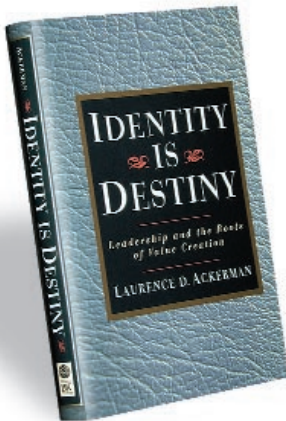




# Executive Book Summaries®



By Laurence D. Ackerman

## Leadership and the Roots of Value Creation

# IDENTITY IS DESTINY

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

According to corporate identity expert Laurence Ackerman, the true strength of an organization is reflected in its identity — the traits and actions that make it a unique being unto itself — and in its ability to leverage that identity into creating products and services that provide value to customers. The wealth that is generated from this transaction feeds back into the organization's identity, thus creating a never-ending value creation cycle of identity, products and services and wealth.

This is the ultimate result of what Ackerman terms the Laws of Identity, which, taken individually, form a compelling set of value-identifying guidelines for any organization. These laws of identity, which will be explored in detail in the following pages of this summary, are as follows:

- **The Law of Being.** Any organization composed of one or more human beings is alive in its own right, exhibiting the distinct capacities of the individuals who make up that organization.
- **The Law of Individuality.** An organization's human capacities invariably fuse into a discernible identity that makes that organization unique.
- **The Law of Constancy.** Identity is fixed, transcending time and place, while its manifestations are constantly changing.
- **The Law of Will.** Every organization is compelled by the need to create value in accordance with its identity.
- **The Law of Possibility.** Identity foreshadows potential.
- **The Law of Relationship.** Organizations are inherently relational, and those relationships are only as strong as the natural alignment between the identities of the participants.
- **The Law of Comprehension.** The individual capacities of the organization are only as valuable as the perceived value of the whole of that organization.
- **The Law of the Cycle.** Identity governs value, which produces wealth, which fuels identity.

The Laws of Identity can light the path to greater value creation. The first question to answer: Do your organizational activities reflect your corporate identity? Your self-analysis begins on the next page ...



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# IDENTITY IS DESTINY

by Laurence D. Ackerman

## — THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

### The Identity Credo and Laws of Identity

Identity contains its own logic. Many of the most memorable events in the lives of individuals or organizations can be explained in relation to who or what they are and who or what they are not. In recognizing this logic — and the insights that it yields — people and companies will find not only the red flags and stop signs that guide the direction and speed with which they pursue their goals, but also the flashing opportunities waiting to be seized along the way.

The logic of identity actually flows from a definable set of laws that clarify much of what works and doesn't work in life and business. These laws exist in a certain pattern, which form a credo — an “identity” credo — that organizes everything we are and do. Here is this credo, which speaks to both individuals and companies:

*I am alive, I am unique, and I am immutable, even as I grow and evolve. To truly live, however, I must express myself fully, and in this regard, have much to give. But to do so, I need others, and am most productive with those who need me in return. To establish these relationships, I must first be recognized for who I am, and it follows then that I will receive in accordance with what I give.*

This identity credo flows from the laws as follows:

**The Law of Being** (“I am alive ...”)

**The Law of Individuality** (“... I am unique...”)

**The Law of Constancy** (“... and I am immutable, even as I grow and evolve.”)

**The Law of Will** (“... To truly live, however, I must express myself fully ...”)

**The Law of Possibility** (“... and in this regard, I have much to give.”)

**The Law of Relationship** (“But to do so, I need others, and am most productive with those who need me in return.”)

**The Law of Comprehension** (“To establish these relationships, I must first be recognized for who I am ...”)

**The Law of the Cycle** (“... and it follows then that I will receive in accordance with what I give.”)

In the remaining pages of this summary, we will explore each of these eight laws in turn. ■

### The Law of Being

The Law of Being speaks to the need for separation from all others as a prerequisite to understanding who you

#### The Law of Being

*Any organization composed of one or more human beings is alive in its own right, exhibiting distinct physical, mental and emotional capacities that derive from, but transcend, the individuals who make up that organization over time.*

are; in other words, you cannot rely on others to define your capabilities, set your course, or tell you about what you must be truly passionate. Parents, friends, counselors, managers — everyone has their own agenda, some quick advice, or an erroneous suggestion that assumes they know something you don't.

