

## Organizational Culture

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### ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the meaning of organizational culture. Organizational culture encompasses values and behaviors that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of a business. The organizational culture influences the way people interact, the context within which knowledge is created, the resistance they will have towards certain changes, and ultimately the way they share (or the way they do not share) knowledge. Organizational culture represents the collective values, beliefs and principles of organizational members. It may also be influenced by factors such as history, type of product, market, technology, strategy, type of employees, management style, and national culture. Culture includes the organization's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols, language, assumptions, environment, location, beliefs and habits. Would you act the same way at a rock*

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*concert as you would while watching a symphony orchestra perform? Although there are no written rules that dictate the acceptable way to act at either type of performance, the concert audience will try to make it very clear to you if your behavior does not conform to what they consider to be appropriate. The culture within an organization is very important, playing a large role in whether it is a happy and healthy environment in which to work. In communicating and promoting the organizational ethos to employees, their acknowledgement and acceptance of it can influence their work behavior and attitudes. Organizational culture includes the values, beliefs, behaviors, norms and artifacts that connect the members of an organization. As in all other cultures, organizational culture develops over a long period of time with the participation of the members.*

### INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture can be defined as the philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes and norms that knit an organization together and are shared by its employees". Organizational culture encompasses values and behaviors that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of a business [1]. The organizational culture influences the way people interact, the context within which knowledge is created, the resistance they will have towards certain changes, and ultimately the way they share (or the way they do not share) knowledge. Organizational culture represents the collective values, beliefs and principles of organizational members. It may also be influenced by factors such as history, type of product, market, technology, strategy, type of

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[2] characterize organizational culture as a set of shared assumptions that guide behaviors. It is also the pattern of such collective behaviors and assumptions that are taught to new organizational members as a way of perceiving and, even thinking and feeling.[3] Thus organizational culture affects the way people and groups interact with each other, with clients, and with stakeholders. In addition, organizational culture may affect how much employees identify with an organization [4].

[5], [6], [7] advanced the idea that organizations often have very differing cultures as well as subcultures. Although

a company may have its "own unique culture," in larger organizations there are sometimes co-existing or conflicting subcultures because each subculture is linked to a different management team. [8] suggest that one can view organizational culture as "corporate personality." They define it as it consisting of the values, beliefs, and norms which influence the behavior of people as members of an organization.

According to [9], "Organizational culture can be defined as a pattern of basic assumptions- invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration-that has worked well enough to be considered valuable and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems".

The above definitions of organizational culture stress on the sharing of norms and values that guide the organizational members' behaviour. These norms and values are clear guidelines as to how employees are to behave within the organizational and their expected code of conduct outside the organization. Organizational culture is another framework within which the behaviours of the members take place. Though culture, as derived from Anthropology, is defined in so many ways and, therefore, includes a variety of factors, organizational culture is defined more precisely.

"Organizational culture is the set of assumptions, beliefs values and norms that are shared by an organization's members". Thus, organization culture is a set of assumptions, that the members of an organization share in common. Such assumptions may be in the form of internally-oriented characteristics like belief, values, attitudes, feelings, personality types and so on known as abstract elements of the culture; or externally-oriented characteristics like products, buildings, dresses, etc., known as material element of the culture. Prof. Vijay Sathe, Harvard Business School, has exemplified some common things to demonstrate the components of organizational culture [10].

### Review of Organizational culture

Would you act the same way at a rock concert as you would while watching a symphony orchestra perform? Although there are no written rules that dictate the acceptable way to act at either type of performance, the concert audience will try to make it very clear to you if your behavior does not conform to what they consider to be appropriate.

Would you dress the same way to attend a golf tournament as you would to attend a football game? Although both are sporting events, there are a set of unwritten rules that dictate what is considered to be the acceptable way to dress for each type of event, and the people in attendance will send you signals as to whether or not they think you are dressed appropriately.

At concerts, sporting events, and just about everywhere that people get together, group members convey social expectations by how they dress and act. Newcomers to the group are expected to learn what is acceptable to the group by observing the behavior and dress code of the group members and adapting to the situation accordingly [11] [12].

