

TERMITES

— IN THE —

GUESTROOM

DEALING WITH POOR CULTURE
IN THE WORKPLACE



ELIJAH SINYINZA

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to every business manager desiring to harness the power of a positive working culture to improve corporate performance.

It is the first book in the series of five making up *the five pillars of organizational transformation* series.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to my wife and children for their continuous support in this work.

I also wish to thank my friends Arthur Chisanga and Chungu Mwila for their unwavering encouragement and support.

May the Almighty God continue blessing you in your life and work.

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INTRODUCTION

TERMITES IN THE GUESTROOM

I draw the title of this book and some of its lessons from a simple real-life experience I had in April 2022 when I visited a family property which we had constructed in a newly built-up area in Mufulira Town.

We had just painted the house and were doing final touches in preparation for tenants to move in when I noticed a trail of neatly laid termite mud tunnels coming up from a very tiny hole in the concrete floor and going up the corner adjacent to the access door.

In an attempt to stop these insects from getting to the trusses and eating up the timber, I removed the mud and cleared up the area. The following day, I found freshly moulded earth going up the same path. I removed it as I had done the first time and cleaned up the place.

After a couple of days, I went to check again and this time, I found that the termites had gone all the way up to the ceiling board and were trying to find a way through to access the timber. At this I decided to pour some substance at their entry point on the concrete floor to prevent them from entering the room altogether.

The next day, I visited the place to see if my stopgap measure to deter my uninvited guests from occupying the guestroom and creating a passage to the roof had worked.

To my amazement, I discovered that the termites had abandoned their first path, went round the obstacle and joined the old trail from a different spot up the wall. As I sought within myself for a more effective alternative to deal with this persisting problem, my thoughts were caught up into a different paradigm. I began to picture this scenario through the lenses of organisational culture.

At this time, I was working on my book "*Business beyond the Strategic Plan*" and one of the topics I was dealing with was the subject of culture as a fundamental component of effective organisational transformation.

When I looked at this scenario; and related it with some of the ideas I had drawn on the subject, I began to see how - like the termites in the guestroom - many organisational leaders faced with undesirable cultural dispositions in the workplace have struggled to turn tables around and nature a positive culture.

Here is one big lesson to start with: Just as the termites were able to find an alternative route to avoid the sticky substance laced on their construction path, culture has a way of navigating

through various deterrent measures and finding expression in different formats.

The fact that you have enforced use of the disciplinary code does not guarantee that you will win the fight against poor culture amongst your staff.

The fact that you have instituted performance management schemes to manage productivity and promote hard work does not also warrant success.

The subject of culture is a cross-cutting discipline whose principles of function and methods of handling surpass many conventional management initiatives.

In this book I discuss these principles and methods to help you understand the subject better.

My goal is to equip you with relevant tools to enable you bring about a positive cultural shift and build a team that will operate from the high-performance zone.

Journey with me as we explore proven practical methods to deal with the *“termites in the guestroom.”*

1

DEFINING CULTURE



From this point onwards, “the termites in the guestroom” are those undesirable cultural traits exhibited by employees in the organisation you lead.

Our goal is to identify them, understand their “genetic make-up” and prescribe the right techniques to ensure total transformation.

Before we get to that point however, it is imperative that we deal with the fundamental concepts which make up for culture as a subject worth the attention of every organisational leader.

What is culture?

The word “culture” stems from the Latin word “Cultura” meaning “to cultivate.”

Use of this word dates as far back as the 18th and 19th century where it was used to connote a process of cultivation in agriculture or horticulture.

Today the word *culture*; apart from being used as above and in biology to denote maintaining of tissue cells or bacteria in conditions suitable for their growth; means the following:

- (i) The customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group.
- (ii) The beliefs and attitudes about something which people in a particular group or organisation share.

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

Narrowing down to organisational behaviour, the word "culture" literally means a collection of *values, expectations* and *practices* which guides the actions of team members in the organisation.

The Duo-conscious nature of culture

Past the above formal definition, culture can be considered as possessing a duo-conscious nature.

What does this mean?

Any form of culture exhibited by an individual or group of people in the workplace is either *inherent* or *acquired*.

Inherent cultural traits are those behaviours which people exhibit based on their personal values and beliefs accumulated over time. They

are inherent because they have become a part of the mental programming of an individual and emanate from the sub-conscious mind. One does not need to think twice to exhibit these cultural traits. Their brain is programmed to behave in that particular manner to trigger actions, reactions and responses under certain specific conditions.

