Definition of Corporate Culture

Are you looking for a clear definition of corporate culture? You have come to the right place!

I have developed a definition of corporate culture after nearly 20 years of working with organizations and viewing them from the perspective of a cultural anthropologist as well as a strategy consultant with an MBA in finance.

The easiest way to think of corporate culture is that it is an energy field that determines how people think, act, and view the world around them. I often compare culture to electricity. Culture is powerful and invisible and its effects are far reaching. Culture is an energy force that becomes woven through the thinking, behavior, and identity of those within the group.

Corporate culture is created naturally and automatically. Every time people come together with a shared purpose, culture is created. This group of people could be a family, neighborhood, project team, or company. Culture is automatically created out of the combined thoughts, energies, and attitudes of the people in the group.

I have worked with entrepreneurs and venture capitalists involved in the start-up of technology companies. They want to work on the corporate culture once the company is profitable or ?in the black?. It is much more difficult to change the corporate culture once it has emerged than to proactively create the corporate culture they want from the start.

The corporate culture energy field determines a company?s dress code, work environment, work hours, rules for getting ahead and getting promoted, how the business world is viewed, what is valued, who is valued, and much more.

Every company or organizations has numerous corporate cultures. For example, the marketing department and the engineering department may have very different corporate cultures which are both influenced by the overall organizational corporate culture. Many times these two sub-cultures clash.

Culture shows up in both visible and invisible ways. Some expressions of corporate culture are easy to observe. You can see the dress code, work environment, perks, and titles in a company. This is the surface layer of culture. These are only some of the visible manifestations of a culture.

Surface Layer of Corporate Culture: Visible Expressions
? Dress Code
? Work Environment
? Benefits
? Perks
? Conversations
? Work/Life Balance
? Titles & Job Descriptions
? Organizational Structure
? Relationships

The far more powerful aspects of corporate culture are invisible. The cultural core is composed of the beliefs, values, standards, paradigms, worldviews, moods, internal conversations, and private conversations of the people that are part of the group. This is the foundation for all actions and decisions within a team, department, or organization.

Core Layer of Corporate Culture: Invisible Manifestations
? Values
? Private Conversations (with self or confidants)
? Invisible Rules
? Attitudes
? Beliefs

? Worldviews
? Moods and Emotions
? Unconscious Interpretations
? Standards
? Paradigms
? Assumptions

Business leaders often assume that their company's vision, values, and strategic priorities are synonymous with their company's culture. Unfortunately, too often, the vision, values, and strategic priorities may only be words hanging on a plaque on the wall.

Corporate culture is actually the container for the vision, mission and values. It is not synonymous with them. In a thriving profitable company, employees will embody the values, vision, and strategic priorities of their company.

What creates this embodiment (or lack of embodiment) is the corporate culture energy field that permeates the employees' psyches, bodies, conversations, and actions.

Companies need a good definition of corporate culture before they can begin to understand how to change the corporate culture.

Short note about the author

Find out how to successfully change your corporate culture. Debra Lea Thorsen helps companies optimize their corporate cultures. Visit www.culturebuilders.com for a free white paper - Corporate Culture Change: Aligning People and Profits.

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