The Law of Being reveals that organizations, by virtue of the fact that they are comprised of human beings, are alive. They are self-directing beings with minds of their own. The life of a company can be described in ways that illuminate its value on multiple levels. Specifically, a company's “being” can be described in terms of its

● **Human value.** A company's life derives from the thousands of people who make up the organization over time and, thus, it is a true reflection of the organization's aggregate skills and expertise.

● **Business value.** A company makes a distinctive contribution to the marketplace, in the products and ser-

*(continued on page 3)*

**The author:** Laurence D. Ackerman is senior vice-president at Siegel & Gale, an international strategic brand management consulting firm. He has written widely about corporate identity in such journals as *Across the Board*, *The Journal of Business Strategy* and the American Management Association's *Management Review*.

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### The Law of Being

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vices that flow from and reinforce identity, or in joint ventures that build upon the unique, value-creating characteristics of the partners.

- **Societal value.** A company, as a life force, brings about social improvement, impacting not just the people who comprise the organization, but also the greater world outside the walls of headquarters.

- **Economic value.** It is only in combining the effects of these three forms of value creation — human, business and societal — that leaders can assess the basic financial worth of the company, including long-term stock performance and portfolio turnover.

The Law of Being requires managers to practice the art and science of value creation on all four levels — human, business, societal and economic. The key for you as a leader is to liberate your company's identity and give it room to run. In practical terms, this means clarifying your company's innate strengths and working with those strengths to create value. ■

### The Law of Individuality

It's one thing to know that you are alive; it's another thing entirely to live according to who you are. Yet the defining leaders of this and previous generations have

#### The Law of Individuality

*An organization's human capacities invariably fuse into a discernible identity that makes that organization unique.*

exhibited an authenticity as individuals that effortlessly draws others to them. Likewise, the Law of Individuality asserts that every organization, like every individual, is unique. Corporate leaders must recognize that true

and sustainable differentiation is not only achievable, but also necessary. If an enterprise is to thrive, its unique, value-creating characteristics must be known.

Leaders must thus look deeply within the organization to find the root and full extensions of the company's identity by doing the following:

- **Commit to finding out.** Get to know the institution as the individual it truly is. Determine what makes the company special by soliciting input from the people — customers, suppliers, employees and the like — who interact with and within the company every day. How do they perceive your organization creates value, both for them and with them? How does the company contribute to the enhancement of their welfare and that of their customers? To the productive evolution of their enterprise? To the betterment of society as a whole? Dig

### Alcoa and the Law of Being

In the mid- and late-1980s, Alcoa was meeting new economic and competitive pressures by shrinking (while strengthening) activities inherent to its core aluminum business. For example, it was reducing smelting by 25 percent while continuing its search for new, significant uses for aluminum in industrial and commercial products.

At the same time, Alcoa was pursuing acquisitions and mergers designed to broaden the company's appeal beyond aluminum, developing new technologies, products and markets in areas such as ceramics and separations. The company was even considering buying an aerospace and defense organization.

For Alcoa's leaders, the company's identity was in transition as a result of this diversification. Author Ackerman was brought in to help redefine and communicate the identity of the "new Alcoa." Discerning the company's identity in the midst of such considerable change (the company diversification moves were coupled with management's efforts to decentralize) provided a unique challenge. Ackerman had to slice through these familiar business markers by searching for answers to one key question: If you strip away what the organization makes and sells, and if you regard its 55,000 employees as one individual, what was this "individual" really good at? From where does it derive its value?

The answer, Ackerman found, was *a genius for transformation*. Transformation — of new technology into new products or new products into new markets — was at the heart of Alcoa's identity. Alcoa even transformed society. For example, Alcoa transformed the aviation industry by allowing airplanes to be wrapped in aluminum instead of cloth. This development, in turn, helped the growth of the passenger aviation industry at the expense of the railroads.

If a genius for transformation was what defined Alcoa's identity — what set it apart from every other company — then transformation needed to be at the core of future corporate strategy or activities.

Alcoa pulled back from its diversification strategy and refocused on aluminum, thus ensuring that transformation remains key to the company's activities. Ackerman believes a diversification strategy could have also worked — as long as it remained guided by Alcoa's identity.

deep and proactively pursue the core components of your organizational individuality.

- **Assume nothing.** Most responses you receive will be multi-layered, although they may not seem so at first.