Acquired cultural traits on the other hand are those behaviours which are extrinsic in nature and motivated by the prevailing conditions around an individual. These can be influenced by rules, regulations, policies and procedures within a workplace or through interaction with peers and workmates.

The illustration below demonstrates how inherent and acquired cultural traits interact to form what we collectively term as the “work culture” of an individual.

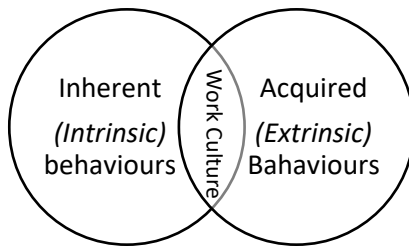


Fig. 1: The Duo-conscious nature of culture

Depending on the strength of an individual's capacity to lead and influence others, it is possible that their inherent cultural behaviour can influence the behaviours of those around them.

This - as a matter of fact - is what leadership is all about.

To be an effective leader is to develop principle-based inherent behaviours and build the capacity to influence others towards achievement of desired objectives through those behaviours.

The three cultural fronts

We have stated in the preceding section that culture is either inherent or acquired; and that acquired culture can be developed informally through social interactions or formally through management policies, processes and procedures.

A closer look at these literally gives us what I would call the three cultural fronts. These are: *Intrinsic, informal* and *formal* cultural fronts.

What the above entails is that we have three spaces from which we can influence culture in the workplace and get desired results.

This is illustrated in the figure below.

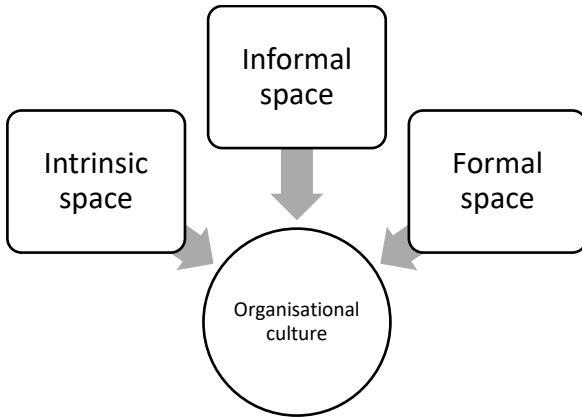


Figure 2: The three cultural fronts

Each of these spaces feeds into the corporate culture differently; and the overall result is determined by the skill levels possessed by organisational leaders to effectively function in each of these three spaces.

Understanding the two dimensions of human consciousness

Having talked about the duo-conscious nature of culture and identified the three cultural fronts, it is important that we extend this discussion a bit further and gain some understanding of the psychology behind the mind of a human being in relation to culture.

Every human being has got two dimensions or faculties of the mind. These are the *conscious mind* and the *subconscious mind*.

(i) The Conscious mind

The conscious mind is the mechanism which works on active consciousness. It is the faculty of awareness which directly and spontaneously interacts with the environment through the five senses.

(ii) The Sub-conscious mind

The sub-conscious mind is the passive element of the collective mind. This component is what houses the mental codes on which basis an individual's value system, personality and character are built.

The subconscious mind is where personal *experiences, resolutions, convictions, beliefs, secret hopes, fears and desires* are stored. This is the place where the real person is.

The subconscious mind is developed by active as well as passive processing and storing of information coming in through the conscious mind.

The relationship between the conscious and sub-conscious mind can best be understood by likening it to what happens in a computer.

Quite an unusual example but I know it will help us drive the point home.

A modern-day personal computer has got two major types of memory; the Random Access Memory (RAM) and the Hard Disc Drive (HDD).

The RAM is *temporary storage* where information is kept for use by the Central Processing Unit (CPU) during operation.

The HDD on the other hand is permanent storage where the operating system and other critical computer programs are kept.

Much of what the computer is capable of doing is dependent on what is stored on the HDD.

In like manner, the conscious mind of a person behaves like the RAM of a computer and deals with real time information to coordinate human behaviour. The sub-conscious mind on the other hand is the HDD of the human being which houses the “operating system” and dictates sub-conscious behaviours.

In line with the above, there is a saying which goes “*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*”

The “heart” in this context does not refer to the organ which pumps blood. It refers to the sub-

conscious mind (or the “HDD”) of the person. The nature, character and inherent attributes of every individual is housed in the sub-conscious mind of that person and as has already been mentioned, the sub-conscious mind can be developed by regulating what goes into it through the conscious mind.

The unity of consciousness

As the human mind develops through disciplined thought, consistent reasoning and study, it begins to attain a state I call the *unity of consciousness*.

