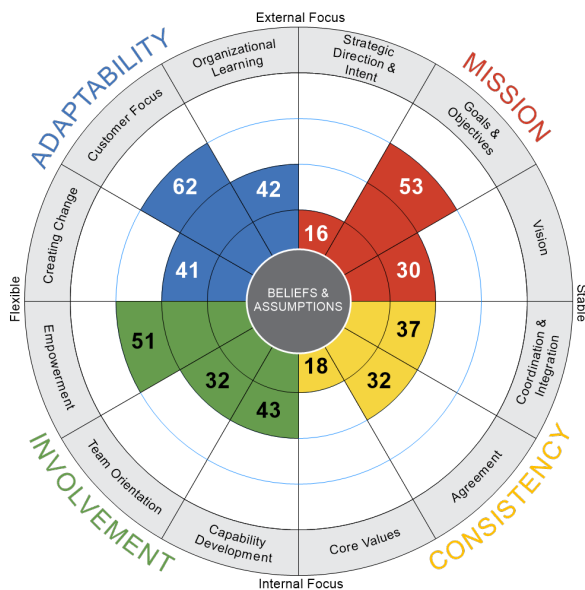


### TALENT MANAGEMENT

To start that journey, SDLC utilized the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) to establish a cultural baseline. John Durgee, a Sr. Manager at SDLC remembered it this way..."One of our leaders asked me, 'What is our Culture'? It was a good question.

We knew change was coming and we were looking for a catalyst for that change, a way to help drive performance in people and results. We needed to understand what our employees thought about working here and how they viewed our culture. The Denison culture survey was that catalyst, our opportunity for change."

2018 Profile



**A Balanced Approach to Improve the Company, the Employee and the Customer**

The culture data collected in 2018 reinforced many of their suspicions about the need for greater clarity and connection to the firm. It set the stage for a range of actions designed to take some of the informal intentions of leaders and turn them into explicit tenets of the SDLC culture. For example, even though they often discussed aspirations for the firm, a clear Mission and Vision needed to be created and shared. They knew that the behaviors they sometimes emphasized needed to be formulated into an explicit set of Core Values. Most important, they knew that a sustainable culture change process needed the full involvement of the SDLC team.

With several priorities, what became evident was that an effective culture change process would require a balanced approach. SDLC is in the business of helping clients solve complex issues and thinking systemically about problems. The first step in the effort to involve employees was to share the culture results utilizing a variety of channels including face-to-face and written communications. Focus groups were used to gain further insight, feedback and support for the culture change effort. A range of actions were developed using the Denison Culture Model and their survey data as a roadmap.

**MISSION & CONSISTENCY:** The firm went to work on the creation of a new company Mission, Vision and Values. Once finalized they used a staged approach to create alignment, first among executives, followed by all managers, and ultimately the entire workforce. Employees were involved in conducting SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. Company goals led to the creation of both team and individual goals that were reinforced through tracking against KPI's and individual performance management.

The newly defined Core Values emphasize their customer commitment with emphasis on action, teamwork and entrepreneurship. Consistent communication programs were developed or refreshed including weekly 'Monday Minutes', monthly manager meetings and information about their roadmap incorporated into all company communications. SDLC adopted and implemented Workday, a cloud-based software that provides consistency for human capital and financial management.

**INVOLVEMENT & ADAPTABILITY:** Regular meetings and communications were used to keep all employees informed about changes taking place and the progress being made.

Decision making tools (RACI) were used to clarify and support empowerment and decision rights. Capability development took on many forms including a mentor program, manager training and the ability for volunteers to suggest and drive company initiatives. Emma Fazio, Sr. HR manager at SDLC noted that, "There is a new sense of momentum towards making the employee experience more positive. Ideas to make the company better, such as the mentor program, have taken off which feels exciting and fun. The encouragement of bringing forth innovative ideas, allows individuals to get involved in areas that interest them. This adds a level of productivity, transparency, and collaboration that was missing before."

In addition, a major reorganization took place to position the company for a coordinated approach that focused on services and solutions for their customers. It was important that any actions for culture improvement were focused on three key factors: improving the company, the employee and the impact on the customer.

