

Culture Matters



CORPORATE CULTURE - ORIGIN, MEANING, SURVEY AND DEVELOPMENT.

The below is based on a presentation Karl F. Meier-Gantenbein of Gantenbein Consulting held in 2021. View full presentation here.

What is culture?

Every action has its moment of recognition, which in turn is based on perception. The perception of a situation is by no means objective, but people perceive things based on their own, mostly unconscious „filters“. These are often learned, but can also be based on the current situation. This is true for individuals but also for groups of people. Culture thus arises from the common shaping of system-specific filters and their refinement. Culture acts for itself as an amplifier of the phenomena already produced. Certain assumptions will no longer be questioned by those who operate from inside the culture.

Corporate culture can be seen as a subset of everyday culture, which in turn is a part of immaterial culture. This comprises the shared and lived values of the organization, „sum of all self-evident things“ and jointly made assumptions on which behavior in everyday life is based which leads to behavioral norms and expectations to fit into the organization.

Why is it worthwhile to take a closer look into corporate culture?

Culture determines the daily interaction of organizational members and also the attitude towards the business itself, which happens unconsciously, but can still be perceived by those involved. Mr. Meier-Gantenbein consults the OCI® from Human Synergistics for the possible measurement of organizational culture. This tool makes cultural phenomena visible and discussable. But, of course, looking at culture is rarely done as an end in itself. Research clearly shows that there are correlations between certain corporate cultures and certain organizational outcomes. One study that Mr. Meier-Gantenbein draws on for his presentation is a 2021 study by Heidrich Consulting, which followed the question of whether there are companies that rank the design and development of corporate culture among the top three drivers of corporate success, and whether this sets these culture-driven companies apart from other companies in terms of their performance. To this end, 500 companies were surveyed over a period of 3 years and the results speak for themselves: the culture-conscious companies achieved growth of 9.1% over the period, while the other companies achieved an average of 4.4%. The strong relevance of the attitude of the top management was also highlighted by the authors of the study, because „the more intensively CEOs consistently carry cultural aspects into the organization, the better its financial performance can develop.“ Another study demonstrating a significant positive correlation between Constructive Behavioral Norms and company performance (specifically revenue/sales) was conducted by Dr. Robert A. Cooke in 2004. This study also indicates that more volatile results are achieved when Aggressive/Defensive Behavioral Norms prevail.

How Corporate Culture Emerges

Each person can theoretically influence the culture of an organization with his or her behavior. However, stronger manifestations in the corporate culture of certain behavioral styles only emerge when several people exhibit them preferentially, and thus generalized rules of behavior and matching expectations develop. On the part of the organization, factors such as organizational requirements and resources have an effect on the culture. The circle with inference to the behavior of individuals is closed when employees are asked questions such as „what should we do more of in the future?“ and „what should we not do in the future?“ as part of a culture analysis. An accurate depiction of how corporate culture works is provided by the interactive How Culture Works model, which you can view vividly displayed on our website.

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In his presentation, Mr. Meier-Gantenbein emphasizes that there are different scenarios in the implementation of corporate culture. In one scenario, the Current culture in a company can be in line with its values, philosophy and goals. In this case, the As-Is culture is also in harmony with the Constructive Norms expressed in the To-Be culture. The result here is not only a high level of satisfaction throughout the workforce, but also consistently good results. If the expressed values are not in harmony with the lived.

In theory, any individual person can influence the culture of an organization through his or her behavior. However, certain behavioral styles only become more pronounced in the corporate culture when several people display them preferentially, and thus generalized rules of behavior and matching expectations develop. On the part of the organization, factors such as requirements and resources have an effect on the organizational culture. The circle with inference to the behavior of individuals is closed when employees are asked questions such as „what should we do more of in the future?“ and „what should we not do in the future?“ as part of a culture analysis. An accurate depiction of how corporate culture works is provided by the interactive How Culture Works model, which you can view vividly displayed on our website.

In his presentation, Mr. Meier-Gantenbein emphasizes that there are different scenarios in the implementation of corporate culture. On the one hand, the actual culture in a company can be in line with its values, philosophy and goals. In this case, the As-Is culture is also in harmony with the Constructive Norms expressed in the To-Be culture. The result here is not only a high level of satisfaction throughout the workforce, but also consistently good results. If the expressed values are not in harmony with the lived behavior, the actual culture will also deviate from the desired target culture. This in turn leads to results that are not good or to good results at a high price.

Culture analysis or culture development?

Culture analysis is essential for uncovering and understanding interrelationships. The willingness of a workforce to change is also promoted here. A disadvantage would be the monetary and time expenditure to be mentioned here. The primary goal of culture development is to define a goal for the culture, as well as to identify change levers. Clarity is achieved about which direction to take, what to do more often and what to do less often. A culture analysis is thus an important starting point for all development activities.

Summing it up - The ingredients for successful culture development

Mr. Meier-Gantenbein's closing words are an excellent summary of what is needed for successful change: A fantastic intuition, great tools and a large amount of stamina.

Are you ready to change your culture or do you want to help a client do so?

Contact us at info@humansynergistics.de