. . . helping organizations find solutions to people-related problems

DON'T LET YOUR COMPANY CULTURE IMPEDE YOUR PERFORMANCE

In talking about organizations these days, we seem to hit with increasing frequency on the word "culture," and we regularly talk about changing the culture to something else. In discussing the power of teams and emotional intelligence within organizations, Dan Goleman focuses our attention on the importance of developing a "culture of accountability" as a way of impacting real performance and profitability. While we all sort of know what culture means in a social context, we seldom take the time to define its usage in terms of the organization. In real terms, your company culture is the sum of all aspects of your organization in light of its history, values, beliefs, leadership style, and prevailing patterns of behavior. Many times when we help organizations examine their current culture, we jointly find areas that would benefit from redirection, but we also have a great deal of evidence that cultural change within organizations is almost never a short-term fix. It requires planning, creativity, intense and persistent conversation, and dogged determination and discipline.

One effective way to get a handle on your current culture is to objectively examine the company's reputation and image from an internal and external point-of-view. The operative word is "objectively" because the pervasiveness of existing organizational culture often masks a multitude of issues. Historical baggage, too, can end up distorting the analysis, and the old adage "if you don't ask the right question, you don't get the right answer" really does apply. In examining your own organizational culture, here are key areas to think about:

Reputation and Image

How do customers, vendors, and employees at various levels see the company from a realistic, day-to-day standpoint? Is it well respected and fair-minded in how it deals with staff at all levels? Does it project a sense of integrity and concern for quality?

Leadership

Does the management team really work as a team and communicate effectively with staff members throughout the organization? Do employees feel a sense of inclusion in the global work of the organization? Is there an implicit or explicit emphasis on holding information at the top? Is there true accountability for results?

Staffing and Recruitment

Are the right people in the right place at the right time for the organization to move ahead in unison? Are "poor fits" draining off important organizational energy and disabling the company's capacity to move ahead? Do recruitment and orientation processes and procedures focus on getting it right at the outset rather than trying to make a bad situation better?

Performance

Do individuals know and understand the requirements and standards for their jobs? Are they recognized for good performance as well as poor performance?

Do individuals understand the relationship between their performance and the overall company effort? Is communication stimulated or avoided? Do compensation and benefit programs support and foster the desired company culture?

Balance

Does the organization project a sense of balance? Are relevant people and production issues given careful thought and consideration? Do employees care about the company and its performance and success, and does the company mirror that consideration?

Your company's culture is the sum of all these considerations and clearly keeping the analysis objective and the elements in balance is an ongoing challenge, but the potential satisfaction of an effective organizational culture is well worth the effort. Not dealing with cultural issues can quickly and dramatically debilitate your company and defeat initiatives that might otherwise work.

LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS

"Who's in the bullpen, who's warming up?" Succession planning is a concept that's been around for some time now, although there are several interpretations of what it means. Usually it means at least thinking about who's able to step into the CEO's shoes if he or she is no longer available. This is, of course, a principal focus and responsibility of the board of directors. It is also important, however, to recognize that good succession planning should mean identifying and developing talent at multiple organizational levels. John Kotter's admonition about developing the leading coalition underscores the signifi-cance of leadership at all levels within the organizations and the critical importance of challenging existing and "would-be" leaders. In fact, one of top management's most frustrating challenges is seeing younger leaders bubbling up, bouncing against more senior managers who are not exhibiting effective leadership.

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that best-practice organizations make multi-level succession planning and talent development a central issue in future organizational planning. This process often entails identifying and documenting the company's core competencies and potential future opportunities and then inventorying what talents are or will become available to meet them. Some organizations simply hope burgeoning talent will bide its time until fate or retirement provides the answer. Unfortunately, talent with ambition and drive often moves on to more fertile fields and more dynamic environments. Succession planning at all levels requires a clear commitment to the long-term health of the organization, a strong sense of accountability, and disciplined methodology for identifying and motivating quality leaders.

IT SALARIES DIP

Worldatwork's July issue of *Workspan* notes: "For the first time in a decade, total compensation for information technology professionals (IT) is heading south." IT managers are seeing an eight per cent drop in total compensation and IT staff, eleven per cent. These figures compare to gains of ten per cent for managers and eight and a half per cent for staff last year.

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