Our Character & Culture

Orange Paper #2
The Enduring Nature of Purpose and Culture

Strategies are designed for specific contexts. In a dynamic and evolving environment, strategies may need to be reconsidered, or in some cases, entire pivots may even be warranted. Purpose and culture, on the other hand, tend to be much more enduring features and are thus much harder to change. Culture is the constant during times of intense challenge. It functions as the glue that secures the cohesion of an organization and helps it navigate through changes in its strategy.

At High Resolves, we have evolved, changed and pivoted our strategies as the environment has made it necessary. Our constancy of purpose and our very special culture have protected us through these twists and turns. While our purpose has been precisely articulated in terms of our dream, *a generation of young people working together to create a better world*, we have been less definitive in defining the specifics of our culture. We have all recognized how special it is, but we have not been able to capture it in very specific and satisfactory terms.

Our original attempt at articulating our culture was to define it in terms of four values: respect, integrity, passion and innovation. This top-down attempt at naming our values drew no objections but neither did it win the hearts and minds of our team. Our culture, and indeed our character, was far more nuanced and specific than a mere four words could adequately capture.

Heading into 2018, inspired by the opportunities to expand geographically, we articulated a powerful new global growth strategy which created momentum and a renewed sense of success into High Resolves. It also challenged us to define our culture more clearly and deliberately so that we do not leave the development of our culture to chance. Importantly, we realized the value of undertaking this effort in a bottom-up manner, engaging every member of our team to contribute their words describing our actual character and culture and what makes us a special place. Instead of aspirational slogans, we have a collective expression of the High Resolves character, as it is today. Individually, we may not each embody every single one of the ten attributes we ultimately chose. Collectively, however, these ten words are the most fitting description of who we are and who we aim to be.

Our dream

Imagine a generation of young people working together to create a better world

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Our character

Passionate

We care deeply about our work and we are not afraid to proudly show our passion to others.

Rigorous

We believe in the real value of rigor and don’t take short-cuts that risk our quality or robustness.
We dare to imagine bold ways to do things and have the courage to put them into action.

We are sincere and truthful in all that we say, and we are genuine and caring in all that we do.
We are curious by nature and listen carefully to hear other perspectives before acting.

We like to defy convention and ask “why not” so we invent pioneering concepts and novel approaches.
We are relentless in our work, willing to go above and beyond, and never satisfied with mediocrity.

We are not afraid to change our minds and we pivot to adapt to new and better ways of doing things.
We make decisions with our purpose, not our own immediate interest, as the primary objective.

We recruit people who are committed to personal growth as a long journey and value the feedback needed to become better versions of themselves; and we support them to do just that.
To achieve our dream and purpose, we must be an organization that is all about growth. We need to continue growing and growing fast in order to reach an entire generation. This is why our culture needs to be a culture of growth. Through many conversations, we have explored this notion as a collective team. One thing that has become abundantly clear is that growth is not a concept that can be captured in a single dimension. Indeed, our final definition of what we mean by a culture of growth consists of 5 mutually reinforcing dimensions to define growth. Each and every single one of these dimensions of our culture is critical to our future destiny and the realization of our dream.

We have represented these five dimensions of our growth culture in the form of a pentagon which by its nature is expanding upwards. At the base, we have included what makes us truly special. To the left, we have placed the external facing aspects of our culture while the right side contains a more internal view. The top two elements represent the twin outcomes that define our culture.