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### The Law of Individuality

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Such obvious, pat answers as low cost, service, speed, quality and innovation may actually only comprise the most superficial of layers to the true answer; peel back those layers and see what rests beyond them.

● **Celebrate individualism.** Look closely at your organization and find the capabilities and passions that make your company the individual that it is — these elements have very likely always been there. They must be drawn out and celebrated in order to make the discovery of your organizational identity that much more credible.

#### Fidelity Investments

Fidelity Investments wanted to make certain investors recognized the value in doing business with the company, not just with its myriad funds. The problem was that Fidelity's own employees, from managers on down, were inattentive to the institution as a whole, paying homage (as did their customers) instead to the company's various funds. The whole was, in essence, lost among the sum of its parts; there existed no real institutional glue to bind up the company's high-octane, entrepreneurial fund managers and marketing executives who had pushed the organization's growth projections to stunning heights.

What made this so astonishing was that, to a large extent, the company was driven by its need to celebrate individuals, as reflected in its commitment to private ownership; passion for innovation and invention; fierce reliance on personal skill and judgment as the foundation for the company's growth; and an almost organic organizational structure based on self-contained units or cells. Fidelity's need to celebrate individualism had been a part of its culture for as long as it had been in existence; no one within Fidelity knew that identity existed.

A commitment to individualism was the core of Fidelity's identity. Recognizing this identity, Fidelity managers took steps *not* to coordinate or control the company's activities, but rather to enhance the company's "individual to individual" connection with customers. One example: creating a company online database that provided daily fund information to all customers with personal computers and modems. ■

### The Law of Constancy

In the past decade, no issue had occupied leaders more than change — specifically, the need for change and how to achieve it. Wholesale change is often viewed as the path to salvation in a corporate environment in which nothing is sacred. This is an incorrect point of view — it

is identity, not change, that is sacred. For all managers who realize that life doesn't stand still and that their companies must change, this law demands a sharply counter-intuitive response —

#### The Law of Constancy

*Identity is fixed, transcending time and place, while its manifestations are constantly changing.*

"change" initiatives, if they are to succeed, must be made in concert with the identity of the institution.

After all, change is really built into identity — both individually and in the context of the corporation.

The challenge is to use outside forces — economic, competitive, technological and societal — to spark new ways of interpreting identity, rather than as reasons to change it.

#### Korn/Ferry International

Korn/Ferry International, the widely regarded executive search firm, met this challenge head-on. While most of its competitors focused solely on searches for senior-level executives, Korn/Ferry drew criticism for focusing on mid-level executives, a tactic that expanded its revenue base and influence with clients, but which ran counter to virtually every other like-tasked business in their market.

Rather than roll with the familiar or the accepted, Korn/Ferry went even further against the grain when it launched FutureStep, an online career management program that reviewed, categorized and tracked credentials submitted by mostly mid-level candidates. The initiative

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### The Law of Constancy and Brand Management

The Law of Constancy tells us much about the corporate brand:

- ✓ Its definition resides within the identity of the enterprise and cannot simply be fabricated.
- ✓ It is not transitory — not simply a statement of today's corporate features — but timeless in terms of the benefits it yields.
- ✓ It requires constant reinterpretation.
- ✓ It is (or should be) "of the moment" in how it is interpreted.
- ✓ It must be established by companies as their own "turf" and defended vigorously against fads, fashions, and competitor's standards or views.
- ✓ Its strengths must develop over time and, to be fully known, must be viewed through the lens of history as well as current events and future aspirations.

### The Law of Constancy

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was based in using technology — in this case, the “downscale” forum of the Internet — to create a cutting-edge, contemporary expression of the organization’s bias toward multilevel, multifunctional searches. This “new” idea was actually based in an attitude and aptitude the company had held all along, one firmly rooted in its unwavering identity: a need to build leadership capital. ■

### The Law of Will

The Law of Will can manifest itself in many ways — the will to break a world record in a sport, to scale Mount Everest, to be one of the most admired companies

#### The Law of Will

*Every organization is compelled by the need to create value in accordance with its identity.*

in the nation, to build the fastest, the sleekest, the most of every good thing. The Law of Will drives people and companies to be the best at whatever they do. There is, however, a danger hidden in this Law — the danger lies in

attempting, or “willing” yourself, to be something you are not, something that doesn’t spring naturally from your identity.