When an individual reaches this state, they begin to think and reason from the “inner man” or “inner self”.

Instead of making decisions based purely on what is obtaining from the extrinsic environment, they begin to consult more with the inner self, compare what is inside with what is outside and arrive at the most preferred conclusions from that perspective.

How do you identify a person who has attained this level of mastery?

- (i) They are critical thinkers.
- (ii) They demonstrate high levels of professionalism and self-discipline.

- (iii) They don't speak because they have to say something but because they have something to say.
- (iv) They use three sets of ears to listen. One set of ears listens to *content*, the other listens to *context* whilst the third one listens to the *intent*. They are always looking for the message within the message and the intention behind those messages.
- (v) They do not make decisions on impulse but take time to consider different factors attached to that decision.
- (vi) They maintain composure when faced with a crisis.
- (vii) They have high emotional intelligence (EQ).

Attaining the unity of consciousness is a priceless virtue which should be a primary goal for every well-meaning leader desiring to build a positive culture in the workplace.

"How did you learn about the unity of consciousness?" You might want to ask me.

Well, I discovered this wisdom from personal experiences; and ever since, I have endeavoured to discipline myself to sustain this state of being.

When attuned to the inner voice, I acquire insights too deep for the conscious mind to grasp by itself. Much of what I write is actually a product of this level of consciousness.

What has all this got to do with culture?

Well, we will learn more as we go.

For now, let's move on and look at some ways in which poor culture often expresses itself in the workplace.

2



IDENTIFYING CULTURAL TRAITS

How does poor culture in the workplace look like?

What characteristic features should we be looking for in order for us to distinguish between a good working culture and a bad one?

Essentially there are a lot of factors we can consider to determine the cultural disposition of employees in the workplace.

However, the following six are the most common ones to be on the lookout for:

(i) Time Management

How directors, managers and the general workforce manage their time at work has got volumes to speak about the culture of people in that workplace.

For example; do employees report for work before the official reporting time, on the dot or minutes after the official reporting time?

Do people start meetings on time and end them on time?

How good are the team members with sticking to scheduled appointments within and outside the work place?

These are some of the time management related pointers which can help you identify the cultural disposition of employees in the workplace.

(ii) Communication patterns

The second cultural trait to look out for in an organisation are communication patterns.

It is possible for one to perceive culture in the workplace by simply listening to employees speak.

Written communication such as posters, notices and signage also speak volumes about culture in the workplace.

A workshop with very little or no signage for example is likely to tell you the organisation does not pay much attention to safety and order.

Similarly, a consistently blank notice board may be an indicator of poor internal communication.

An active institution always has something to share with employees and the notice board is one of easiest and most widely used mediums for such

communications. Where other means of communication such as emails and social media platforms have been adopted, there must be evidence of active use.

(iii) Organisational energy

Organisational energy is the degree of commitment and focus employees exhibit towards company objectives. Organisational energy is largely demonstrated by what employees spend much of their time on during working hours; how they respond to internal issues amongst departments; how they deal with customers and other external stakeholders and how they respond to emergencies.

If there is one factor which clearly spells out cultural orientation in the workplace, it is organisational energy.

I took cognisance of this phenomenon when I was Divisional Manager for Mulonga Water Supply and Sanitation Company in Mufulira town, Zambia.

During my early days in the office - after I had been moved from Head Office where I was serving as Technical Manager prior to the transfer - I noticed this casual approach by employees towards their work.

Whenever they reported for work in the morning, the first thing they would do was to stand under the storage shade and nearby mango trees to chat.

No one really seemed to be bothered about the business of the day. The only thing which moved them out from under the shade was the morning meetings scheduled for 08:30 AM; and even then, supervisors would go for the meeting and leave their subordinates under the shed unattended.

I saw entire mornings wasted away without anyone giving a care about the negative impact this behaviour was having on the wellbeing of the company. It seemed as though the only person who was concerned about what would become of the company as a result of this bad culture was this guy who had just been transferred from head office and given the responsibility to manage the district.

I saw another exception from Mr. Musonda, the man responsible for the sanitation team on the northern side of the district. This man made sure his team was in the office at 08:00 AM discussing the program for the day; and as you would expect from a typical African working environment, the man was hated for his commitment to work. He

was actually nicknamed “Idi Amin” by his subordinates for his intolerance.

(iv) Internal and external relationships

Every healthy relationship has got characteristics which fuel and sustain its existence. Some of these include honesty, respect, maturity and effective resolution of disputes between parties. When such attributes are not in existence in a relationship, it’s a clear indication that the persons involved have not fully matured for such interactions.

