

# The Developmental Journey

## Coverage of a Best Practices Sharing Forum

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Denison Asia Consulting, a **Mobley Group Pacific** company, recently hosted “Leading Change Across Boundaries: A Best Practice Forum for CEOs, Senior Executives, and Human Resource Leaders.”

The event was sponsored by Harvard Business Review (China) and attracted over 80 attendees.



### Starting the Voyage



The most apprehensive part of any journey is the uncertainty of the mission itself. Yet, the voyages that continue on, providing an abundance of opportunities to gather insights and knowledge, tend to be the most exciting. With a little direction and guidance, the anxiety of navigating through the seemingly endless journey called “development” can be transformed into the perseverance necessary to achieve multiple successes.

Transcending boundaries such as regional cultures, ambiguous matrix structures, and multiple business units that are geographically spread apart, is essential to the organizational effectiveness of MNC’s operating in the Asia Pacific region. Therefore, leading change across these boundaries is critical to the success of a developmental journey, whether it be individually or organizationally based. Dr. Dan Denison, of **Denison Consulting**, opened the first morning of the forum with a presentation that linked organizational effectiveness issues, both broad and specific, to company culture and leadership.

By showing the audience a list of well-thought out company values that seemed to capture the very essence of corporate citizenship, and then surprising them with the fact that these values came from Enron Corp., Dr. Denison immediately engaged forum attendees. He explained further that it doesn’t take too many people to stray too far from important principles in order to make a profound negative impact on an organization. “In a time when the oldest, most powerful and respected companies can disappear in six months or even six weeks, the issue of culture is at the core of what can keep an organization alive,” said Denison.



### Setting the Sails



Delving further into the analysis of the comprehensive Denison Organizational Culture Model, he expanded by stating “Culture is important because the only strategy that allows us to compete is the one we can actually implement. Without implementation of a mission there is no competitive strategy and there is no ‘return policy’ on an unimplemented mission.” Later, speaker Dr. Lismen Chan, VP of HR and Organization for **McDonalds’** APMEA regions, would lend weight to this advice by specifically referring to talent management, and describing the issue not as a competitive advantage, but as a necessity. “If you don’t do it you will be at a disadvantage because everyone else is,” he declared. Letting attendants in on the related strategy-change that helped McDonalds almost immediately bounce back with 52 consecutive months of positive sales after the company’s first quarterly loss in its 54 year history, while, at the same time, the organization coped with four CEOs in three years, was certainly a journey worth noting.

One of Dr. Denison’s favorite encapsulating quotes is “If everything is under control...you’re not going fast enough,” from racecar driver Mario Andretti. One only finds the limits of control by exceeding it in small increments. Culture, he explained, is a control system that lives in people’s hearts and minds. However, Cattaneo Giuseppe, CEO for **Pirelli** Tyre Co. (China) Ltd. later jokingly countered this remark during his presentation on JV’s in the PRC with his own twist, stating, “If everything is under control, you’re not in China.” Though meant humorously, Giuseppe’s comment captured best one of the predominating themes of the forum. That is, there are no perfect answers. Yet, listening to senior leaders openly share their experiences instilled confidence in others, not only because of their messages’ content applications or the inherent advice, but also because of the comforting knowledge that these organizations’ journeys are facing similar obstacles.



## Staying on Course



One inspiring story came from Frank Rexach, VP and GM of **Haworth** Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Middle East. Mr. Rexach's current journey started when he took the reigns of a company in serious decline, and, with his innovative team, brought it back to a billion dollar organization. By using his marketing instincts to better understand how his industry could strategically operate within the China context, he discovered ways to empower his team to become market leaders. His restructuring initiatives coupled with his keen understanding of China and India's "rise of the creative class" led to a renaissance for Haworth and the ergonomic side of talent management. How? As Mr. Rexach explained, the key to value deployment across the regions for which he is responsible comes from ensuring he and his people are aligned at a strategic level from the outset of the year. He makes sure that the individuals responsible for his sub-regions reflect these values and strategies in order to keep their teams energized.

Some stories were successful from the start, such as the one presented by Kim Ooi President of **TI Automotives** FCS China and ASEAN. Realizing the need for rapid growth to harness China's developing market, Mr. Ooi looked to change his company culture from that of a "chicken with its head down pleased with the seeds it was thrown, to an eagle who surveys the environment below to figure out what to do next." Using the Denison Organizational Culture survey, he found his organization scored in the higher percentiles for almost all of the measured aspects. But, as Dr. Denison pointed out, organizations that are already doing well can be quite compulsive about wanting to get better. Listening to Mr. Ooi's challenges, and how he used the Denison Organizational Culture Survey and the Denison 360 Surveys to develop in-house training programs, certainly confirmed this remark.

Mr. Werner Krieger, Senior Vice President, HR and Corporate Communications of **Henkel** Asia-pacific and Hong Kong shared how the corporate culture of his organization had an impact on talent attraction and retention. He had used the Denison tools to discover his 100-year-old, family owned company's cultural needs and to develop action steps. He again used the tools one year later to assess the progress that had been made. Other distinguished speakers included Lucy Qi, HR director for **Michelin**, Joan Popovich, HR Director for **Corning** Greater China and Yvonne Moore, VP of HR for **Medtronic**. Each one of these successful leaders shared individual or performance development plans that they implement in their region of responsibility.



## The Crew



Besides senior-level speakers from a range of industries, two **Denison Senior Consultants**, Bryan Adkins and Leeb Tannenbaum, also presented a case that is "still in the works." It was so current, they explained, that they were giving details to the client as they walked in the room. Such a case provided a chance for attendees to brainstorm, and offer opinions and interpretations of the ongoing project. Another highlight of the forum was the interactive workshop and sharing opportunity provided by Dr. Grant Levitan of **RHR International**. By analyzing and sharing their own personal and international journey experiences, forum attendees became aware that in order to effectively lead in another country, one must assume the qualities and behaviors associated with a "transpatriate" rather than those of an expatriate or even an "impatriate." Additionally, each day of the one and a half day forum (+ networking dinners) featured a panel with three speakers to answer attendees' questions and answers. After participating in this best-practices sharing forum, there was a general consensus that the cultural and developmental voyages ahead didn't seem so intimidating anymore.

