

X vs **Y**

Connecting brand, culture + innovation

Volume #1



The
**brand
culture**
manifesto

The birth and rise of brand culture

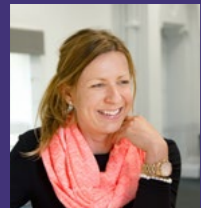
SIX

Our contributors



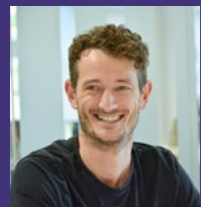
Ruth Clarke
Deputy Managing Director

A qualified member of the CIPD and CIM, combining her strategic background with a fresh look at brand and employee engagement.



Alexandra Shallish
Creative Director

Bringing her global brand experience to discuss the power of brand culture in today's creative environment.



Charlie Thorogood
Associate Creative Director

Helping many of the world's biggest brands craft stories and create campaigns filled with emotion.

X vs Y is a series of refreshing whitepapers from Six opening up discussion, best practice, reports and insight on the areas our team of experts think are relevant to driving purposeful businesses today.

One thing for certain is that change is constant – now more than ever. Transformation of business models are moving all around us and the purpose of those businesses should sit firm at the heart of their strategy.

We believe Brand is Culture – Culture is Brand.

To find out more about Six – The brand culture studio, visit www.six.agency

All views expressed are our own, or reflect those that have been reported through our own research methods. All errors and omissions are the author's own.

What comes first **culture** or **brand**?

We've taken a closer look at the evolution and growth of the brand culture model and why we think it is now integral to any organisation that wants to stay relevant and attractive to their increasingly discerning audiences.

The real answer is that neither internal culture nor external brand came first. They are inherently fused together, and here we explore how and why this is important today.

Brand culture is not something new for Six, we have lived this ethos for over 25 years. In that time we have worked with a myriad of hugely successful brands, strived to work differently to a typical agency to bring culture and human experience into our creative strategy – you could say we've been ahead of our time.

We are not anthropologists but rather, instinctive, strategic and creative experts, particularly brilliant at knowing our clients' businesses well. We love talking about how brand culture and brand DNA can blend seamlessly and manifest itself in a way that can help organisations attract talent, develop their people, sell their products and services, and promote their purpose to the outside world. Simply put we make brands bigger and stronger.



The brand culture manifesto

For over 100 years, branding and organisational culture have been like twins separated at birth. Nurtured by different teams in remote areas of the organisation. Co-existing but never truly connected.

Now, as we enter an age of unprecedented transparency, businesses can no longer keep their internal and external identities at arm's length. Customers and employees can see all sides. And they expect them to be the same.

Brand culture, as the name suggests, brings branding and organisational culture together again. Uniting them around a single strategy with a clear purpose at its heart. By removing the gap between action and image, brand culture helps businesses behave and communicate authentically. Creating a solid foundation on which to build customer and employee loyalty in today's disrupted marketplace.

The birth of brand and culture



The word 'branding' first appeared in business during the 19th century. At the time, corporate logos were physically branded onto crates and containers using a hot iron. But it wasn't until the explosion of mass media – particularly newspapers, radio and television – that the word evolved into the meaning we know today. Not a physical impression of a logo but a mental impression of the business as a whole.

These early days gave us cartoon mascots like Tony the Tiger, whistle-while-you-work jingles and dubious promises like 'Guinness is good for you'. Basic as it seems today, this was a brave new world for businesses – and marked the first degree of separation between their internal truth and external image.

Our industry trundled on like this until 1959, when one advert single-handedly transformed the world of branding.

Its creators, Bill Bernbach, Helmut Krone and Julian Koenig, noticed customers were growing tired of functional advertising and would be more likely to buy from brands they truly respected. Their VW Beetle advert 'Think Small' was the first of a new generation. It was minimal. It was intelligent. And above all, it made many of the post-war generation do something previously unimaginable – swap their plush vehicles for a funny little car from Germany.

The success of this one ad was the catalyst for a global revolution in marketing. In the decades that followed, major businesses embarked on a creative arms race. Propelled by the economic boom of the late 20th century, budgets skyrocketed. Hollywood stars were bought. And creativity flourished.