Similarly, how employees relate with both internal and external stakeholders speak volumes about culture in that organisation.

A toxic culture is likely to create a negative customer perception and will often sustain unresolved conflicts amongst employees.

(v) Physical appearance

In many instances, it is possible for one to catch a glimpse of the organisational culture in a workplace by simply looking at the physical appearance of employees in alignment with their nature of work.

Every industry/organisation has got a form of custom wear which represent what the organisation stands for.

For example, you do not expect to find employees in a bank dressed in industrial work suits or overalls. It just doesn't suit the industry.

There could be a few exceptions here and there but generally, appearance is usually aligned with the nature of business the organisation is involved in.

Not only does appearance reveal the nature of work an organisation does; but within the colours, designs and general appearance of most corporate and industrial attire is a silent expression of the culture of the organisation.

As you look forward to identifying and dealing with the termites in the guestroom therefore, you will need to know that appearance also speaks volumes about culture in the workplace.

(vi) Corporate gatherings

The cultural framework of any society is mostly demonstrated to its fullness during gatherings.

For example, ethnic groups in Africa demonstrate their diverse cultural values through gatherings which are mostly in form of ceremonies. During these gatherings, participants

wear uniquely designed regalia and perform dances and other ceremonial activities in line with their beliefs and inherited practices.

In like manner, one of the best places to detect the cultural disposition of any organisation is during gatherings such as board meetings, planning meetings, operations meetings, social events etc.

How directors, managers and the general workforce behave and interact during gatherings will tell you volumes about culture in that organisation.

I have been part of meetings where people would spend hours talking until they lost track of where they had started from and what issues they needed to address during that meeting.

As a matter of observation, many organisations I have interacted with in Zambia - whether corporate or otherwise - are suffering from this negative cultural disposition where people take meetings as places to satisfy their personal egos at the expense of corporate goals.

I have also been part of meetings where the CEO would curate closed end questions to prompt his own desired responses without giving participants chance to frame their own words and

give their own perspectives on the subject under discussion.

During these meetings, you were only allowed to say “yes” or “no” even if your opinion contradicted with both options.

I have been in discussions where no one bothered to keep notes or minutes of what was being discussed; and each time there was a successive meeting, discussions tabled in the previous meeting would take a totally new direction.

These are all demonstrations of cultural traits which can be picked during formal and informal gatherings in the workplace.

Our primary lesson from these is that how people behave during gatherings speaks volumes about culture in that workplace.

3



ORGANISATIONAL CULTURAL DYNAMICS

The subject of culture has been highly misunderstood by leaders and their followers in many organisations.

This lack of understanding has resulted into many leaders wrongly diagnosing the cause of the problem and prescribing the wrong initiatives to remedy.

In this section we look at the principles of culture and ascertain the real determinants of cultural dispositions in the workplace.

By the end of the chapter, you should be able to identify who in the organisational hierarchy bears the greater responsibility for setting the tone and determining culture in that environment.

Principles of culture

Culture is governed by generic guiding principles which influence behaviour and dictate outcomes. It is critical for us at this point to consider these

guiding principles as a starting point for our understanding of what really constitutes culture in the workplace.

(i) Culture is a people issue

The first principle we need to understand is that culture is a people issue. We cannot talk about culture in the absence of the human being as the primary object.

Remember our earlier discussion on dual-consciousness?

Cultural behaviours originate from the very nature of human existence and are projected through the window of the conscious and sub-conscious minds. To remodel culture therefore means reprogramming the sub-conscious mind by feeding it with the correct information and disciplining the conscious mind to align to the correct thoughts. This calls for continuous learning and relearning of proven principles governing life and work.

(ii) Culture is transferable

The second principle of culture is that it can be transferred from one person or group of persons to another. This transfer can occur through structured means such as cultural exchange

programs and formal training as well as informally through social interactions and networking.

One typical example of formal cultural transfer is through structured knowledge frameworks which are taught as transformational programs in the workplace.

For instance, kaizen, a Japanese business philosophy of continuous improvement of working practices, is nothing more than a structured working culture aimed at promoting efficiency and excellence.

As this program is taught in different organisations around the world, the Japanese work culture is transferred to those who sit to learn and practice the principles of Kaizen.

Informal cultural transfer on the other hand occurs through daily interactions with differently cultured people as well as through art and entertainment.

The bottom line to this point is that culture is transferable.