A company must have a deep-seated need to create value on its own terms — it must express itself fully. Managers must make it their business to know the identity of their organization before they attempt to set the direction for that organization. They must either recognize the will of the institution as a central, value-creating force or be prepared to see their company falter.

### The Upjohn Company

The Upjohn Company, a giant in the pharmaceuticals industry, spent a great deal of time dealing with a conflict within the organization, between the will of those who would tie the company’s future to a relatively narrow path and the will of the institution itself, whose method of value creation was much broader.

This conflict was apparent in the uncompromising way the company approached quality — everyone in the organization took great pride in making drugs that were superior in quality to those of competitors. This admirable approach contained hidden problems. First of all, people outside the organization — customers and investors — did not view quality as an overt advantage. The other problem stemmed from the way quality was defined, valued and lived on a day-to-day basis; indeed, the company was operating in line with three very clear but unspoken definitions of quality:

- **Quality of products.** The ways in which Upjohn ensured the quality of its products seemed ritualistic, in some ways, unnecessarily so — its products regularly exceeded FDA standards.

- **Quality of life.** The environment in which employees worked was immaculate, but the value of such a setting influenced the enterprise to a surprising extent. Form reigned over substance; the comfort it generated led to a somewhat genteel pace of business.

- **Quality of people.** Although Upjohn held employees to the highest ethical standards, the company’s resources weren’t always deployed to the service of improving business performance or enhancing the company’s ability to compete on a global scale.

With such an importance placed on quality — quality products, quality people — why couldn’t Upjohn reach its full potential? The answer lies in a comment made by the company’s marketing manager — “Risk taking is too risky.” The company’s push for quality and high ethical standards bred employees who were aggressive go-getters — creative, passionate people who could create value in a way that played off the strengths of their collective identity. The company’s conservative business practices, however, stymied the energy of its employees; its insistence on creating value its way, not theirs, created discord with the true identity of the organization. Upjohn’s merger with Pharmacia — its demise as an independent enterprise — is a direct result of this conflict between the company’s identity and the company’s practices and strategies.

Identity precedes strategy. If the direction of a company is to have staying power — whether it is referred to as vision, mission, strategy or purpose — leaders must ensure that it flows from identity. ■

### The Law of Possibility

The Law of Possibility becomes a window on the future of an organization in ways that reveal its potential for timeless value creation. The richest avenues with the

#### The Law of Possibility

*Identity foreshadows potential.*

greatest potential for growth lie in understanding the natural drive of the organization. Managers who chase new markets

solely because they are “high growth” and those who seek diversification simply to smooth the ups and downs of business cycles are focusing in the wrong places. They must first look at the value-creating potential inherent in the identity of their institutions if they want to grow in ways that are both natural and profitable.

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## The Law of Possibility

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### Westinghouse

Westinghouse ensured its own demise by failing to make this connection. Its obsession with short-term financial performance — seen in microcosm in the many foundering divisions of its Advanced Industrial Systems (AIS) unit — never put Westinghouse in the same league as Caterpillar, IBM and Marriott, as the company’s senior management insisted it would. Its plan to reach “greatness” was based on strategies to achieve a greater return on equity (ROE), not to create value for its customers or partners.

AIS, however, could and did create value through the collective sharing of four distinct capabilities:

- **A problem-solving approach to customer interaction**
- **A holistic view of their customer’s needs**
- **An obsessive concern with the customer’s welfare**
- **A deep regard for technology in general, and for engineering in particular**

To articulate the identity of AIS was to reveal its potential to create value as a single, optimally integrat-

ed organization. In the ROE-obsessed culture of Westinghouse, however, such value creation could not help the unit turn a profit. As a result, AIS never came close to “greatness,” as defined by management, and was dissolved — a tragic result of Westinghouse’s ignorance of its productive potential as an organization.

While leaders certainly must keep economic requirements in mind, they must also rethink what constitutes reasonable payback time horizons and acceptable ROE. They must employ identity as a guide to growth, keeping in mind that their organization as a corporate being must strive to exercise and deepen its own identity as a means by which to achieve that growth. ■

## The Law of Relationship

Organizations are most productive with those who

### The Law of Relationship

*Organizations are inherently relational, and those relationships are only as strong as the natural alignment between the identities of the participants.*

need them in return; this interdependence yields an entire framework for leading on the strength of relationships. Leaders must manage relationships with stakeholders as a whole system, not as a portfolio