We start at the top left because the natural starting point for our culture of growth is to do whatever we can to grow the impact we have on the participants of our programs. Going counter-clockwise, we add a dimension which is quite customer-facing: growth defined in terms of reach. However, we note that our growth is both about deepening our reach in existing hubs while simultaneously expanding the global footprint of hubs. Third, we know that our comparative advantage has always stemmed from our truly innovative spirit and we must continue to grow that foundation for our future success. Next, we look inward and define growth in terms of our own organization, noting that our model will feel like units with deep local ties but working as one single global organization. Finally, we add one more very important dimension to the definition of our culture of growth: the personal growth and development of all our team members. Taken together, these five dimensions represent a comprehensive depiction of a true culture of growth. It is important to define each of these dimensions in more detail in order to paint a more clear picture of our culture and how our ten character traits link to these five dimensions of growth.
1. Transformation of participants

The first, and most important way that we define growth is in terms of the transformation we generate in all the people participating in our programs. Whether they are students, teachers, parents or company workers, we aim to grow the transformative impact of our programs, especially in terms of helping them to think, feel and act in the long-term collective interest of humanity. To grow on this dimension, we rely on these three character traits to shape our culture:

1. **Rigorous**
   
   We always rely on the latest insights from learning science as well as participant feedback to continue to redesign and enhance our curriculum to ensure maximum impact.

2. **Bold**
   
   Good is never good enough for us; to have transformational impact, we have to be bold and design exceptional learning experiences that leave lasting impressions on participants.

3. **Passionate**
   
   The authentic passion of our facilitators is another critical element of transformational learning, so we share our own life stories to create truly memorable learning experiences.
2. Local depth at global scale

The second way that we define growth is in terms of the reach of our programs. In order to realize our dream and fulfill our purpose, we aim to grow both our local depth and our global scale at the same time. This means adding more geographies while also doing more with every school and organization. To grow on this dimension, we rely on the following three character traits to shape our culture:

1. Sincere
We always begin from a sincere place: to help our partners achieve their own objectives so we will design a solution and offering that is in the best interest of each school or organization.

2. Curious
We know we will not be able to design the best solutions for our partners unless we show up with immense curiosity and listen actively to understand their context and their needs in great detail.

3. Bold
Sometimes the best solutions will go beyond the incremental actions that some consider feasible, so we will advocate for bold action without minimizing the constraints holding them back.
3. Game-changing innovation

The third way that we define growth is in terms of our willingness to disrupt the education sector. Whether designing learning experiences or thinking about new ways to measure impact or even in the way we run our organization, we aim to grow and accelerate our game-changing innovation. To grow on this dimension, we rely on the following three character traits to shape our culture:

1. **Pioneering**
   We accept the value of disruptive innovation so we challenge longstanding assumptions, try new ways of doing things, and prepare either to fail fast or to adapt and scale new ideas.

2. **Curious**
   We are insatiably curious: we are not afraid to question everything, to leave behind last year’s ideas and to ask “why not” over and over again until we land on new insights that trigger new ideas.

3. **Relentless**
   The pursuit of innovation never ends: we are relentless in challenging our own thinking and driving new paradigms, even if it means more work, because we know it is the secret to our success.
4. Multi-local organization

The fourth way that we define growth is with respect to our own organization. As we grow our global reach, our organization will have to grow to incorporate the new geographies, but we will have to tailor to local differences while maintaining our cohesion as one entity. Thus, we aim to grow into a united, multi-local organization. To grow on this dimension, we rely on the following three character traits to shape our culture:

1. Adaptable
We know that every community is unique in its history, culture and customs so we do not believe in replicating the same approach everywhere: we adapt to suit our new environments.

2. Purpose-led
Being adaptable does not mean that everything is up for grabs: the one constant in our work is our purpose; we will not deviate from our true North and will always be purpose-led.

3. Relentless
We work at an entrepreneurial venture pace within our not-for-profit context: we know our operating velocity is not for everyone but we know those who join us, enjoy that challenge.
5. Catalyst for team careers

The fifth, and final way that we define growth is in terms of the personal development of our people. For all our team members, we aim to be a catalyst for their careers and help them grow as individuals. While insisting that each person must own and drive their development, we recognise the need for a supporting and transparent work environment to enable that development. To grow on this dimension, we rely on the following three character traits to shape our culture:

1. **Committed**
   We recruit people who are committed to personal growth as a long journey and value the feedback needed to become better versions of themselves; and we support them to do just that.