(iii) Culture is trans-generational

The third principle of culture is that it has the capacity to transcend generations. When you look at most cultural beliefs and practices around the

world, you will realise that a lot of them have been preserved for hundreds of years and passed down from one generation to another.

Many of the traditional ceremonies we celebrate in Zambia and across other African nations for example are simply a demonstration of culture passed down from one generation to another.

(iv) Culture is influenced by history

As we will come to learn later on, one of the most effective ways to deal with culture in the workplace is to revisit and gain full understanding of the past.

Culture always bears an imprint of a company's past. This could be in form of past successes, past failures, past leaders, past structures and restructurings, past products or services, etc.

What does this tell you?

The culture you are trying to change in that organisation partly came about because of what happened in the past.

History always has a way of influencing culture and programming employees' inherent behaviours in the workplace.

(v) **Culture can be changed**

The fifth characteristic of culture is that it can be changed.

I bet this should be good news for organisational leaders who have been grappling with cultural problems in the workplace for some time.

Whatever cultural issues you are struggling to deal with as a leader, understand that it can be changed.

I know you might already be asking the most probable question:

“How can culture be changed?”

“What exactly do I have to do to turn tables around and build a highly motivated team willing to go the extra mile to achieve corporate objectives?”

Just hang on in there!

We will deal with that question in a short while.

The vicious cycle of culture

Who is responsible for developing culture in the workplace? Who should be held accountable when employees’ behaviours are not in line with expected cultural norms?

Is it the directors, managers or the general workforce?

Here is something for you to consider in line with the above questions. Take time to think through it.

“Poor organisational culture is always an effect before it becomes a cause. Trying to deal with it as the reason for failure without attending to the root cause therefore is likely to end in frustration.”

This statement is the undergirding principle which defines culture in the workplace. I call this principle “the vicious cycle of culture.”

What is the logic behind this principle?

Whenever organisational leaders come to a point where they are confronted with poor working culture, chances are that there are some behaviours which they have natured consciously and unconsciously which have resulted into the poor culture they eventually have to deal with.

The diagram below shows a typical cyclic pattern depicting the vicious cycle of organisational culture.



Fig 3: *The vicious cycle of culture*

When you take a close look at this pattern, you will notice that culture predominantly begins with corporate leaders (Point A).

The kind of leadership practiced by directors and managers takes the organisation to point B where the *corporate culture* of the organisation is defined.

What is meant by corporate culture in this case?

By corporate culture, we mean norms and practices embraced by leadership, which ultimately influence and dictate corporate behaviour.

When leaders set the tone and demonstrate certain behaviours, they create a highly

contagious environment which other employees simply follow through and align to.

The end result of this is a poor working culture demonstrated at individual level (point C); and as you may rightly expect, poor employees' work culture will always lead to poor corporate performance (Point D).

Now here is where problems often come in:

When directors and managers observe that the company's poor performance is largely as a result of poor individual working culture, they tend to leave themselves out of the equation and begin looking for whom to fix. This takes the organisation to point E on the vicious cycle: *Wrong diagnosis of the cause of the problem.*

Remember what we said a while ago: *culture is always an effect before it becomes a cause*; and the starting point is leadership.

Rather than playing the blame game therefore, directors and managers ought to include themselves as key players in the cultural issue and take the leadership role to steer the "ship" in the right direction.

When leaders of an organisation are able to correctly diagnose the root cause of poor working culture, it becomes the starting point for corporate recovery.

Wrong diagnosis will always result into wrong prescriptions and wrong prescriptions will lead to failed leadership.

This cycle, if not interrupted at the correct point around the vicious cycle, will keep going on and on until it forms the downward spiral of poor working culture as illustrated below.

The Downward Spiral Effect of Poor Culture in the Work Place

When poor working culture is not dealt with appropriately over a prolonged period of time, it results into a downward spiral effect (see figure xxx)

Poor culture is like a wild fire sparked by a match stick. Small as it may be, a match stick has the potential of setting an entire forest ablaze and destroying every tree, plant and herb standing in its way.

In like manner, a bad culture started from one spot has the potential of spreading through the organisation and corrupting every element of positivity and hard work within a very short space of time.

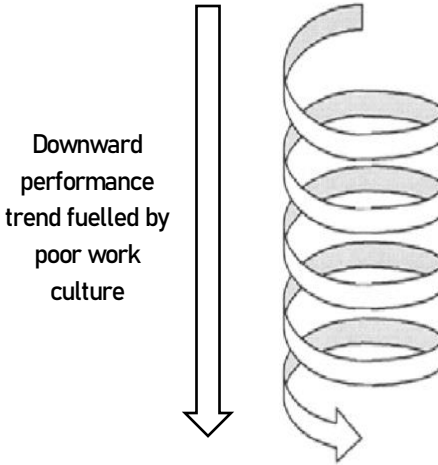


Fig 4: The Downward spiral effect of poor organisational culture

From the above illustration, we understand that the longer it takes for organisational leaders to acknowledge their indispensable role in bringing about cultural change, the further they push the organisation around the vicious cycle.

