

The Power of Culture

Many have a hard time quantifying their culture. It's fuzzy and mystical. Culture seemingly is hard to describe in concrete terms. Everyone acknowledges that culture plays an important part in how people act, conduct business, and manage change.

Why pay attention to the organization's culture? Simply put, if your strategy and your culture are not aligned, "culture will eat your strategy for breakfast."

What is Corporate Culture

One way to think about culture is as a code or core logic. It is the "software of the mind" that organizes the way people behave.

Culture is informed by the daily lessons learned inside an organization. If you listen closely to the stories told in a company, you'll begin to understand what is important and what is not. Employee stories are the lore that is passed from one worker to the next, and down through time to future generations of employees. One of the fastest ways to learn about the culture of an organization is to ask two questions:

"What gets recognized and rewarded in this company?"
"What gets you in trouble in this company?"

These stories (both good and bad) can have a surprisingly long shelf life.

Underlying all personal actions are values, beliefs, assumptions, and practices that have been developed over time.

All of the above culture explanations have some truth to them. Tom Peters summed up these cultural definitions best when he said: "Culture is the way we do things around here."

"Any competitor can duplicate our putting satellite TV's in every seat, any competitor can duplicate our larger overhead bin space, any competitor can duplicate our extra leg room, any competitor can duplicate our roomier leather seats, But NO competitor can duplicate the culture and leadership we've created that delivers the jetBlue experience to our customers."

David Neeleman, CEO, JetBlue Airways

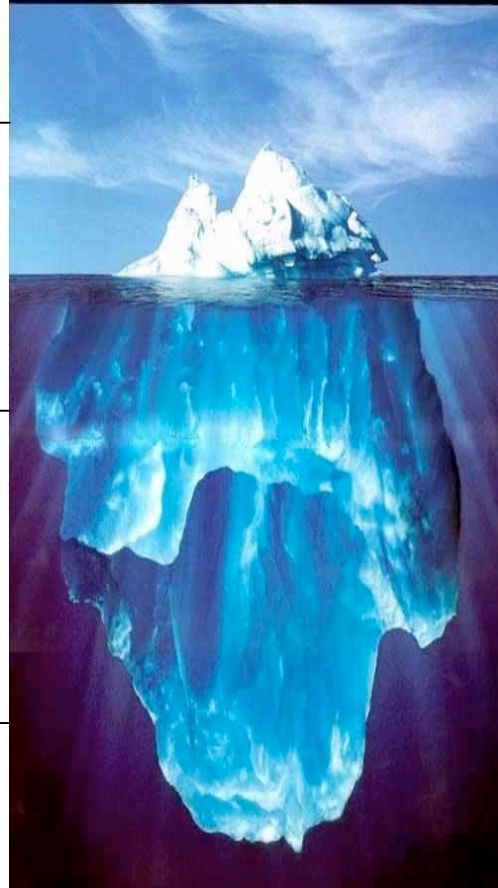
Measuring Key Aspects of Culture

Think of culture as an iceberg. A little is visible. Much is submerged. The same holds true when uncovering the culture of an organization.

Visible culture – observable norms, behaviors and artifacts (the physical remnants of past actions and decisions). These tangible elements of the culture are the result of deeper beliefs and assumptions.

Submerged culture – less visible personal values/ethics, and attitudes. These aspects of culture can be discovered through dialogue in a safe environment.

Invisible culture – subconsciously held cultural values and assumptions that are deeply embedded in individuals. These cultural assumptions are seldom questioned by those who hold them. Rather, this invisible culture is accepted as the way everyday life is conducted.



Soure: Bryan Adkins, President, Denison Culture

Image: R. A. Clevenger

Measuring culture effectively means gaining organizational insights into all three aspects of the embedded beliefs, values and assumptions.

Culture Matters

The alignment of the companies culture with its business imperatives is crucial to their success. Culture can enable:

- Employees' connection to the mission and vision
- The potential for business growth
- The ability to innovate
- The organization's readiness for change
- How employees work together
- Responsiveness to market demands