But as the quest for a perfect marketable image gained pace, brands grew increasingly distant from the businesses they represented. Look at any classics from the golden era of TV advertising – Apple '1984', Guinness 'Surfer', Sony 'Balls', Cadbury 'Gorilla'. All brilliant, but not one of them gives more than a passing glimpse of the products they're selling.

Tellingly, it was during this time that businesses first started to look at their organisational cultures as a way to improve their financial performance. Led by the research of University of Oxford professor Andrew Pettigrew¹, business leaders in the '70s and '80s started to borrow concepts from anthropology and sociology to define their culture – as a shared set of ideologies, beliefs, rituals and stories.

As understanding of organisational culture grew, so did examples of businesses who used it to achieve great commercial success. In his book *It's Not about the coffee*, Starbucks' Former VP, Howard Behar, explained how a small Seattle café became a global phenomenon with over 2,000 branches by focusing on culture². Summing up Starbucks' philosophy, he says, "the way we treat our people affects the way

our people treat our customers, and, in turn, our success, which includes financial performance." Their culture permeates all aspects of the business, including the operations of their franchisees. For the first time, it mattered where we bought our coffee and this is down to the distinct characteristics of the business – the culture mattered, with thousands of latte copycats riding on the back their success.

So while branding and culture have both grown into important concepts, the fact they came to prominence at different times for different reasons means they are often distanced from each other in traditional organisational structures. Brand living in the world of marketing. Culture somewhere between HR and Operations. Twins, separated at birth.

"The way we treat our people affects the way our people treat our customers, and, in turn, our success, which includes financial performance."

Howard Behar



<https://www.insider.com/vintage-photos-offices-work-2018-10>

The age of *transparency*

Separating brand and culture wasn't merely a historical accident. Before the internet, it also made a lot of sense to keep them at arm's length.

Without social media and customer reviews to offer a balanced view, marketing was the only window people had into a business' world. That meant businesses could manufacture a positive view of themselves, regardless of what was going on behind the scenes. As long as their advertising claims weren't overtly false, it was all good.

Today's reality couldn't be more different. Customers no longer have a small marketing-shaped window to peek through. They have the keys to the front door.

A cursory search will tell you whether a business lives up to its promises, how they treat their employees, whether they pay their taxes and anything else you want to know. Sports Direct putting profit ahead of people's health amid the Coronavirus crisis, VW's Dieselgate scandal, Facebook's open-door approach to customer data, the suicides at Apple's Chinese iPhone factory, the gender pay gap and the #MeToo movement have all shown one thing. In the age of transparency, when you create a gap between your words and your actions, you might just fall

straight into it.

It's not just brands struggling to acclimatise to all this transparency either. Talented employees have seen enough first-hand accounts of great employee experience to know what good looks like – Google's 20% time, Starbucks paying for their staff's university tuition, Patagonia's policy that employees can surf when the waves are good (even during work hours). These attractive and very visible examples mean businesses who don't give their people enough freedom and opportunity now face an uphill battle to attract and retain the kind of talent they need to take them forwards.

What's more, startups born in the age of transparency – from FinTech challengers like Monzo and Starling Bank to lifestyle brands like Netflix, Uber and Airbnb – have shown that new businesses with powerful ideas and more agile, competitive cultures can now move from the fringes to the mainstream at lightening pace.