Now here is the issue:

Each time the organisation goes around from point "A" to point "E," it is not likely to retain the same level of performance as when it first started at point "A." All factors being equal, the organisation will be downgraded in specific key performance areas. If no intervention is made,

these cycles will keep going down until they form a spiral-like pattern of corporate performance.

When left unattended for a long time, this scenario will keep going until the company hits rock bottom.

The Extremities of Organisational Culture

You might at this point be asking yourself why we have chosen to lay the burden of culture on organisational leaders.

Why should it be the leader to pay for the follies of the entire workforce?

Here is a principle to help you answer this question:

Culture is predominantly shaped at the topmost layer of the corporate structure; but it only becomes clearly visible at the bottom.

I call this the extremities of organisational culture.

Wait a minute!

Does this mean other employees do not have the capacity to bring in bad habits which might ultimately affect culture in the workplace?

The answer to the above question is that they do have. Employees can bring in habits and practices which have the potential to influence the

behaviour of others and nature a bad culture amongst their contemporaries.

So why should it be the manager's burden?

Because they are the ones who have been conferred with authority to command direction and influence behaviour.

Nothing enters a system and remains tolerated unless the authority in that system has allowed it.

In as much therefore as employees have the ability to bring in intolerable behaviours, they do not have the authority to sustain those behaviours.

Therefore, the buck ends with the directors and managers who have been endowed with authority to manage the workforce.

This is the burden of leadership.

By accepting to take up leadership roles as managers, directors and supervisors in the workplace, we also accept to take up the responsibility to nature others and ensure they are aligned to organisational objectives.

However, we need to be mindful of how this is done especially when it comes to the aspect of culture.

Playing the blame game will fuel the downward spiral effect and ruin your chances of success as an organisation.

The most important takeaway

As we move on to the next chapter, this is the most important take away from this discussion:

“Culture is predominantly created at the top but clearly reveals itself at the bottom.” Managers should therefore be careful to consider themselves as part of the cultural equation and take an all-inclusive approach in dealing with the problem.

4

THE THREE CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS



Having looked at the principles of culture and how it is transferred through the corporate organogram, the next question we need to answer is this:

Does culture have any form of stages through which it progresses?

The answer to the above question is “yes.”

Culture in the workplace has got three principal stages or orientations through which it predominantly expresses itself. These are: the *position orientation*, the *performance orientation* and the *growth-orientation*.

Let's take a look at each of these to gain understanding.

(i) **Position-orientated organisational culture**

Position-oriented culture is the lowest form of culture in the work place. Under this orientation, employees' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are

more focused on the positions they hold in the company than anything else; and their input is centred on keeping their jobs at the expense of corporate performance. Some of the visible cultural traits you will notice under this orientation are:

- (a) Employees will report for work on time because they have to and not because they want to; and they will pack their bags early enough to allow them leave the office at the exact knocking off time and where possible before knocking off time.

- (b) The blame game is a predominant feature when accountability is demanded of them.

- (c) People are comfortable with giving excuses for failure to perform their duties and usually get away with it.

- (d) There is no team work.

- (e) Culture remodelling is preached throughout the organisation but is never practiced.

- (f) The disciplinary code is the most useful tool to drive performance.
- (g) Employees deliver out of fear for reprimand and loss of their jobs than they do out of personal desire to achieve corporate results.

(ii) Performance-oriented organisational culture

The second orientation of culture in the workplace is the performance-oriented culture. Under this disposition, employees are more focused on productivity and are accountable for failure. Some of the common cultural traits under this orientation are:

- (a) There is a general sense of willingness to get things done.
- (b) Rewards, recognition and discipline are the driving force for performance.
- (c) Employees are ready to hold each other accountable through their reporting structures.
- (d) Performance-based conflicts amongst peers are a common feature.

- (e) Ideas usually flow from top to bottom in form of instructions and directives.

When an organisation exhibits the production-oriented culture, the odds are that managers at the helm of the business are more skilled in management than they are in leadership.