2. **Purpose-led**
   We are not motivated by money or fame; we are motivated by a shared desire to make the biggest contribution we can to the collective advancement of humanity.

3. **Passionate**
   Our team members have a wide array of personal passions and we support all career paths: growth within a role, advancement to a different role or working toward an external path.
An integrated perspective of Character and Culture

We can now combine the ten aspects of our character with the five dimensions of our growth culture to give a much more detailed and integrated view of our organization.
Advancing our culture

As described earlier, we believe our character and culture should represent our team’s collective expression of our actual current culture as opposed to a top-down aspirational statement. However, this does not mean that we already have a perfect manifestation of this culture; nor does it mean that there is no room for improvement. To the contrary, each one of us must strive individually in every moment of every day, to live up to our character and culture. Equally, at the collective level, we must do our best to design our organization and operating model to reinforce the right behaviors from all of us. To this end, we will be engaging in the systematic redesign of our operating model along each of the five growth dimensions to embed and reinforce our ten character traits:

1. Transformation of Participants

We will grow our impact on participants by upgrading our Program Manager training through deeper materials and digital platforms, and by deploying new planning systems that ensure schools have well-designed strings in place. Importantly, we will use our new digital platform to lift the bar on training for teacher-led activities at schools.

2. Local Depth at Global Reach

Within each hub, we will grow our local reach through the design and deployment of the new granular performance management system and the adoption of Plans-on-a-Page and customer journeys. Globally, we will systematize the process for opening up a new hub and establish a formula for getting traction faster than before.

3. Game-changing Innovation

We will upgrade our curriculum innovation processes to ensure incremental enhancements flow in more easily through our digital platform. We will also explore completely disruptive business models (like spinoffs) around the development and commercialization of CQ and the string configurator.

4. Multi-local Organization

We will need a major systems upgrade to manage a multi-local enterprise. Our migration to Salesforce as a CRM is an essential step in that journey and will complement the adoption of a cloud-based platform on the Finance side. Our governance requirements will also continue to grow in complexity and professionalism.

5. Catalyst for Team Careers

We will design and roll out a new model for role definition and progression for team members driven by individualized development plans and self-led review processes. We will also revamp our recruiting and onboarding processes to ensure tighter fit with our character and culture, right from the beginning.

This is simply an illustrative list. There will be more systems and process enhancements than the ones listed above. We will work through these as one collective enterprise, drawing on our amazing diverse talent base to rewire our organization to advance our culture.

High Resolves is a non-partisan, non-religious, non-profit social venture specializing in the design and delivery of immersive learning experiences around citizenship themes for young people. The Orange Papers series are designed to share our insights and learnings to advance the discourse in this important arena.
The voice of our people

What happens when you attract a team of passionate, relentless, sincere and bold individuals to an organization with a genuine mission? A fast-paced and exciting workplace where I feel like every day I'm actually achieving something important.

When people ask me what I do, my initial response is to smile; it is uncontrollable. I am surrounded by a humble and unstoppable team, inspired by our clarity of mission, values and vision.

It might be a small organization but the passion and hard work can literally move mountains.

I'm excited! Excited about working within a framework that clearly defines and continues to evaluate who we are and who we're striving to be as an organization that is driven by purpose! Working within such a robust and sincere culture is absolutely energizing!

I love the fact that we both talk the talk and walk the walk.

High Resolves is an organisation where everyone's voice matters, diversity is celebrated and big ideas are realized. A true sense of togetherness is the driving force that allows us to be adaptive and innovative leaders of social change.

When we know we are doing the right thing, and someone puts a roadblock in front of us, we will relentlessly find a way forward.

What I love about the character of High Resolves is the sense of urgency about our mission and the work we do. Coming into work means being surrounded by people who are energized and determined to achieve our mission as best we can, as soon as possible, because we truly believe that our work has the potential to change the world.