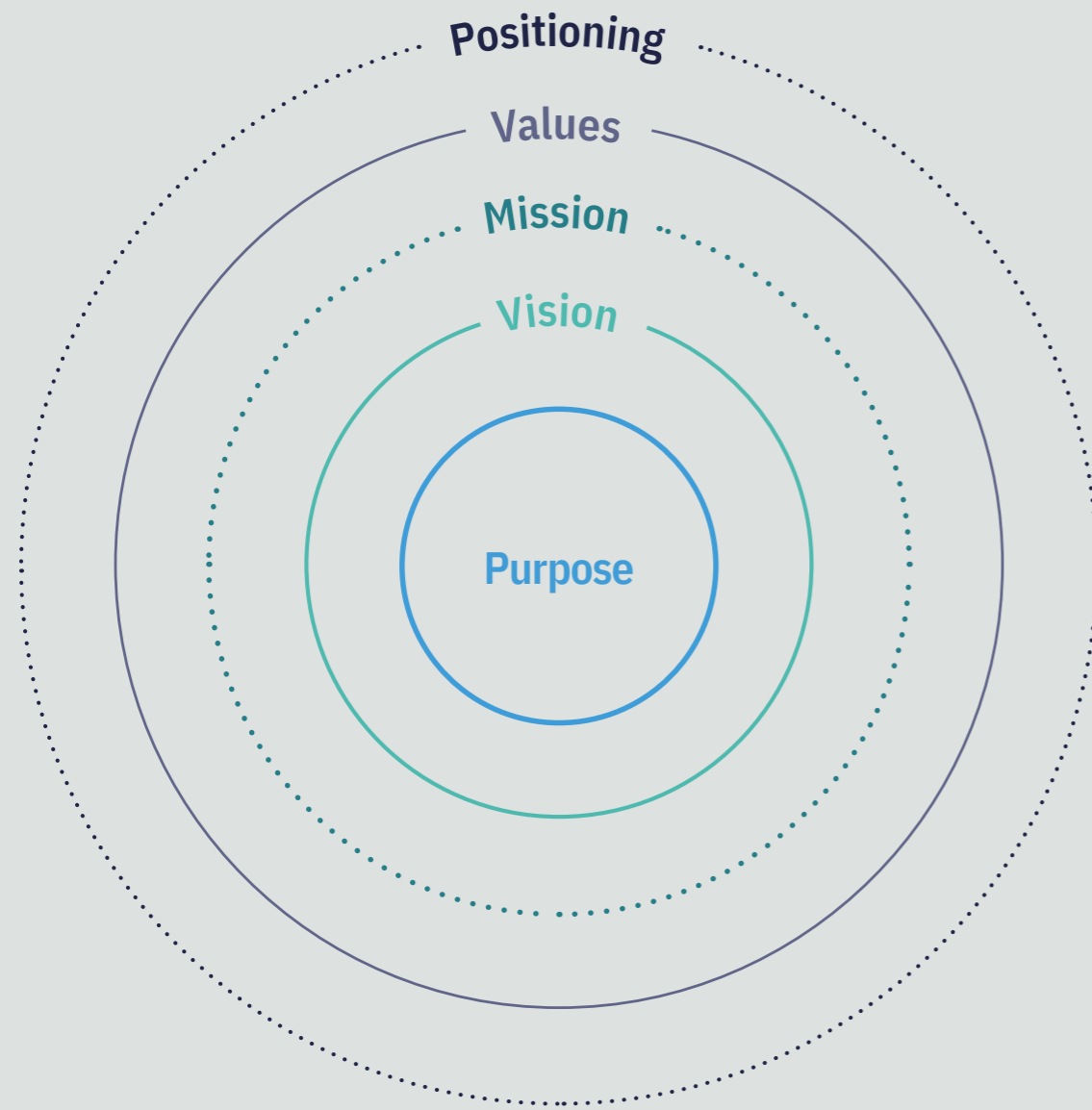
All of which means many established businesses now find themselves in the midst of a perfect storm. Fending off wave after wave of customer apathy, talent attrition and increased competition. All while stripped naked by the harsh realities of transparency.



“If you’re going to be naked, you had better be buff.”

Don Tapscott & David Ticoll,
The Naked Corporation³

The rise of *brand culture*



Purpose: Why we exist // **Vision:** What we aim to achieve // **Mission:** How we plan to achieve our vision
Values: What we stand for and how we behave // **Positioning:** How we differentiate from our competition

These fundamental changes in consumer and employee behaviour have brought about a new way of thinking about how a business acts and communicates. We call this brand culture.

By fusing the worlds of external brand and internal culture around a shared strategy and clear purpose, brand culture makes sure the actions a business makes behind the scenes and the stories it shares in public reflect one another.

As organisational transformation becomes an everyday reality for many businesses, brand culture provides a solid bedrock from which to manage ongoing change. By defining why your business exists, its core values and how it wants to influence the world, people can develop a deeper connection with you. Products and services may come and go, marketing campaigns certainly will, but brand culture should feel evergreen – truthful, timeless and reassuring. Like a ship at anchor in a storm, enabling businesses to hold fast even as the landscape around them moves.

