

Organizational Culture and Management

What is your organization's culture? The culture of an organization includes symbols, beliefs, and behavior patterns of its employees. Culture is exhibited in management styles, structures, ethics, dress, and even the view of time management. The visions of current and past leaders continue to impact organizational culture. Strong cultures are more commonly found in companies with an entrepreneurial spirit. Visualize, for example, the culture of IBM versus that of Microsoft or the culture of the U. S. Army versus the culture at a fast food restaurant. Vastly different images of the organization come to mind as you visualize dress, roles, structure, organization, closeness, and a number of other variables.

Organizational culture guides the ways an organization functions. It directs the behavior of the employees within the organization and emphasizes what behaviors are expected and acceptable and what behaviors are not. It is particularly important for new employees to understand the culture as soon as possible. However new employees often find it difficult to understand the rules of the workplace culture. Most report it takes time to determine conduct that is acceptable and what is not.

Reasons for career change or moving to a different organization often include problems with the culture and the person's fit with the prevailing culture.

Cultures can act as a defense against the unknown and organizational rites provide a means of providing stability. Cultures are intangible but give an organization its cohesiveness yet cultures can also exclude others—outsiders

or new members—who don't fit the traditional culture. Examples of closed cultures might include locker rooms, playgrounds, or social clubs.

In new businesses, people from diverse backgrounds are brought together in a workplace and over time a dominant set of norms will emerge and thus give rise to the corporate culture. Think of a child changing to a new school in mid-year or for their senior year of highschool and having to adapt to a new culture. New employees feel the same way as they learn acceptable behaviors and work place patterns. A detailed employee handbook, a well-planned orientation and videos and other materials that reinforce the corporate culture can make indoctrination easier.

Managers need to monitor the organizational culture and focus on developing relationships with their employees that reinforce a desired culture. The dominant culture of an organization must be strong enough to include the members of all subcultures in the workplace if the organization is to succeed. Strong cultures are generally associated with employee commitment and can often lead to a competitive advantage as all employees become focused on the organizations goals. Strong cultures are usually seen as a way to improve productivity and employee interactions, but this may not always be true. It can lead to desensitization of the outside environment as people become comfortable in the culture they adapt to, and it may also exclude those who do not fit the dominant culture of an organization.

Culture is not an unchanging given. Members of an organization sustain or change a culture. This is particularly evident when a new leader takes over, changes symbols, stories, slogans, or ceremonies. Major changes in the environment—legal, social, or political issues—often signal the need to change

established beliefs and practices and adopt new cultures. If you sense your organizational culture needs to be changed, educational programs, the addition of new skills or employee promotions or lateral movement can break up entrenched work groups and create new teams and culture. Top management must have an explicit focus on the development and maintenance of their culture. Once managers understand the culture of their organization they can implement change if necessary. This is done through modeling by managers, issuing statements and policies, creating slogans, etc.

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