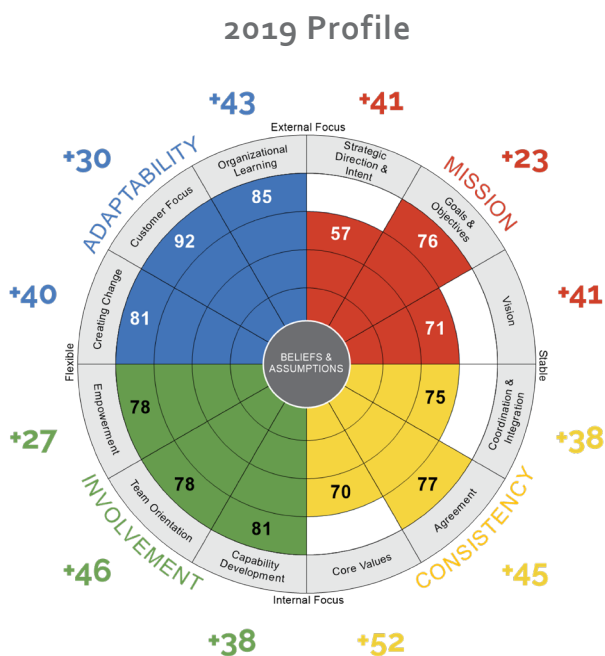
**Meeting the Challenge: A Dramatic Change**

SDLC took what they learned from the Denison survey and empowered their internal change team to create major improvement. When they deployed the survey again in 2019, the change was nothing less than dramatic. According to Bryan Adkins, CEO of Denison, "It is not unusual that concerted efforts will result in a 10 percentile increase from one year to another across targeted areas of the culture. SDLC saw significant increases across all 12 indexes, increases that ranged from a minimum of 27 percentile points to a high of 52 points. That was remarkable."

The results show the power of a balanced approach to culture change and an appreciation for the systemic nature of change in organizations. SDLC focused on driving a culture in which employees are aligned around and clear about the future, clarifying their company strategy, mission, vision, and values. That effort helped to revive the culture toward innovation. In 2019, alone, employees implemented a Women in Technology network, a mentor group, and a STEM for Kids program. Now, employees feel more empowered to bring forward, and spearhead, ideas that will better serve clients, the organization, as well as the employees and community.

Chris Simchick, Founder and CEO of SDLC Partners stated, "I'm incredibly proud of our team who met the challenge of elevating our culture to greater levels of engagement and innovation with creativity and dedication. Their hard work and perseverance was evident in the impressive changes to our Denison culture survey results. It proves that a balanced, system-wide approach that engages stakeholders and touches every employee can cause measurable, tactile changes to our corporate life and value."

Moving forward, SDLC will continue to empower employees and provide ample opportunity for their voices to be heard.



They believe that the employee ideas and voice is the future and they are confident in the collective ability to continue delivering quality and innovative solutions to clients, as well as connecting and engaging as an internal team.

All of the organizational change efforts were designed to further one goal: becoming a stronger business. The Denison assessment helped SDLC see the changes needed and prioritize the areas that would impact their employees and clients most positively.

SDLC's leadership knew they had worked hard to shift the culture and expected to see improvement in the culture scores. Given the significant degree of change revealed, it was clear that not only had the actions been impactful, but that the balanced and systemic approach resulted in a level of progress rarely seen. SDLC's mission is to empower organizations to accelerate performance through smarter solutions. They not only aspire to do that for their customers, they practice it as well.

**See the next page for some of the key practices and processes** that helped to elevate the SDLC culture using a balanced, systemic approach to culture change:



## Adaptability



1. Reorganized the firm into 2 divisions with a focus on Client Services & Solutions.
2. Established a volunteer process to generate new ideas and allow employees to lead those efforts.
3. Effectively developed and implemented key changes ranging from the reorganization to the new Mission/Vision and Values and a range of initiatives that relied on the leadership or involvement of employees across the firm.

## Mission



1. Crafted and rolled out a new Mission and Vision with emphasis on empowering organizations and being a 'partner of choice.'
2. Solicited employee input to support the annual SWOT analysis process.
3. Developed specific goals at every level that aligned to the firm's strategy and created a roadmap for priorities.
4. Ensured that all goals have KPI's with explicit ownership and decision-making rights.

## Consistency



1. Crafted and rolled-out a set of Core Values, making expected behaviors more explicit.
2. Utilized RACI to clarify and reach agreement regarding decision making responsibilities and rights.
3. Implemented Workday for consistent Human Capital and Financial systems.

## Involvement



1. Conducted focus groups to get additional insights and learnings from the culture data.
2. Implemented a company-wide mentoring program.
3. Established and reinvigorated recognition programs such as the annual IMPACT award, peer recognition, as well as firm-wide 'thank you' events.
4. Created new communication efforts including the 'Monday Minute' (a quick update on activities across the firm).
5. Established a Women in Technology network.

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