

## ***Organizational Culture***

*What does it mean and why should I care?*

By:

*Caroline Samné, President and Principal Consultant*

---

We are in a day and age where we are constantly hearing about the impending workforce shortage (and in some professions such as accounting, teaching and the public service it is already a reality). What does it mean that we will face a talent shortage or for that matter an out right head count shortage? It means that analogous to the housing market it is now a sellers market with the “seller” being the employee and the “buyers” the employers. Given this “sellers market” the buyers are making a very big effort to get the first and best offer to the seller in order to secure the home they desire. Similarly, in the workplace we are now observing that employers are trying to court employees and sell them to the virtues and benefits of employment with their organization. This is great news for employees who are more than ever shopping for the right value fit with their potential employers.

Seeing as how employees have become savvy at assessing if they have found a fit, this leaves the onus on the employer to be able to answer the questions “what do we value?” and “how do we live those values?” The larger question to answer is “what are we all about and how do we behave around here?” The culture is the sum of the organization’s DNA; values, shared assumptions and beliefs that are visible in the way things are done in the organization. Regardless of whether we can name it or not, every organization has a culture, whether by default or by design.

Creating a strong and healthy organizational culture is not simply about a good compensation package and a few team building activities, it is about anchoring everything that we do in a certain philosophy or set of beliefs and values. Take an organization who says that it values work-life balance, for this to be truly reflected in the culture we would see it exemplified in all of its processes and structures, an example would be how meetings are run (do meetings allow for conference calling to accommodate telecommuters? are meetings constantly called for 4:30 not allowing people to leave on time?), how are rewards and recognitions allotted (do people who work overtime get bigger bonuses and promotions?). In other words do our actions match our stated values?

In my work with varied clients in differing industries I am often told that they would like to become an employer of choice and aspire to the “Top 100 Best places to work.” The challenge in this is helping clients to understand that building an on-site gym with free massage and yoga classes will only serve as short-term motivators for employees. Numerous studies have shown that what employees really want is a workplace that not only provides those types of benefits but also creates an environment where people feel valued, respected and where they feel like they make an important contribution. If you treat people with disrespect, provide no recognition or positive reinforcement; a nice massage may take the sting out for a while but very quickly the pain returns.

Therefore, creating a strong and healthy organizational culture is more than a few services that create a nice appearance from the surface. What really counts is what people will find when they dig below the surface.

Being aware of and assessing your organizational culture is the first step in capturing an image of the present day situation. Once you have some data about your culture you can objectively take a step back and ask yourself what the results mean to your organization and it's strategic vision of the future. Will your present day culture bring you to where you need to go as an organization?

New Horizons Organizational Effectiveness Consultants works with organizations that are interested in building and sustaining healthy and productive organizational cultures. Our many years of experience combined with our solid culture assessment tools and practices allow us to work with you to assess, design and implement the culture that best suits the needs of your industry and organization. For more information please contact Caroline Samné at 514-620-2703, [caroline@nhorizons.ca](mailto:caroline@nhorizons.ca), [www.nhorizons.ca](http://www.nhorizons.ca).