

Why does Culture Matter?

In Part 1, I described the three levels of culture as defined by Dr. Edgar Schein. Now let's look at why culture is important and some tips on how you can change it.

A strong, healthy culture can put even a mediocre strategy on steroids. But it can prevent even the greatest strategy from gaining any traction. We ignore culture to our own peril, or we can leverage it for great benefit.

Your organization's culture is a living, changing organism. Whether you're intentional about it or not, it is evolving. You may get lucky and it will become healthier without you *making* that happen. But that's a dangerous bet.

Strengthening your culture is an investment with a great return. For example, clarity on what's important allows good decision making to be pushed down through the organization. That frees up bandwidth at higher levels. It also translates into higher productivity, since your people spend less time waiting for other people to make decisions.

It also has benefits in hiring the right people, succession planning, and employee morale to name a few.

Tips for Changing Culture

Here's a three-step outline to help you think about how to change your culture:



1: Clearly Identify it

Make a list of the common behaviors and cultural artifacts you observe in your organization. Then identify the values you believe drive each artifact. Some might be the values you want; others might reveal values you didn't realize were in play. Get input from others to make sure you're being honest about what's driving the artifacts. *You may or may not be happy with some of the values that you discover.*

2: Intentionally Shape it

Once you're clear about the values in play, determine the most important values you want to change or strengthen. **WRITE THEM DOWN.** Start talking about them. A LOT! Multiple times every day. Ask others what it would look like if those values were really practiced in your organization. Help people connect the dots between their actions and these values.

Never miss an opportunity to affirm choices people make that strengthen the values. Coach others on how to adjust behaviors that weaken them.

Think out loud while you're making decisions to help others see how the values influence your decisions.

Invite others in your organization -- from the Board of Directors to your receptionist -- to hold you accountable for consistently living your values. Encourage them to ask you if they think you're doing something inconsistent, and if they're right, admit it and recommit to living them.

3: Proactively monitor it

Listen for how often you hear others reference the values. You know your values are becoming part of your organizational DNA when you overhear them being talked about when people don't know you're listening.

Proactively caring for your organization's culture isn't spending time, it's **INVESTING** it. Don't miss out on the potential returns of a strong, healthy culture.

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