At the deepest level, an organization's culture is based on values derived from basic assumptions about the following:

- **Human nature.** Are people inherently good or bad, mutable or immutable, proactive or reactive? These basic assumptions lead to beliefs about how employees, customers and suppliers should interact and how they should be managed.
- **The organization's relationship to its environment.** How does the organization define its business and its constituencies?
- **Appropriate emotions.** Which emotions should people be encouraged to express, and which ones should be suppressed?
- **Effectiveness.** What metrics show whether the organization and its individual components are doing well? An organization will be effective only when the culture is supported by an appropriate business strategy and a structure

that is appropriate for both the business and the desired culture.

Culture is a nebulous concept and is often an undefined aspect of an organization. Although extensive academic literature exists relating to the topic of organizational culture, there is no generally accepted definition of culture. Instead, the literature expresses many different views as to what organizational culture is.

Organizational culture can manifest itself in a variety of ways, including leadership behaviors, communication styles, internally distributed messages and corporate celebrations. Given that culture comprises so many elements, it is not surprising that terms for describing specific cultures vary widely [13]. Some commonly used terms for describing cultures include aggressive, customer-focused, innovative, fun, ethical, research-driven, technology-driven, process-oriented, hierarchical, family-friendly and risk-taking.

Because culture is difficult to define, organizations may have trouble maintaining consistency in their messages about culture. Employees may also find it difficult to identify and communicate about perceived cultural inconsistencies.

#### **Principle of Organizational culture**

By adopting the following principles, your organization can learn to deploy and improve its culture in a manner that will increase the odds of financial and operational success.

1. **Work with and within your current cultural situations.** Deeply embedded cultures cannot be replaced with simple upgrades, or even with major overhaul efforts. Nor can your culture be swapped out for a new one as though it were an operating system or a CPU. To a degree, your current cultural situation just is what it is and it contains components that provide natural advantages to companies as well as components that may act as brakes [14].
2. **Change behaviors, and mind-sets will follow.** It is a commonly held view that behavioral change

follows mental shifts, as surely as night follows day. This is why organizations often try to change mind-sets (and ultimately behavior) by communicating values and putting them in glossy brochures. This technique didn't work well for Enron, where accounting fraud and scandal were part of everyday practice, even as the company's espoused values of excellence, respect, integrity, and communication were carved into the marble floor of the atrium of its global headquarters in Houston [15].

3. **Focus on a critical few behaviors.** Conventional wisdom advocates a comprehensive approach everybody should change everything that's not perfect! But companies must be rigorously selective when it comes to picking behaviors. The key is to focus on what we call "the critical few," a small number of important behaviors that would have great impact if put into practice by a significant number of people.
4. **Deploy your authentic informal leaders.** Authority, which is conferred by a formal position, should not be confused with leadership. Leadership is a natural attribute, exercised and displayed informally without regard to title or position in the organizational chart [16]. Because authentic informal leaders, who are found in every organization, are often not recognized as such, they are frequently overlooked and underused when it comes to driving culture.
5. **Don't let your formal leaders off the hook.** Most organizations tend to shunt culture into the silo of human resources professionals. But leaders in all parts of the company are critical in safeguarding and championing desired behaviors, energizing personal feelings, and reinforcing cultural alignment [17]. The signaling of emotional

commitment sets the tone for others to follow.

6. **Link behaviors to business objectives.** When people talk about feelings, motivations, and values all of which are vital elements of strong cultures — the conversation can often veer into abstractions. It may then range far afield of what it takes to succeed in the market [18]. Too many employees walk away from culture-focused town halls or values discussions wondering how the advice on how to be a better person actually translates into the work they do.
7. **Demonstrate impact quickly.** We live in an age of notoriously short attention spans. That applies as much to organizational culture as it does to people's media consumption habits. When people hear about new high-profile initiatives and efforts, and then don't see any activity related to them for several months, they'll disengage and grow cynical. That's why it is extremely important to showcase the impact of cultural efforts on business results as quickly as possible.
8. **Use cross-organizational methods to go viral.** Ideas can spread virally across organizational departments and functions, as well as from the top down and from the bottom up. One powerful way to spread ideas is through social media: blogs, Facebook or LinkedIn posts, and tweets not from senior management, but from some of the authentic informal leaders mentioned in Principle 4.
9. **Align programmatic efforts with behaviors.** We've emphasized the role that informal leaders can play in helping ideas go viral. But it's also important to match the new cultural direction with existing ways of doing business. Informal mechanisms and cultural interventions must complement and integrate with the more

common formal organization components, not work at cross-purposes. By providing the structure in which people work through disciplines such as organization design, analytics, human resources, and lean process improvement the formal organization provides a rational motivation for employee actions, while the informal organization enables the emotional commitment that characterizes peak performance.