(iii) Growth-orientated organisational culture

The third and highest form of culture in the work place is the growth-oriented culture. The following are some of the key features under this orientation:

- (a) Employees fully understand the vision and mission of the organisation.
- (b) Product and service quality is of key importance to the workers.
- (c) Employees are ready to go the extra mile to produce results.
- (d) Ideas flow from different directions in the reporting structure.
- (e) Creativity and innovation are highly evident and is often promoted and rewarded.

(f) Coaching, mentoring and effective succession planning are a significant part of the work culture.

Generally, the growth-oriented culture is characterised by a demonstration of a deep sense of ownership by the executives and sundry.

Cultural transitions

In as much as we have been able to place distinctive boundaries between the above three cultural orientations, it is very unlikely that each of these will stand completely isolated from the other.

Practically speaking, these three cultural orientations have got intersection points merging one with another as illustrated in the figure below:

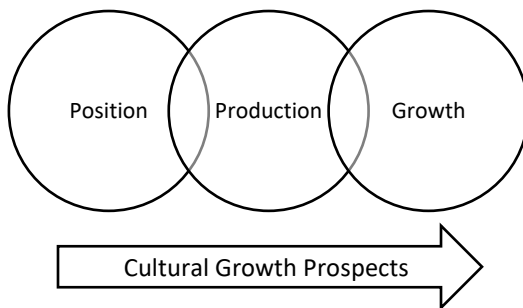


Fig 5: Cultural transitions

From the above diagram, we can picture how each of these three orientations relate with each other.

Taking a closer look at the illustration, we see the following as possible combinations of culture orientation:

- (i) *Position-Production* combination
- (ii) *Production-Growth* combination
- (iii) *Position-Growth* combination.

When an organisation starts from the position orientation, it will have to be taken through the production orientation before employees can begin demonstrating elements of growth.

It is very difficult – if not impossible – for managers to skip the production orientation and land their team at the growth orientation.

Production always precedes growth.

Until your team learns to produce, they are not ready to grow. This as a matter of fact is the reason why most organisations in Africa are still struggling to implement growth-oriented policy frameworks such as the innovation policy.

Most of these companies – especially public institutions and government agencies – are stuck in the mire of position orientation and are struggling to effectively implement performance

management strategies as a way of increasing productivity.

Inclinations of a positive culture

The other question I would like us to answer before we move to the next chapter is this?

Which areas of the business should a progressive organisational culture seek to address?

The following are the most important:

Value creation, Sustainability, Profitability, Expansion and growth, People development, Effective management and leadership.

When you take a look at the above three orientations of culture, you will agree with me that the growth-oriented culture is the only one which touches all these critical areas and should thus be the object of focus for every well-meaning business leader.

5



ESTABLISHING CULTURAL CHANGE

In order for us to deal with cultural issues in the workplace in the most amicable way, we first need to search and discover the kind of information required to correctly orient the conscious and sub-conscious minds of employees.

If you recall what we discussed earlier, culture is a product of the conscious and sub-conscious mental programming of individuals in a working environment.

If we can therefore discover the kind of information as well as experiences which employees need to be consistently exposed to in order for them to nature a positive working culture, then we are halfway done dealing with the termites in the guestroom.

The above brings us to what I call the “DNA” of organisational culture.

The DNA of Organisational Culture

What is the DNA of organisational culture?

It is a framework outlining eight doctrinal points which employees need to be oriented in if they are to develop a positive culture towards their work.

What does this mean?

There are eight key areas organisational leaders must address in order for them to influence the sub-conscious minds of their employees and contribute to the development of a positive corporate culture.

Let us take a moment and have a look at each of these eight factors in detail.

(i) **Relevance of vision**

If you want your employees or subordinates to develop a positive culture towards their work and contribute positively to the growth and wellbeing of the organisation, the first thing you need to do is to communicate effectively and help them understand *the relevance of the vision* which the organisation is running with.

When employees fully understand the “why” of a business, they are likely to develop a positive inclination towards achievement of corporate

goals and will ensure they play their functional roles for the success of all.

A common legend is told of a janitor who was found working late at NASA during president John FKs reign as the 35th president of the United States of America.

Asked by the president why he was working so late, the janitor responded, "Mr President, I am helping put a man on the moon."

This gentleman understood clearly the relevance of the corporate vision and developed a positive culture towards his work in line with his level of understanding of the vision.

If you are struggling with termites in the guestroom; those bad habits which have culminated into a poor working culture amongst your employees or subordinates; the first thing you need to do is to help them understand clearly what the corporate vision is all about.

You need to answer questions like:

Where is the organisation coming from?

Where are we going?

How long will it take us to get to our destination?

