

Whatâ€™s in a Culture (not the bacteria kind)?

## Description

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Itâ€™s easy to point out when a culture is bad, whatâ€™s going wrong. Do any of these sound familiar:

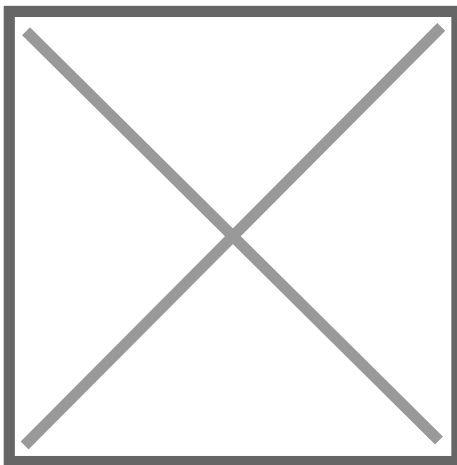
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- Focus on short term results and not long-term growth
- Management politics matter more than good work
- Finger-pointing when something goes wrong instead of problem-solving
- Silos
- Protecting turf instead of working for the greater good
- Padding budgets and estimates cuz theyâ€™re gonna get cut anyway
- No accountability for bad results
- No career growth process
- pressure-tactics to get things done
- Bullying

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As a leader, Iâ€™m sure none of you would want these behaviors or beliefs to live in your organizations. And yet they are everywhere. Managing a great culture or transforming a bad one into a great one is one of the most difficult and yet most important accomplishments of a leader.

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Culture eats strategy for breakfast

*Peter Drucker*

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This quote is so true. If you don't intentionally create and maintain a high-performing, healthy culture, then all the strategies, plans and models will fail ultimately. I've seen it so much; great, fantastic, inspiring plans falling flat because people weren't engaged with making it happen.

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There is a great podcast I listen to called "Masters of Scale" by Reid Hoffman (one of the founders of LinkedIn). One episode he interviewed Danny Meyer, the great chef from Union Square Cafe, where they discussed the importance of developing a great experience for customers. In it Danny Meyer realized that more important than just thinking "customer first" is creating a culture where your employees take care of each other. If you see a waiter struggling with a lot of tables, then another waiter will pitch in and help. The customer experience is realized when the team takes care of each other. Not only does it make it a great place to work, but it also makes it a great result for the customer and the company.

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I highly recommend this podcast series for leadership insights!

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It made me realize that it is so important as a leader to be very intentional in creating the cultural rules for your organization. Are your hours fixed or flexible? Do we help each other when we are struggling or is it everyone for themselves? Are we only concerned with results but also how we get there? Do we give timely feedback or hide our feelings from each other? You need to write them down and make them happen every day if you care at all about the kind of workplace you want.

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And even more important about setting the rules is the realization that if we don't, "unwritten" rules are created by our daily interactions. "oh that person just got away with bad results, I guess results don't matter!" ever seen that before?

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In another one of Reid Hoffman's podcasts, he interviewed Aneel Bhusri, CEO of Workday, who said he personally interviewed the first 500 employees of his company. Sounds crazy right? But not if you're obsessed with creating a high-performing culture. I've embedded this in my strategy as well: now in my new "start-up" organization I personally meet every candidate someone wants to hire to see if they will fit our company's culture. It's a great way to make sure that your company's culture doesn't start drifting with a rogue manager embedding their culture into

yours. It's not so much a lack of trust as I can't easily put into words what I'm looking for but I know it when I see it.

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Harder than creating a culture from scratch in a start-up is transforming one in an existing organization. I've been in so many re-orgs, transformations, process deployments, optimizations, downsizings, upsizing, outsourcings, insourcings, ERP deployments that I'm in a constant state of flux! The vast majority never realize their intended benefits because they don't address the underlying problems in the culture (like the list at the top of this blog). And I think the main reason for that is because most leaders are unwilling to make the hard choices on their leadership teams and experts. In order to change a culture, you need all your key influencers on-board (management team, board, key subject matter experts, and loudest opinion drivers). As leaders we have to inspire them to get on board with the new way of doing things (your new set of rules and behaviors), but if they don't they have to go. It's the only way to do this seriously. As long as there are influential resisters to your new culture it will never completely succeed.

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It becomes a gut-check time for leaders: how badly do you want the new culture vs. losing someone key who you rely on for results? That's the million-dollar question a lot of would-be leaders get stuck on!

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So what are your intentional cultural rules in your organization? Have you let the company naturally decide them? Have you been able to transform a culture successfully? I want to know!!!

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## Category

1. Uncategorized

## Date Created

October 3, 2019

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