10. **Actively manage your cultural situation over time.** Companies that have had great success working with culture we call them "culture superstars" actively monitor, manage, care for, and update their cultural forces. Why? As we noted at the outset, when aligned with strategic and operating priorities, culture can provide hidden sources of energy and motivation that can accelerate changes faster than formal processes and programs. Even if you have a highly effective culture today, it may not be good enough for tomorrow.

#### **Factors That Shape an Organization's Culture**

Organizational leaders often speak about the unusual natures of their company cultures, seeing their domains as special places to work. But organizations such as Disney and Nordstrom, which are well-known for their unique cultures, are rare. Most company cultures are not that different from one another. Even organizations in disparate industries such as manufacturing and health care tend to share a common core of cultural values [4]. For example, most private-sector companies want to grow and increase revenues. Most strive to be team-oriented and to demonstrate concern for others. Most are driven, rather than relaxed, because they are competing for dollars and market share. Some of the cultural characteristics that distinguish most organizations include the following.

#### **Values**

At the heart of organizations' cultures are commonly shared values. None is right or wrong, but organizations need to decide which values they will emphasize. These common values include:

- Outcome orientation. Emphasizing achievements and results.
- People orientation. Insisting on fairness, tolerance and respect for the individual.
- Team orientation. Emphasizing and rewarding collaboration.
- Attention to detail. Valuing precision and approaching situations and problems analytically.
- Stability. Providing security and following a predictable course.
- Innovation. Encouraging experimentation and risk-taking.
- Aggressiveness. Stimulating a fiercely competitive spirit.

#### **Degree of hierarchy**

The degree of hierarchy is the extent to which the organization values traditional channels of authority. The three distinct levels of hierarchy are "high" having a well-defined organizational structure and an expectation that people will work through official channels; "moderate" having a defined structure but an acceptance that people often work outside formal channels; and "low" having loosely defined job descriptions and accepting that people challenge authority. An organization with a high level of hierarchy tends to be more formal and moves more slowly than an organization with a low level of hierarchy.

#### **Degree of urgency**

The degree of urgency defines how quickly the organization wants or needs to drive decision-making and innovation. Some organizations choose their degree of urgency, but others have it thrust on them by the marketplace. A culture with high levels of urgency has a need to push projects through quickly and a high need to respond to a changing marketplace [8]. A moderate level of urgency moves projects at a reasonable pace. A low level of urgency means people work slowly and consistently, valuing quality over efficiency. An organization with high

urgency tends to be fast-paced and supports a decisive management style. An organization with low urgency tends to be more methodical and supports a more considered management style.

#### **People orientation or task orientation**

Organizations usually have a dominant way of valuing people and tasks. An organization with a strong people orientation tends to put people first when making decisions and believes that people drive the organization's performance and productivity. An organization with a strong task orientation tends to put tasks and processes first when making decisions and believes that efficiency and quality drive organization performance and productivity [12]. Some organizations may get to choose their people and task orientations. But others may have to fit their orientation to the nature of their industry, historical issues or operational processes.

#### **Functional orientation**

Every organization puts an emphasis on certain functional areas. Examples of functional orientations may include marketing, operations, research and development, engineering or service. For example, an innovative organization known for its research and development may have at its core a functional orientation toward R&D. A hospitality company may focus on operations or service, depending on its historical choices and its definition in the marketplace [4]. Employees from different functions in the company may think that their functional areas are the ones that drive the organization. Organizational leaders must understand what most employees perceive to be the company's functional orientation.

#### **Organizational subcultures**

Any organization can have a mix of subcultures in addition to the dominant culture. Subcultures exist among groups or individuals who may have their own rituals and traditions that, although not shared by the rest of the organization, can deepen and underscore the organization's core values. Subcultures can also cause serious problems.

For example, regional cultures often differ from the overall culture that top

leadership tries to instill. Perhaps aggressiveness that is common in one area may not mesh with a culture emphasizing team building [9]. Or an organization with a culture built around

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equality may have trouble if the national culture emphasizes hierarchy and expects people to bow to authority. Managers and HR professionals must recognize those differences and address them directly.

#### CONCLUSION

culture develops over a long period of time with the participation of the members. Through studying or analyzing the culture of an organization, you are able to come up with various conclusions. These include conclusions about the resistance of culture, organizational performance, and communication and leadership styles. These conclusions can be helpful for managers and consultants seeking to encourage better organizational cultures.

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