



Why Culture That Doesn't Engage Doesn't Do Enough

This paper explains the definitions of business culture, the values that support the culture and the value the culture creates. As well, we examine the typical and potential impacts attention to business culture produces (or not). The management & culture section details the relationship between management (theory, psychology, skills) and business culture as direct contributors to a business's cultural success. The importance of employee population engagement in the culture—rather than merely in meeting minimum expectations—is known to produce any/all of a variety of desired business results. Finally, a summary of information and services available through Wright Results are listed.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Definitions

Organizational culture is the personality of an organization. Culture is comprised of assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs (artifacts) of organization members and their behaviors.

(Free Management Library)

Culture is the environment that surrounds you at work all the time. Culture is a powerful element that shapes your work enjoyment, your work relationships, and your work processes. . . . Culture is made up of the values, beliefs, underlying assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors shared by a group of people. Culture is the behavior that results when a group arrives at a set of . . . rules for working together.

(Susan Heathfield, www.humanresources.about.com)

. . . a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership)

A business culture develops from the genesis of the business. Business leaders may carefully define, sow and landscape the culture. Employees may cause it to grow rampant and randomly, fertilized by the attitudes and behaviors of the more prominent members.

The culture exists in both *formal* and *informal* forms. Formal culture is composed, published, and distributed, usually in such documents of Policy and Procedures, Employee Orientation Guide, Annual Reports, and Communications to Community and Clients. Informal culture is recognized, respected, and followed without ever being printed and rarely being spoken.

The informal culture typically exerts greater influence on factors including but not limited to *employee motivation and satisfaction, community respect, customer satisfaction and loyalty, candidate recruitment and employee retention, management success, financial success (revenue, expense, profitability)*

Value

Culture provides fundamental values from which the business operates. These values—behavioral, operational, interpersonal, and ethical—determine the value the business generates (financial, community, political, commercial, spiritual, etc.)

For example, a hospital may epitomize the values of appreciating the worth of the individual and committing to the continuous well-being of its community. By doing so effectively and throughout its entire population base, that hospital experiences valuable loyalty and respect among its employees, its patients and their families, and the members of its community.

Similarly, a hospital may operate with attention to the procedures and processes that keep it running but without attention to the culture (and values) from which it makes its decisions and choices. That hospital is more likely to experience indifference (at best) from the several customer bases it seeks to satisfy: patients, physicians, employees, shareholders.

Impact: Typical

Many organizations (hospitals included) ignore their culture. Consequently, it goes unrecognized until a problem arises. It is sensible to pay attention to the *needs of the business*, yet it is strategically significant to pay attention to the business culture.

Consider how rarely organizations hold conversations among all levels of employees concerning what the business stands for; what values are most critical to fulfilling the business purpose, vision, and mission; what values at the individual level contribute substance to the business values; what daily behaviors exemplify those values.

Such rare attention (or inattention) limits successes the organization can achieve. Such cultural indifference means putting out more fires, solving more problems, dealing with greater dissatisfactions.

Impact: Potential

An organization that keeps its culture—the purpose, the values, the behaviors—clearly in its view gives itself more chances for greater successes.

Knowing the culture at the three levels allows all employees to operate with both a macro- and micro-view of living the culture and therefore satisfying the culture's intentions.

The three levels are

- What does the culture contribute to the business's overall *purpose*? How?
- What *values* support that culture and are expected by that culture?
- What *behaviors* manifest and implement those values?

A business can experience almost unlimited potential success by attending culture conscientiously.

MANAGEMENT & CULTURE

Managers' job is not to hold employees' noses to the "culture fire." Rather, managers should create work environments that provide clear and continuous awareness of the culture, opportunities for employees to appreciate and apply the culture (and their role in the culture).

Since 2002, I have conducted slightly more than 300 hours of interviews and discussions with leaders, managers and supervisors in the healthcare industry. Here is a summary of conclusions drawn:

Below are several related conclusions, drawn from more than 300 hours of research conducted since 2005.

- A manager's responsibility is to develop high-quality performers among her employees.
- The manager should balance his attention to *engagement, performance, and results*.
- Employees who are actively engaged in their work perform more favorably, more productively, and more positively.
- Employees' performance produces results like customer satisfaction and loyalty, error reduction, improved candidate recruitment, and enhanced employee retention, greater employee satisfaction/morale/productivity.
- Complementary attention to *Engagement, Performance, Results* requires an innovative approach to management.
- Managers must convey clear job expectations and promote employees' desire to engage in fulfilling those expectations.
- Managers need to give employees opportunities to engage in continuous development, that they may achieve expected results more readily.
- Managers coach and mentor employee performance; they also support engagement not only in one's job but in related areas such as company objectives, professional and functional networks, career achievement, and community support.
- Managers need continuous awareness of ways to infuse their everyday management tasks with communication, opportunities, and resources that stimulate engagement.

Those conclusions produce following four elements that comprise a manager's true role in stimulating employee engagement in/for the business culture:

- **Communication:** the responsibility to be present and prepared to share and receive communication continually.
- **Opportunity:** the commitment to create, recognize, and endorse situations that give employees reason to engage.
- **Resources:** the decision and design to make available resources that expedite an employee's taking on engagement.
- **Encouragement:** the freedom to support an individual's and a team's engagement with enthusiasm.

EMPLOYEE POPULATION ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement has been defined in numerous ways. This is inclusive and meaningful on a specific, behavioral level.

The individual's investment of energy, skill, ability, and eagerness in the work performed. Engagement includes "involvement" and "commitment" yet goes beyond to include observable behaviors such as:

- *Attention to task detail*
- *Commitment to assignment completion*
- *Involvement in special projects*
- *Communication willingly, effectively with others*
- *Demonstration of personal/professional improvement*
- *Initiation of problem-solving and/or conflict resolution*
- *Innovation regarding processes and procedures*

A hospital can expect employees to engage fully in their work.

Managers can tell employees they are expected to engage fully in their work.

Employees can hear and comprehend the instruction to engage fully in their work.

The hospital may still garner typical returns on an employee engagement survey (+/- 30% of employees fully engaged; +/- 70% of employees only neutrally engaged and/or actively disengaged).

The significance is that

Employee Engagement leads to Performance Improvement leads to Desired Results.

The fact, however, is that employees must engage themselves. Engagement is not and cannot be third-party. For the employee to engage s/he must know specifically what engagement is expected and s/he must have the opportunity and the resources allowing engagement.

The hospital organization that successfully defines and continuously refines its culture (top down) increases its chances of engaged employees.

The hospital organization that engages its management team in the concepts and the skills of managing for engagement by the employees (not merely for completion of desired tasks) increases those chances further.

The hospital organization that focuses on strategic plans including communication, opportunities, resources, and encouragements for employee engagement (by leadership and management) increases the chances the furthest yet.