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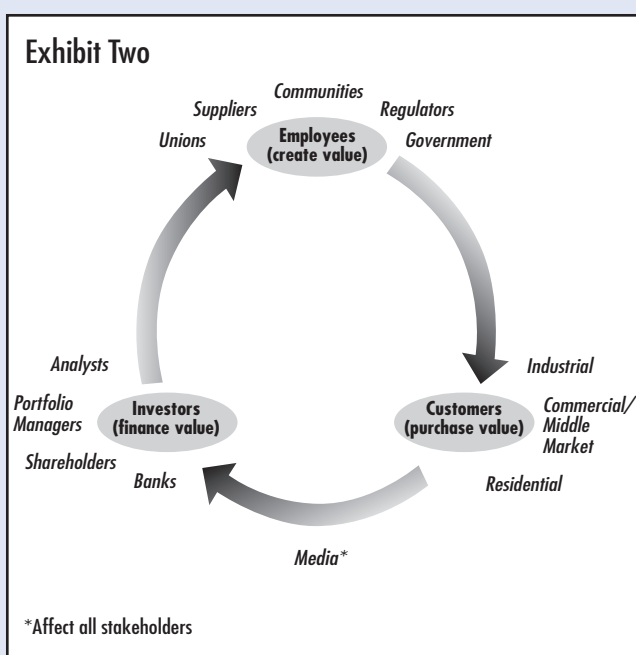
## The Value Circle

The Law of Relationship supplies a model called the value circle, which addresses value creation through the eyes of all stakeholders, revealing the inviolable cause-and-effect relationship among employees, customers and investors. In accordance with the Law, companies do not have a collection of stakeholders; they have a system of stakeholders, with a natural order that manifests itself in the following ways:

- ✓ Employees create value through their ideas, innovations, talents, experience and skills, and through the products and services they build, market and sell.
- ✓ Customers purchase value to the extent that they like the offerings (or the value) that they see. Revenues, sales and profits are at stake here.
- ✓ Investors finance value, putting capital back into the organization as they “approve of” the earnings that flow from the value “purchased” by customers. This act closes the loop on the value circle, fueling its constant momentum.

It is important to note that, in the value circle, no one stakeholder group is more important than any other.

Investors are not, as one may think, the primary focus of the circle; this risks future growth for the sake of the present. Investors are best served by seeing themselves as beneficiaries of the value created through the interaction between employees and customers.



### The Law of Relationship

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of separate, distinct relationships. The work of an organization must thus be organized in ways that put the value circle in motion (see sidebar on previous page), thus building momentum and creating a relationship advantage that will stand the test of time.

#### *New York State Gas and Electric*

That organizations are most productive with those who need them in return suggests something else no leader can afford to ignore — the fact that *need* is determined by *identity*. New York State Electric and Gas is driven by a need to “shape energy environments.” This need governs the company’s relationships with all stakeholders, implying value in many forms:

- For employees, NYSEG creates and sustains energy around the goal of improving the efficiency and quality of its customers’ lives and businesses.
- For customers, the company focuses on boosting productivity and competitiveness (for business customers) and contributing to health, ease and reliability (for residential customers).
- For investors, NYSEG builds its brand franchise and its ability to improve earnings by modularizing its approach to identifying and meeting the needs of its customers.

Taken together, these messages form the basis of a new contract with NYSEG’s most important stakeholders, aligning its approach to meeting the needs of its three core constituencies, using the value circle to simultaneously enhance its relationships with all three. ■

### The Law of Comprehension

One of the underlying themes of identity is that we must take responsibility for ourselves, both as individuals and as organizations, to build productive relationships,

#### The Law of Comprehension

*The individual capacities of the organization are only as valuable as the perceived value of the whole of that organization.*

pursue personal and professional goals, and accept the good and the bad that result from our actions. We have the need to be known for who we are as a prerequisite for building potent relationships with others. On an organizational level, managers must be certain that their organization’s capacity to create value is likewise understood.

Again, we refer to the value circle (first referenced in

the Law of Relationship) and how the needs of the three main stakeholders are affected by the Law of Comprehension:

- Current and future employees must know the identity of the enterprise they help form if they are going to live it, keeping it fresh, vital and relevant.
- Investors must know the company’s identity, because identity is the key driver of wealth.
- Customers must be made to experience identity at every turn, regardless of whether they can articulate that identity.

