



Starting the Culture Conversation: Leaders Share Implications of COVID-19 on Organization

We heard you. More specifically, we heard you say you were overwhelmed and facing continual challenges. It's not surprising. Health care has never been described as a calm or tranquil setting. The very nature of illness and unplanned crises creates an environment of intensity and even, cacophony. With the most recent challenge of COVID-19, health care leaders and employees recently shared that the pace and level of anxiety has reached a tipping point.

The first phase of [Accordant's 2020 CEO/President Culture Survey](#) echoed some of these challenges and also provided core themes, all of which allow us to transition to a second research phase. In this [next survey initiative](#), research will expand to determine how leaders and staff members are addressing associate needs and adapting to the impact of ongoing fatigue on their corporate cultures.

IDENTIFYING AND LIVING CORE VALUES

Health care presidents and CEOs were asked in the initial survey for their organization's stated and lived values. Clear trends surfaced. The most frequently

stated value was integrity. Best-selling author Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW, addresses integrity while describing times of fear and uncertainty in her book, *Daring to Lead*. She stresses how vulnerability can be harnessed to rise up as a more resilient, courageous, and laser-focused leader. Brown shares the imperative to lean on values when making critical decisions, even when overwhelmed. While she acknowledges the overuse of the word integrity, she also believes it is the most appropriate term to employ at this time. "Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; it's choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and it's practicing your values, not just professing them."¹

When sharing lived or practiced organizational values, survey respondents were more likely to share values such as empathy, compassion, excellence and patient-centered care. While integrity is often described as an aspirational value, these practiced values presented a greater focus on the way in which care is delivered. The respondents provided an average score of 4 out of 5 for how embedded these values are in the organization, reflecting a strong organizational culture.

¹Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead: Brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts*. 227.

NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS OF COVID-19 ON CULTURE

When the respondent group considered cultural elements that have been harmed during the pandemic, more than 85% of respondents indicated organizational financial health was negatively impacted. This was considered a priority when recalibrating or re-energizing the organizational culture. The greatest negative implication of COVID-19 was the impact on the financial bottom line as identified by a large majority of the sample. When reflecting on this statement, it was troubling to also recognize only 12% of respondents believe there has been a heightened awareness within the community of health care finances and the negative impact on hospitals due to the pandemic.

More than 70% of respondents also identified employee engagement and mental health/clinician burnout as imperatives to focus on when considering organizational culture efforts. This isn't a surprise given clinician burnout was already high prior to COVID-19.

POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHALLENGES IN 2020

At a challenging time that few leaders could have ever predicted, industries pivoted, revising business goals and strategies. Health care was no different. A majority of survey respondents indicated that there have been

positive implications during the past year within their organizations, with 100% of respondents identifying the impact and legacy of telemedicine.

Leaders also identified the burgeoning need to demonstrate efforts to align diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization's values. At this time, ongoing education and hiring were cited as the primary strategies that are being more heavily embedded within their systems.

CONTINUING THE CRITICAL CONVERSATION

This past year has demonstrated bold and brave sacrifices by many in our society, especially health care workers. Frontline workers have been lauded by a nation that realized the fleeting and precarious state of health. But the crisis is not yet over and organizations are stretched on every front. While culture could be a key determinant of success in any industry, it is most notably front and center in health care at this time. When leaders are sharing times of challenge and discomfort, the entire organization will be called upon to share and lead with values. We look forward to hearing from more of you in [our next survey found here](#), which should take no more than ten minutes of your time.

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