

Chapter 2

Culture Basics

ABSTRACT

This chapter defines culture and explains the different conceptual models developed by key researchers in the field. The authors explain why it is essential for us to learn how to see our cultures. The chapter breaks the conceptual models down into three essential elements, including assumptions and beliefs, values and behaviors, and artifacts. The authors explain why and how each organization's culture is unique – and walk through the factors that influence our organizational cultures. The chapter reminds us that it is hard to deliberately change an organization's culture because it is inherently dynamic. Each organization should strive to understand how these factors affect our organizations.

CULTURE – DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERIZATIONS

Culture is difficult to recognize – it is difficult to see and expose our underlying assumptions and beliefs, our values and behaviors, and to interpret our cultural artifacts. Culture is complex – as a collective asset, it is an aggregation of the cultures of individuals, business units, and the entire membership of the group or organization. Culture is refined and expanded by each individual in the organization. Culture is dynamic and continuously evolving. Culture is multi-directional. Culture is both the way we do things around here and what we do when we think no one is looking. Culture is the code, the core Logic, the software of the mind that organizes the behavior of the people, and

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the lessons that we have learned that are important enough to pass on to the next generation (Denison, 1990; Denison Hooijberg Lane and Leif, 2012).

Culture is viewed as a shared mental model that influences how individuals interpret behaviors, and they often behave without their being aware of the underlying assumptions. Culture is learned, reinforced, and handed on as learning to the Next Generation and new members of groups. Culture has a purpose in terms of achieving common objectives. Perceive success will reinforce the culture and make it stronger. An organization or group will develop its distinct patterns of behaviors and beliefs to support the culture and the internal socialization process.

CULTURE – THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Organizational culture has been defined in many ways by various authors and researchers. There is general agreement that organizational culture can be referred as a set of values, beliefs, and behavior patterns that form its core identity and shape everyday behaviors (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Jones, 1983; Schein, 1992; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Pheysey, 1993; Van der Post, 1998; Deshpande and Farley, 1999). Hofstede defines culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another. The fundamental expression in this definition is the collected programming. It describes a process to which each of each one of us has been subjected since birth. When parents returning from the hospital carry you over the threshold, they have often already made their first culturally-based decision.

Frost defines culture to mean rituals, myths, stories, legends, interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences that are influenced and shaped by the groups within which they live. Organizational culture includes values and assumptions about social reality. Culture provides the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed. Culture is not primarily inside people's heads, but somewhere between the heads of a group of people, workgroup interactions, in board meetings, but also in material objects. Culture then is central and describes our behaviors, social events, institutions, and processes. Culture is the setting in which these phenomena become comprehensible and

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