



Business Culture—You Know It When you “Feel” It

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Business or workplace “culture” is a frequently-used, hard-to-describe idea. Authors have written volumes and speakers have shared hours about culture in business or in a workplace, yet it’s often misunderstood. Let’s take look at what culture means for you and your business.

Webster’s dictionary defines ‘culture’ as the “knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and traits” that a group of people have in common. You’ve certainly noticed this if you’ve traveled to a foreign country, or even a different town. Whether it’s due to shared history, common geography, or regionalized values of a certain place, the common knowledge, beliefs, behaviors and traits seem to link people together.

This newsletter is an instrument of the Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work program of University of Wyoming Extension. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact information@eRuralFamilies.org or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.



Tip of the Month



Trust in the Family Business

Trust serves as the foundation on which relationships are built. If you do not trust a family member or business associate, your relationship with that person will neither thrive nor survive into the future. Once violated, trust is very difficult to rebuild. It must be guarded carefully and constantly nurtured.

Building Trust

How do we go about building trust? Families and individuals who are able to sustain a culture of mutual trust, generally adhere to three basic elements, whether intentionally or not:

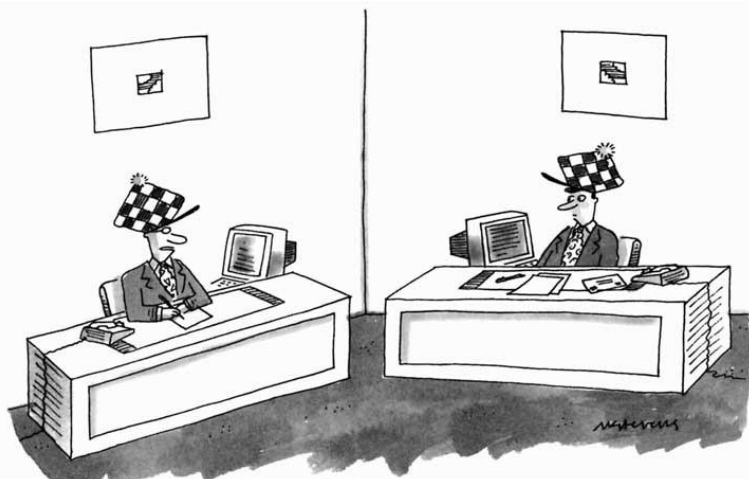
- Individuals are reliable. They do what they say they will do.
- They demonstrate feelings of intimacy. They care about each other and generally like being together.
- They are honest with each other. They have open, direct communication — they are willing to speak and to listen when difficult things need to be said.

Truths about Trust in Business

- Trust is a multidimensional experience with behavioral and emotional aspects—each of which need to be nurtured on a continuing basis;
- Trust is dynamic. The order in which different aspects of trust develop vary. Each dimension of trust is usually associated with a different phase of the firm’s development;

- Trust is both cyclical and renewing. Withdrawal of any one of the nurturing components of the trust cycle can jeopardize trust in the entire system;
- Sustaining trust at the individual or group level is intricately linked to the firm level; and
- Trust cannot increase without also affecting distrust.

Our own experience in relationships has undoubtedly taught us that trust is not something that can be taken for granted. Although trust can be an advantage of the family business structure, it may represent an aspect that requires even more attention than in other business structures.



"I don't know how it started, either. All I know is that it's part of our corporate culture."

"...knowing your culture is vital when you bring new people into your team."

The culture of a place can be difficult to describe, but often easy to see and hear. Language and dialect, styles of dress, and shared behaviors often make a culture come to life before our eyes and ears.

We don't have to travel to foreign lands to get a sense of unique and differing cultures. Every business and workplace has a culture of its very own. A workplace culture can be equally hard to pinpoint as that of a foreign country, but usually we "know it when we see it." Or, more accurately, we might know it when we feel it.

Just like the culture of a nation or region becomes apparent through peoples' language, dress, behaviors and beliefs, the same is true for the culture of a workplace. Think about these scenarios where workplace culture plays a role in day-to-day operations:

- Can you recall a conversation among you and your colleagues when you were all using industry jargon, acronyms and 'slang'? If someone unfamiliar with your workplace was there, could they even guess at what you were speaking of?
- Have you ever seen a visitor or guest walk into a meeting only to find out he or she was the only one wearing a suit when everyone else was in jeans?
- What happens in the first few minutes of a meeting in your workplace? Do you get right to the agenda at the exact start time, or is there a 10-minute social time before the meeting begins?

Those are all examples of how we dress, speak, and act in our workplace. They are examples of our culture. Considering these and other aspects of your workplace culture might help you when it's time to reinforce what's working, and attempt to change what isn't. If change needs to be made, it may go deeper than a simple change in policy or procedure; it might require a fundamental shift in culture.

Additionally, knowing your culture is vital when you bring new people into your team. Identifying certain aspects of culture – language, dress, behaviors, and so on – and relating them to new team members can help make their transition smooth. You may not be able to identify and clarify all aspects of culture – some of it they just have to experience first hand! But by being thoughtful about your culture, you can set others up for success by sharing clear expectations of what lies ahead.