Nothing could have brought brand culture and purpose into sharper focus than the coronavirus outbreak. Brands like Dyson, Louis Vuitton and Rolls Royce massively increased their brand equity by acting for the greater good. Similarly, Guinness announced they were donating £1 million to support bar workers who had lost their livelihoods. Meanwhile, JD Wetherspoon made headlines for refusing to pay their staff. These actions speak volumes and the whole world can see these businesses for what they truly are.

This is an important step forward from the era of superficial branding. But *spoiler alert* it does require organisations and the individuals within them to make some significant changes. Marketing and HR need to make space for sharing ideas and priorities. The leadership team need to undergo some soul-searching to identify the reason why they exist (and why people should care). Employees need to be treated more like customers. And decision makers at every level need to be empowered to do the right thing, even if that means foregoing some short-term wins to aid long-term success.

“Customers will never love a company until its employees love it first.”

Simon Sinek, *Start With Why*

So the big question is: why bother?

Well, the simple fact is, purpose-driven businesses financially perform far better than their rivals. Studying a huge range of organisations over a decade-long period, Harvard Business School professors John Kotter and James Heskett found that “purposeful, value-driven companies outperform their counterparts in stock price by a factor of twelve.”⁴ Why? Because people care.

Culture: from the Latin *cultus*, which means ‘care’.

In 2018, Accenture found that out of 30,000 consumers surveyed globally, nearly two-thirds⁵ wanted brands to take a stand on issues like sustainability, fair employment and transparency. Consumers are changing, demanding alignment and authenticity. Reshaping the brand experience inside and out.


But it’s not just the bottom line that benefits. Since consumers are also employees, the need for placing a clear and compelling purpose at the centre of your brand culture is becoming ever-clearer, with huge implications found in talent acquisition and retention. In a major study of workplace culture, the New York Times found that “employees who derive meaning and significance from their work were more than three times as likely to stay with their organizations.”⁶

Likewise, Gallup found that companies in the top quartile for engaged employees, compared with the bottom quartile, had 22 percent higher profitability, 10 percent higher customer ratings, 28 percent less theft and 48 percent fewer safety incidents.⁷



grey?
 gorgeous?

Why can't more women feel glad to be grey? Join the beauty debate.

campaignforrealbeauty.co.uk 

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/consumers-becoming-critical-of-dove-s-real-beauty-ad-1.2678460>

However you look at it, whether attracting talent or smashing targets, there is evidently great power in purpose in the workplace. Are we all so driven by being the change we want to see in the world? While we may want to think so, the answer may be less about changing the world and more about that fundamental human need: belonging, which is ranked third in priority for obtaining human satisfaction and fulfilment by Dr. Maslow in his Hierarchy of Needs. This might just explain why, as Don Tapscott and David Ticoll point out in their book *The Naked Corporation*;

“Work without purpose is work; work with purpose can be joy.”

Similarly, in the 2017 New York Times Bestseller *The Culture Code*, Daniel Coyle discusses the link between purpose and a culture of safety and belonging which, in turn, promotes connection, shared vulnerability, productivity, innovation – and yes, even joy. In other words, all the advantages that HR teams have been seeking for years. The true building blocks of a strong brand culture.

While purpose as a brand tool has skyrocketed in recent times – so much so that it now has its own army of imitators in the form of ‘woke-washers’ looking to cash-in – it was arguably Dove who laid the foundations for the brand culture model in 2004, when they launched the Campaign for Real Beauty (now

called the Dove Self-Esteem Project). In doing so, they started a global conversation around images of ‘beauty’ in the media, and elevated themselves from just another soap brand into a business with a clear and empowering reason to be.

Their vision statement: beauty should be a source of confidence, and not anxiety comes across in every piece of marketing and underpins their workplace culture across every territory in which they operate.

What’s more, this message isn’t just skin deep (if you’ll excuse the pun). Over recent decades, they have poured huge sums of money into empowering young people with body-positive educational programmes. In fact, brand culture is so deeply embedded at Dove, it’s almost impossible to separate the product from the purpose. Just as Starbucks’ success wasn’t about the coffee, Dove’s success hasn’t been about the soap.