Indeed, the role of the leader is to find every conceivable way to ensure identity is woven into the day-to-day operations of the enterprise. The Law of Comprehension is, first and foremost, fueled by how employees speak of the company and how they behave during and after work. These actions reinforce the work that is done and how that work results in products and services that are (or should be) the natural expression of identity. On an organizational level, the Law of Comprehension is reinforced through the policies and practices of the company toward the communities in which it lives, through its recognition of the whole organization and more than just the sum of its parts, and the visibility of value throughout the entire enterprise. ■

### The Law of the Cycle

The final Law of Identity notes that companies will receive in direct accordance with what they give. The Law of the Cycle is expressed in another circle, not

#### The Law of the Cycle

*Identity governs value, which produces wealth, which fuels identity.*

unlike the value circle. The things we believe we are (as workers and practitioners of our various interests) prescribe our sense of self and foreshadow the gifts we share with family,

friends, clients and business associates. The wealth we receive in exchange for sharing those gifts a) depends on how well we blend those two intrinsically connected roles, and b) ever more fuels the expression of our identity. For companies as well as individuals, wealth is not only about money, but also the things that, like a magnet, draw people back to us over and over again.

#### *Maytag*

Home appliance conglomerate Maytag asked Laurence Ackerman to clarify the meaning of the venerable company — how its goals and practices dovetailed

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### The Law of the Cycle

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with its identity. What he found was that the external perception of the organization as merely “a collection of pieces and parts” had been taken to heart within the company as well. One could tell this from the way Maytag introduced itself in its annual reports: “Maytag Corporation ... consists of x companies with y manu-

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*... the external perception of the organization as merely “a collection of pieces and parts” had been taken to heart within the company as well.*

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facturing operations in z countries and approximately xx,000 employees.” Only the numbers changed from year to year, reflecting the year’s acquisitions, expansions and layoffs. Maytag’s management had no real definition of the company’s unique

role as a corporate being and, thus, explicated its identity and purpose in terms that were as quantifiable as it could make them.

Ackerman’s analysis revealed the core of Maytag’s identity: the need to improve the quality of home life. Maytag wasn’t an appliance company nor a manufacturing conglomerate. It was a home management enterprise. The many brands of Maytag — including Hoover, Jenn-Air, Magic Chef and Maytag — were just the bridges that connected customers to this home management enterprise. Helping customers improve the quality of their home lives — not selling customers more brands — was the value that Maytag created. The better Maytag helped customers improve their home lives, the more value the company created and, thus, the more wealth it generated. ■

### In conclusion ...

Organizations must recognize identity as the invisible, immortal core that governs organizations just as it governs people. What we do with this knowledge — how we respond to the Laws of Identity as individuals, professionals and business leaders — is a challenge each of us must meet on our own terms.

The only real prerequisite to engaging identity as life’s center of gravity is believing deeply in the potential of people and organizations to create value for others, and to realize wealth in return. This is the imperative of true leaders. For individuals and organizations fueled by this belief, the Laws of Identity are there as a guide. ■

### Managing by New Criteria

The Laws of Identity can be applied to all facets of day-to-day management which, when practiced in the light of identity, will help ensure the creation of value and wealth over time. This new criteria for management affects a broad swath of executive and managerial level leaders in every identity-centered organization:

- ✓ For board directors, identity may suggest the criteria for choosing chief executives, including such factors as servant leadership, insight into organizations and insight into the external environment.
- ✓ For CEOs, in turn, identity provides criteria for the composition of the board, specifically in the congruence of the candidates’ world views with the value-creating characteristics of the organization. It also supplies a frame of reference for picking business partners with similar congruent goals and identities.
- ✓ For CFOs, identity provides an expanded framework for stock valuation, identifying the companies and income statements that reflect commitment in investiture and operations in accordance with identity.
- ✓ For strategic planning executives, identity provides the source of competitive differentiation and sustainable growth.
- ✓ For marketing managers, identity provides criteria for market expansion — identifying those markets where the company believes it can make a proprietary contribution based on its identity.
- ✓ For line managers, identity provides the framework for planning and running a business, clarifying the value-creating role of the unit.
- ✓ For HR executives, identity dictates how and who you recruit, hire and train. It also provides vital criteria for performance appraisals, compensation and employee recognition, establishing a framework for effective employee performance and involvement.
- ✓ For communications executives, identity is the message — the cornerstone of all communications, internal and external, now and in the future. The identity of the organization and how it affects the company’s relationships with all stakeholders is inviolable.