Atlassian
Success through Organisational Values

Organisation

👥 **1,400+ employees**

🏭 **Team collaboration and productivity software provider**

📍 **Global business**

EST. **2002**

Since starting up in 2002, Atlassian has transformed the way enterprise software is developed and accessed by their 51,000+ global customers. Their mission is simple: "Unleash the potential in every team."

Scott Farquhar and Mike Cannon-Brookes founded the company, built on a business model that proves if you create great software, price it right and make it easy to access and use, customers will come. These foundations continue to deliver customer and employee experiences that are centred on Atlassian's five core values of Open company, No bull#@!%, Build with heart and balance, Don't #@!% the customer, Play as a team, and Be the change you seek. These strong values underlie decisions on the business, product development and brand.

With strong leadership, alignment with strategy and behaviour, and the continual iteration of the business and operating rhythm, these values have cultivated success for Atlassian. So, what exactly is it that Atlassian does to translate its values to business success?

Being a values-based organisation

Organisations can spend vast amounts of time developing strategies to boost revenue, market share, brand exposure, employee engagement, etc. Yet how many fully connect their values to strategic outcomes? Values create certainty in the midst of ambiguity, because they help people understand how to act and what's expected of them at all times. We would classify a company like Atlassian as a 'values-based organisation'. Being a values-based organisation means ensuring that the organisational values are so ubiquitous and engrained that they—more so than written rules, policies, or clever slogans—guide the behaviour and decisions of leaders and employees.

The co-founders and leaders are responsible for role-modelling the values and defining what the business looks like. It's not rhetoric. The leaders have successfully built a business based on a clear idea and coupled it with palatable values and behaviours that everyone understands and can easily apply. Atlassian's ability to connect the organisational strategy with the critical behavioural levers that enable a successful outcome is firmly embedded in everything they do. Their values are ubiquitous and are part of the Atlassian fabric. You can find them not only on posters in meeting rooms, coffee mugs, or decals in foyers, but also in welcome kits, and in every day conversations. They are led and role-modelled from the top, but the expectations are the same for everyone, irrespective of their role in the organisation.

What's intriguing about Atlassian is how they managed to maintain a strong values-based culture despite the fact that they have grown into a large global business. According to Brent Harman, Global Head of Real Estate & Experience, Atlassian has a relatively flat structure, where being an 'open company' means decisions, sharing and learning are distributed evenly throughout the business. This allows people to tap into the skills and expertise of their 1,400+ employees. The co-founders and leaders have built the business based on humility, learning, play and sharing, which are all qualities rooted in their values.

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The tone at the top has remained rock solid around accountability to the values, even through massive growth. Building the customer and employee experience around their values has proved an effective strategy for the organisation, ensuring that every interaction is consistent, reliable, honest and authentic.

When leaders are accountable for their actions and behaviour, others see it and model it too. At Atlassian, their people believe in the mission and values, and they 'play as a team' to create an enjoyable and humble place to work, while also creating better customer and employee experience. For instance, every three months all employees stop their normal work routine for 24 hours to innovate and create new ways to enhance the overall company. They're encouraged to think of new ideas, build new products or fix a process – anything that can make everyday life for 'Atlassians' and their customers even better than it is today. The regeneration cycle that exists within Atlassian is infectious. Houda Chehab, Graduate Developer, shared that every new employee brings a new set of ideas and experiences to the business. They harness and nurture talent so that continual growth is always at the forefront of peoples' minds.

Peter Georgiou, Head of IT, shared that 80% of the work completed is about getting it right for the customer, while the remaining 20% is about refining it with the customer. Either way, honest and robust feedback is required at every step of the way, which helps unconventional but fruitful ideas come to the surface. 'Don't #@!% the customer' and 'building with heart and balance' are the two critical values providing a backbone to 'unleash the full potential' with the customer and one another.

Constants in the midst of change

Atlassian is growing at a very fast pace, and after a recent successful IPO release, they're not patting themselves on the back just yet. It's business as usual for the Atlassians. 'No bull' means no ego is attached to the game-changing work they're doing. They know the challenges and the need to be agile, but what's constant in all of it is their mission and values. Their clear perspective of intention, purpose and identity is so clearly defined that even though the business may grow or change, who they are will remain constant.

But connecting values to business success doesn't always require transformational change. It takes influential leaders with a clear vision and purpose to translate that into an identity that others can relate to. The Atlassian leaders are clear on who they are and why the organisation exists, and this spreads to the interactions they have with their teams, the products their teams develop, and how employees interact with the customer. And it all ultimately impacts Atlassian's market share.

What did we learn?

Even though Atlassian built this ethos from its start-up days, there is much to be learned from their journey that, when distilled, is applicable to other organisations and leaders:

› Leadership buy-in to the mission and purpose is paramount;
› Everyone is equally accountable for their behaviour and actions; and
› All work must loop back to the mission and values.

Ensuring that the values and value-based behaviours are always at work is important. Internalised values serve as a 'sniff test' that people do when deciding if a strategy, leader or value is worth following. Taking values off the walls and putting them into everyday conversations and decisions is a great start at bringing values to life.

There is no need to follow the same road as Atlassian. Indeed, adopting their values is unlikely to be appropriate for your organisation and your context. Of course, it's critical to make sure that your organisation's mission, values, strategy, and structure are aligned. However, Atlassian illustrates the importance of incorporating values and value-based behaviours into everyday organisational life. Atlassian also shows us how embracing a values-based culture can translate to important outcomes like customer and employee engagement, and ultimately market share, brand equity, retention, competitive recruitment and a strong talent pipeline.

A project by the Centre for Workplace Leadership

A case study by AHA on behalf of Centre for Workplace Leadership

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