

## Chapter 6

# Seeing Information Cultures

### ABSTRACT

*Information cultures affect an organization's ability to define and implement a practical and effective information strategy. Just as business culture supports or impedes business strategy, so does information culture support or impede information strategy. Organizations typically have many information cultures, some of which may be contradictory. Unmanaged information cultures can present a significant risk in the knowledge economy. Information culture is reflected in the organization's values, norms, and practices concerning the management and use of information. The information science literature provides insufficient treatment to help us understand the day-to-day impacts of information cultures on business. It also fails to provide an inclusive description of the range of cultures extant in the information management profession and practice. Just like business cultures, information cultures exist and may vary by level of the organization. The authors call out and describe dynamic factors that affect information cultures at all five levels.*

### WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT INFORMATION CULTURES

We care about information cultures because they affect the organization's ability to define and implement a practical and effective information strategy. Just as business culture supports or impedes business strategy, so does information culture support or impede information strategy. The primary reason information management strategies fail is that they fail to consider, align with, or manage the existing information cultures. This is not a trivial

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challenge. Every organization has one or more information cultures. These information cultures determine whether your strategy will be adopted and supported, or ignored and impeded.

Information cultures have been the focus of both business and information managers. Early, the authors suggest that it is essential to integrate our business and information strategies. It is also essential to ensure that our business and information cultures are also integrated and supportive. The challenge is that in most organizations today, business and information cultures are distinct. Neither are these views integrated or consistently researched in the peer review or gray literature. The business literature focuses on how the business views information and how the information contributes to achieving business effectiveness. The business literature discusses how the use of information improves decision making and business performance. We find treatment of information cultures in the information science literature. Our understanding of information culture comes primarily from the information profession. An organization's information culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has most often focused on good information management practices. This view of information culture represents the assumptions, beliefs, values, behaviors, and artifacts of the information science and information management communities.

The authors attempt to synthesize the current research and practice from these two domains into a single practical view – the view from within the organization. This means we must draw from the literature of both fields, translate them to Schein's essential model of culture, and interpret them at the national and global level, the organization level, the unit or team level, and the individual level. The authors' goal is to provide managers with a framework and guiding questions that will help them to see the "information culture water" they are swimming in each day. The challenge is that the business and the information science cultures are well developed and well-entrenched. It is unwise for any organization to attempt to change either of these information cultures. It is imperative, though, that we attempt to synthesize and shape them to fit strategies in the business context.

Organizations typically have many information cultures, some of which may be contradictory. Left unaddressed, information cultures create a higher risk in the knowledge economy than they did in the information economy. The risk is that the information culture will deteriorate into information politics. Not only will information politics undermine your information management strategy but your business strategy as well. Information politics can leave your

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