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ALL COMPANIES, BIG AND SMALL, NEED TO SET VALUES AND BEHAVIORS THAT POSITION THEM FOR SUCCESS. HERE ARE EIGHT STEPS FOR CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.

All businesses require infrastructure, from computer hardware to machinery, that is necessary for daily function and creating revenue. Without it, for example, a construction company can't build a new office tower, an architecture firm can't draft plans for a new doctor's office, and a manufacturing business can't develop its next great idea.

But businesses also require less tangible markers, like a healthy organizational culture. For companies too focused on the black-and-white necessities of running a business, organizational culture may seem too gossamer an idea, too inexact. Organizational culture, or the social norms of a company, describes how that company operates, how employees interact, and how decisions are made. To be fair, culture is more felt and experienced than seen or measured—and it is vital to a company's success.

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behavior and values are experienced every day because of



employees' proximity to senior leaders. For example, in a small engineering firm, a first-year associate and a partner are likely to be keenly aware of their company's goals because they work across many projects together, even if the work happens at different stages.

In larger companies, the organizational culture may be defined by a vision or motto. It's on the coffee mugs and computer pads. But the realities of the culture may trickle down into business groups or verticals quite differently, depending on the leadership styles within those groups. The culture experienced by one person working in the office of a manufacturing business may be very different than that of a person working on the factory floor.

Defining an organization's culture - or changing it - so that every person is on the same page requires much more than

writing a vision in a handbook or posting a placard in a lobby. Organizational culture requires a top-to-bottom strategy of adaptive, innovative redevelopment.

For businesses today, this intangible identity can have as much bearing on their companies' success and future as any reskilling initiatives or business line expansions. Without a healthy organizational culture, those other aspects of business growth and development may be more likely to founder.

Here, you will get an idea of what organizational culture is, why it's important, and why you might want to change that culture within your own business. You can follow the eight outlined steps to change your company's organizational culture so that your business is more robust and responsive to the ever-changing corporate landscape.

What is Organizational Culture?

"[Organizational culture] is the expected social norms within an organization that shape how employees interact and how decisions are made," says Sabrina Palmer, a performance-improvement and change-management consultant.

"Often, organizational culture develops from the organization's mission, why the organization exists; the vision of what the organization hopes to become; and the values—the core beliefs or principles that influence how employees behave," Palmer says. "As a result, organizational culture will vary between companies. No two companies will have the same culture. However, there are commonalities among small companies and among larger companies."

More than ever, a company's culture has become a significant factor in its future prospects. Current employees, prospective

singled out for discrimination or given fewer opportunities than their colleagues.

- » New lines of business. Growth is good and necessary, but it also presents a challenge to company culture. At times of big changes, such as launching a new product or service, organizational culture changes need to be considered.
- » New business priorities. You don't always need a significant change to your company's structure to necessitate a workplace culture review. A planned strategy change may mean you're worried about the business's ability to support a new trajectory. This is a good time to weave culture change into business change.
- » Changes in leadership. As senior leaders leave or realign, a natural vacuum is created. These transitions can be a good time to initiate new culture and expectations.
- » A merger or acquisition. Blending two or more companies offers an excellent opportunity to readjust the hybrid entity's expectations and culture. These mergers often bring a chance for companies to learn from one another and select the best strategies from each for a healthier culture in the merged business.

It's not enough to offer pep talks and require compliance trainings. As a business leader, you need to ensure that your organization embodies the values necessary to accomplish your business goals. Taken together, those values and behaviors define your organizational culture.

Whether your overarching goal is taking on a new line of business, digitizing your processes, or increasing automation, it's important that how you behave as a company puts you on the path to success - from the everyday actions of employees to interactions with customers. If you recognize the need for organizational change, here are eight steps you can take toward creating a better company culture:

1. IDENTIFY DESIRED OUTCOMES

Any company culture is a manifestation of its employees' values and behaviors. If you want to change that, you have to be specific about what you want to change.

As a first step, identify a core set of values and determine the behaviors that support those values. Include elements that have served you well, in addition to new values and behaviors necessary to achieve your company's long-term goals.

Be as deliberate as possible in defining what your culture should look like. Otherwise, as new employees join (particularly when you're growing quickly), the culture becomes whatever they interpret it to be, which can be confusing and a hindrance to success.

A clear vision tells all levels of employees, as well as new employees, what you want the organization to be. Taking time from the outset to be clear about where you're headed can help accelerate change.

2. PLAN A CULTURE CHANGE ROLLOUT

It's one thing to define a culture plan, but if you don't communicate it clearly to the organization, it's all for naught. Employees must identify with the change. They should want to adapt and even feel a responsibility to change.

The key, especially when first rolling out the culture framework, is to create engaging, interactive communications that encourage employee feedback. These can include in-person workshops that get your workforce thinking through new concepts; all-hands meetings at the company and business-unit level to show early advocacy from senior leaders; and more supporting communication activities such as email, intranet, and internal social channels.

Remember that you're not trying to teach anybody anything; you're trying to help them understand and get behind the mission. It's about helping your employees ask questions, engage with the values, and connect them to their everyday work. This will create a deeper understanding of the desired culture and also personally connects employees to the broader success of the company.

3. WEAVE NEW CULTURAL VALUES INTO RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES

One surefire way to make culture change a reality is incorporating it into how you hire, promote, and reward employees. For the hiring process in particular, your culture will play out in the way you measure and assess candidates, as well as in the hiring experience you provide.

That experience starts the second that first contact is made and encompasses every touch point, from emails to screening calls to onsite interviews. Candidates quickly get a feel for the company and decide whether it's the right place for them. If it

is, upon joining, they're immediately ready to infuse the culture with all the values you're trying to proliferate throughout the business.

4. GET EXECUTIVE BUY-IN

This should go without saying, but it's imperative that company leadership teams, at all levels, actually believe that this set of values and behaviors is the right way forward and fundamental to the company's success. This shows the greater workforce that all of this culture work isn't just fancy rhetoric for the organization's website. This step takes a lot of dedication; company leaders, especially executives, need to model the culture you want the employees to emulate, and you must be aligned for the rest of the company to follow you.

Company leaders must model the culture they want employees to emulate.

5. BE PATIENT

For any company embarking on this journey, it is important to recognize that it will be a multiyear effort. You will test, pilot, assess, adjust, and eventually come to a culture framework that is final but still always evolving.

Don't forget that the employees of your company ultimately own the culture and get to shape it. As a leader, you can provide the guideposts your workforce can put into practice, providing a better experience on the job; improved customer relationships; and, ultimately, a more thriving business.

6. DEFINE MESSAGING, INSIDE AND OUT

There were several things done to change the culture to being one that was highly motivated, high performance, and more vibrant.”

Palmer outlines those changes:



About the Article

Written by Kimberly Holland, who is a lifestyle writer and editor based in Birmingham, AL.

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