Another company synonymous with purpose is outdoor equipment brand Patagonia. While they have always known their customers love spending time in the wilderness, they also know this passion is fundamentally at odds with their business, which manufactures clothing and distributes it around the world, contributing to climate change and placing the natural world at risk.

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



It's Black Friday, the day in the year retail turns from red to black and starts to make real money. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural systems that support all life firmly in the red. We're now using the resources of one-and-a-half planets on our one and only planet.

Because Patagonia wants to be in business for a long long time—and we want to be profitable for our kids—we want to do the opposite of every other business today. We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on this jacket or anything else.

Environmental bankruptcy, as with corporate bankruptcy, can happen very slowly, then all at a sudden. This is what we face unless we slow down, then reverse the damage. While running short on fresh water, topsoil, fisheries, wetlands – all our planet's natural systems and resources that support business, and life, including our own.

The environmental cost of everything we make is astronomical. Consider the R2™ jacket shown, one of our best sellers. To make it required 135 liters of water, enough to meet the daily needs of three glasses a day of 45 people. Its journey from its origin as 50% recycled polyester to our Reno warehouse generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, 2x times the weight of the finished product. The jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste.

And this is a 60% recycled polyester jacket, knit and sewn to a high standard. It is exceptionally durable, so you won't have to replace it as often. And when it comes to the end of its useful life we'll take it back to recycle into a product of equal value. But, as to most of all the things we can make and you can buy, this jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price.

There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything. Go to patagonia.com/CommonThreads or scan the QR code below. Take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, and join us in the 1% to reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace.

COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE

REDUCE

WE make useful gear that lasts a long time
 YOU don't buy what you don't need

REPAIR

WE help you repair your Patagonia gear
 YOU pledge to fix what's broken

REUSE

WE help find a home for Patagonia gear
 you no longer need

RECYCLE

WE will take back your Patagonia gear
 that is worn out

REIMAGINE

TOGETHER we reimagine a world where we take
 only what nature can replace

patagonia
patagonia.com

*If you've used Patagonia products or services and love the Common Threads Initiative pledge, we will credit your product on patagonia.com for no additional charge. TAKE THE PLEDGE.

<https://www.brandchannel.com/2011/11/30/are-you-buying-patagonias-dont-buy-this-jacket-campaign/>

“Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. It's not something you are. It's something you do.”

Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code*

While this approach may look like bad business sense, the reality is that Patagonia has grown sales at a speed most companies could only dream of and built up a loyal base of advocates who support them through good years and bad.

While fighting for positive body image and saving the world are unambiguous in their ethical single-mindedness, purpose doesn't always have to be worthy of a Nobel Peace Prize nomination. Some may be subtler, yet authentic, and still drive business success. When Microsoft opened its doors in April 1975, Bill Gates and Paul Allen had a clear vision: a computer on every desk and in every home; a ‘reason to be’ that straddled both the ‘what’ in business targets and the ‘why’ in promoting individual opportunity the world over. Over four decades on, the founding mission is still echoed in their updated purpose: To empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. In 2019, they were ranked among the World’s Most Ethical Companies for the ninth year in a row by Ethisphere.⁸ In 2011, an acquisition only served to bolster their purpose-led positioning when they bought Skype – a company that, while on a mission to become indispensable for efficiency in business the world over, at its heart was always about connecting people.

To mitigate this conflict of interest, Patagonia always goes the extra mile to reduce their environmental impact. Or as their core values state, we’re in business to save our home planet. They live this promise by donating at least 1% of sales to grassroots environmental activists, innovating new fabrics from recycled materials, and repairing old damaged clothing rather than encouraging customers to purchase more. In 2011, they even ran a Black Friday advert asking people not to shop for their products – or any others, in fact.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx7Mmwstqw>

When it launched in 2003, still a few years away from the first iPhone, Skype had the capacity to change peoples' lives, a heartstring-tugging theme that culminated in 42 million views of its Stay Together campaign featuring real people being connected to loved ones from whom they were separated geographically. Filmmaker John Clang summed this up in his comment: "The campaign acknowledges the human side of technological advancement."⁹ Which, when it comes to finding your 'why', just about says it all.

