



Supporting Your Document Strategy

The culture of your organization can either support your document strategy or work against it. All organizations have a subjective or invisible culture that will influence your success. You may have a culture that stops the forward progress of a change initiative, while the same initiative in another company is implemented quite easily. Experts estimate that between 50% and 70% percent of all re-engineering efforts fail, often because a culture does not accept new approaches. You must prepare for and accept the fact that the culture of your organization has a significant and potentially negative influence on your ability to implement your strategy.

While a set of engineering drawings or system schematics adequately depicts the performance of a piece of equipment, the performance of a company is rarely encapsulated in its organizational charts, strategic plans or mission statement. The difference is the effect of corporate culture on the way things actually get done. Your firm's culture can be of great assistance to you if it is receptive to new ideas and adept with change. But if your culture prevents your company from accepting change, then your efforts to implement your strategy will be severely inhibited.

Corporate culture provides the human glue that can rally the collective energy of your company toward improvements and accomplishments, or it can be the glue that fastens your organization to "the way things have always been." Like the personality of a person, the culture of an organization is not something that is readily apparent at first glance. But after you get to know it, you begin to see the shared beliefs and unwritten ground rules that determine the ways in which your organization and its people behave.

Characteristics of a High-Performance Culture

While you cannot really see your corporate culture, you can observe the behavior or actions of people that set the norms for your organization. Every company is different and has both positive and negative characteristics. Even companies of similar size in the same industry will have different cultures, just as twins who grow up in the same household can be very different.

There is no perfect culture, but the following chart summarizes some of the characteristics found in high performing organizations. Organizations that embrace, adopt and implement change easily generally exhibit these high performance characteristics, while those that

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How corporate culture can make or break you

By Kevin Craine

perform less admirably experience the corresponding cultural barriers to change.

Tips for Combating the Negative Aspects of Culture

- *Practice what you preach.* You must model the behaviors you wish were present in other people. Any change to corporate culture must start with key leaders, and as a document strategist you are a leader regardless of your rank or position.
- *Reinforce new and positive behaviors.* The practice of catching people doing the right things is a key to overcoming bad cultural habits. Provide reinforcing feedback on a day-to-day basis, and build into your strategy a system for people to offer feedback to others.
- *Repetition, repetition, repetition.* You must reiterate the message of your strategy over and over. If you preach the virtues of your plan with simplicity, consistency and repetition, you will eventually get through to people. Changing aspects of your corporate culture requires a steady continuum that finally reaches a critical mass.
- *Consistency.* You do not want people within your organization to consider your strategy as a “gimmick of the month.” Your evangelist message must be the same month after month. While some of the aspects of your strategy will, and must, be revised, the essential message should stay the same.
- *Passion.* You must believe in your strategy and feel passionate about it, or no one else will. Communicate your enthusiasm and passion to the rest of the organization at every opportunity.

Change Cultural History

You may need to alter “cultural history” in order to enact your document strategy. If the history in your organization is a legacy of resistance to change, slow progress toward improvements and the avoidance of risk, you may need to change the norm of how things typically get done. One way to overcome negative cultural history is by both acknowledging it and denying it. Take a rebellious stance against the cultural dysfunction that prevents improvement from happening successfully.

If you work hard and become known for your ability to change things for the better, people will become excited about working with you, and they will be happy to support your strategy. This is another example of where your earlier work will benefit you. Perhaps your cultural history is one where improvements are not implemented because there has not been a clear understanding of what needed to be changed in the first place and why. People struggle, become frustrated, and then they will quit because they do not recognize problems and hindrances ahead of time. However, the effort you put into assessment, evaluation and planning falls into the “pay now or pay later” category. People may resist and disparage your efforts, but if you have done your homework, you will be in a position to minimize or remove the barriers to your success and rewrite cultural history.

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