Meanwhile, companies that leave their purpose trailing miserably behind, even while enjoying monumental growth, have started to rethink where the key to success lies. In recent times, no lifestyle brand has perhaps been quite so high profile for its lack of ethics as Uber, whose growth into the world's largest ride-hailing company was propelled in no small part by a culture encouraging a stop-at-nothing mentality and highly competitive behaviour from staff. The problem is, while this attitude proved valuable in growing a young and ambitious Uber, it threatened the stability and prospects of an older and wiser Uber. Reports started to emerge of endemic sexual harassment and threats of physical violence. #DeleteUber started trending. Good workers left. And twitchy investors started to move to rivals like Lyft, citing their "special culture" as a marker of long-term growth potential.

So in 2017, Uber replaced its company founder Travis Kalanick with CEO Dara Khosrowshahi, who went about rebuilding the brand culture from the inside out. And he started by softening the business' core values with a new set of cultural norms, including statements like "We do the right thing" and "We celebrate differences" in a bid to win back the trust of employees and customers.

From Dove to Patagonia to Microsoft and many more besides, in today's world, people don't just want great adverts, they want great actions. The purpose must be as unique as the brands. They don't want brands that hide behind a perfectly manufactured image of themselves. They want ones who aren't afraid to bare all and demonstrate they share the same values as their customers.

And that, fundamentally, is what brand culture is all about.

People don't just want great adverts, they want great actions.



The *brand culture* studio

To many businesses, brand culture and the ideas surrounding it are fairly new. Certainly, many business leaders we speak to feel like they're already playing catchup. But the good news is that embracing brand culture is more about evolution than revolution – and by applying common sense rather than being bound to legacy processes, it can actually be very liberating.

We know this because we've been doing brand culture in one form or another for over 25 years. Helping our clients navigate their way through constant change, identify and articulate their purpose, transform their culture, and align their internal and external communications.

This experience has culminated in our current offering – brand culture immersion processes, strategic modelling, purpose articulation, creative brand development, and campaign activation. All built on open and collaborative working relationships – a way of working that shines through the experiences our clients have.

When we took L&C Mortgages on a journey to create a culture of colleague engagement, aligned with vision and strategy, they found the process went far beyond shaping their internal values and behaviours. It energised and bonded the team as a whole. "It was all about working together – with all our colleagues – to take on board views and opinions. This was an invigorating process that's created a real sense of togetherness across the company," says Andrew Thomas, L&C's HR Director.

"To prove that when we get the employee experience right, brilliance follows."

Six purpose statement

Indeed, when we started this journey, we typically found ourselves working alongside marketing, not HR departments. Even with the best will in the world, this meant there was only so much we could achieve for our clients' organisations. Now we're often in the room with the CMO, CHRO and CEO, working together to activate a brand culture strategy which delivers against everyone's agenda. Often we are at the centre of organisational change discussions where we are helping to engage leaders and advise on communications tactics that are ownable and credible.

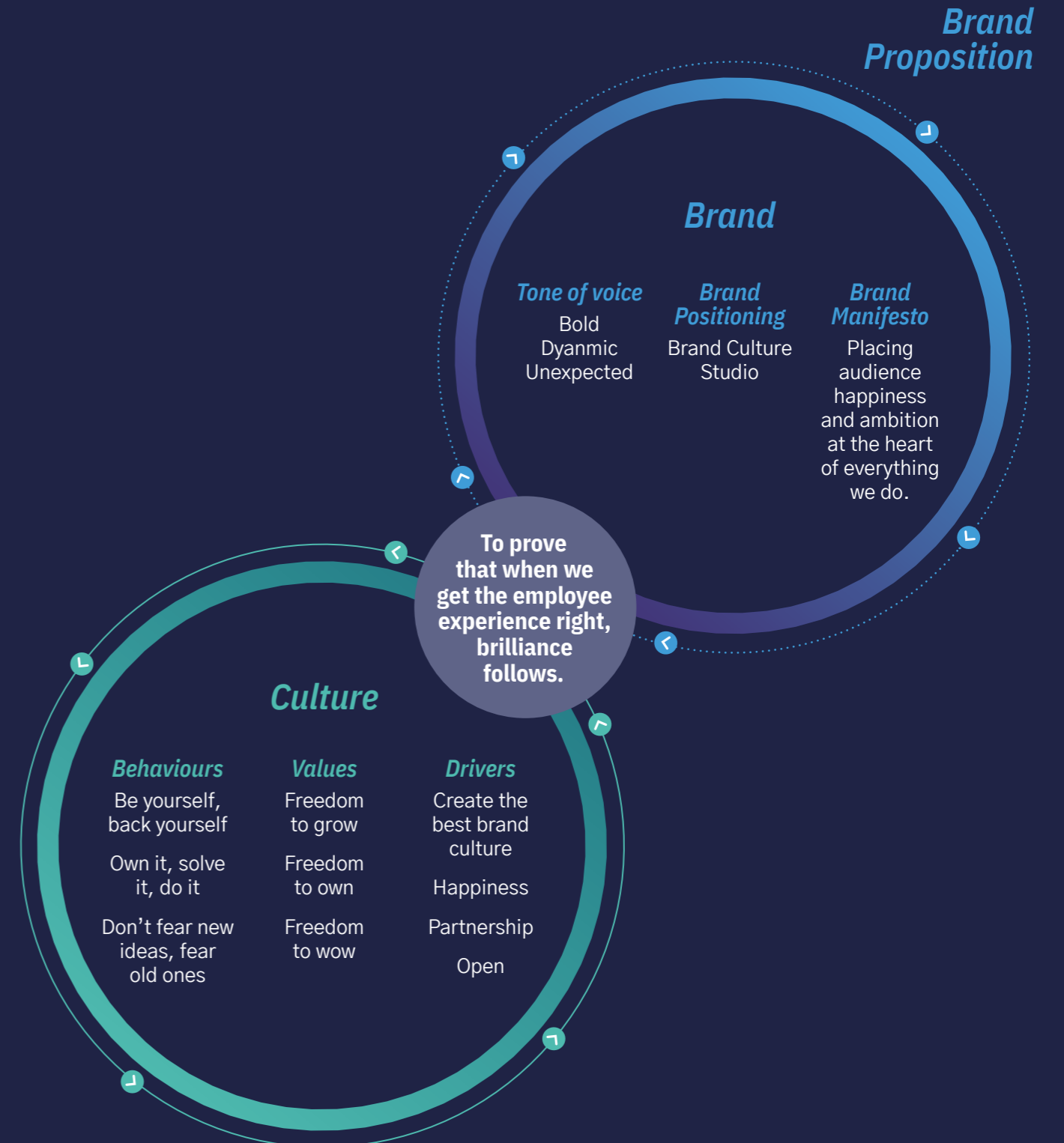
Now is the time to focus on purpose, brand and culture to help drive change and shape the brands of the future.

If you've had quite enough of reading for now (we don't blame you), get in touch. We'd be delighted to meet up and talk about brand culture and what it could mean for your business.

Opposite: The Six Brand Culture Model in brief. Developing strategic models like these for our clients for 25 years.

¹ A.M. Pettigrew, 'On Studying Organisational Cultures', Administrative Science Quarterly, 1979. ² H. Behar, It's Not about the Coffee: Lessons on Putting People First from a Life at Starbucks, Penguin Random House, 2009. ³ D. Tapscott and D. Ticoll, The Naked Corporation: How the Age of Transparency Will Revolutionize Business, Free Press, 2012. ⁴ J. P. Kotter and J. L. Heskett, Corporate Culture and Performance, Free Press, 2008. ⁵ Accenture, From Me to We, the Rise of the Purpose-led Brand. ⁶ T. Schwartz and C. Porath, Why You Hate Work, The New York Times, 2014 (accessed January 2020). ⁷ S. Sorenson, How Employee Engagement Drives Growth, Gallup, 2013 (accessed January 2020). ⁸ B. Magistretti, Dell, Microsoft, and Salesforce are among the world's most ethical companies. ⁹ Skype Stay Together Campaign

Brand Proposition



Employer Value Proposition

Need to talk about your ***brand purpose?***

We're here to offer help and advice on how to create your brand culture model that aligns your brand experience inside and out.



To find out more about Six visit www.six.agency



Give us a call on
0117 9150066



Or get in touch with our
Brand and HR consultant
ruth.clarke@six.agency