As you practically answer these questions in the simplest form, you will be communicating the relevance of the vision to the least of your

employees and nurturing a positive culture in them towards their work.

(ii) Philosophy of leadership

The second factor with potential to influence the work culture of employees in a workplace is the leadership philosophy taught and practiced by directors, managers and supervisors.

At this point we need to understand that there are two dimensions of leadership. There is self-leadership and people leadership.

Self-leadership is one's ability to align their *intentions*, their *thoughts*, their *words* and their *actions* together. An effective leader of self is one who says what they mean, mean what they say and do what they say and mean.

People leadership on the other hand is one's ability to inspire and influence others to:

- (a) *Perceive the corporate vision in its real context.*
- (b) *Realise their inherent potential and perceive their own personal visions.*

A combination of personal and people leadership is what culminates into a comprehensive growth-centred leadership philosophy which can alter culture positively.

What should be the leaders' role in championing these two forms of leadership in the workplace?

(a) They should teach their followers the principles of personal and people leadership

One of the things many corporate leaders have failed to do is to teach their followers how to become effective leaders of themselves and of others.

As a business leader, you must find means of inculcating these valuable lessons in to the minds of your team members if you are going to build a positive culture in the workplace.

If you are able to deliver these lessons by yourself, then create programs through which you can deliver them. If not, you can outsource training services or get some of your team members to be trained as trainers.

Whichever way you chose to approach this matter, the bottom line is that correct leadership philosophies must be taught in the workplace if you are going to build a growth-oriented culture amongst your employees.

(b) They should demonstrate these principles by walking the talk

The most effective way to influence people's behaviour is to do before them what you want them to become.

Teaching leadership alone is not enough.

You need to demonstrate what you teach by becoming an effective leader of yourself and of others.

(iii) Employees' level of awareness of purpose

The next thing employees need for them to develop a positive attitude towards their work is to become fully aware of the reason why the organisation they work for exists.

With this in mind, it becomes the leaders' responsibility to ensure they interpret the mission statement of the organisation to their followers in the most sensible way. When employees fully understand why the organisation exists and the role it plays in society, they will be more cautious with how things are done and will make every effort to generate the best results.

(iv) Level of understanding of what the vision demands out of the employees

The next factor to consider as a key ingredient in developing a positive culture is the level of understanding of what the vision demands out of each and every worker in the organisation.

When employees understand what they need to do in their respective functional roles to contribute towards the corporate vision, they are likely to develop a positive attitude towards their work. Unclear job functions kill morale and lead to frustration.

(v) Fulfilled sense of support towards assigned responsibilities

Another thing which kills morale and builds a negative mental disposition towards work is being assigned duties without provisions to enable one effectively carry out those assignments.

If you are going to succeed at building positive mental paradigms and developing a positive culture in the workplace, ensure that as you lead and assign duties, you also provide resources to enable your followers effectively carry out those tasks.

A fulfilled sense of support inspires creativity and builds confidence in your followers.

(vi) Level of appreciation of personal benefits derived from fulfilment of the vision

The next principle which helps employees reprogram their sub-conscious minds towards a positive work culture is the level of appreciation of personal benefits derived from fulfilment of the corporate vision.

When employees understand that the pay check they get at the end of every month is directly linked to fulfilment of the objectives enshrined in their job description, they tend to develop a sense of responsibility and are likely to nurture a positive attitude towards their work.

(vii) Assurance and timely fulfilment of personal benefits accredited to employees

The other area organisational leaders need to pay attention to in order to deal with corporate culture is employees' emoluments.

The primary reason why those workers came to join the organisation you are leading is not because they did not have anything else to do with their time; but because they had basic needs to meet.

What this entails is that failure by the organisation to honour its part of the deal so that these needs can be met will negate every effort made to build a positive culture in the workplace.

Never assume that when you don't pay employees what is due to them on time, they will align and still hold on to a positive working attitude.

When employees' personal survival is threatened, natural survival instincts fall in place; and the downside to this is that positive culture does not thrive on instincts but on principles.

Take time to observe organisations which have a tendency of delaying monthly salaries.

Most employees of these organisations are more in a survival mode than they are in a performance mode. They are constantly looking for ways to keep up with life's demands and will easily lay their hands on anything which will provide them some little cash - even if it means stealing money from the company.

(viii) Effectiveness of systems and policies established to champion objectives

How effective systems and policies are in an organisation has a direct bearing on the cultural

disposition exhibited by employees in the workplace.

In order to build a positive work culture therefore, organisational leaders must ensure that business systems and policies are well structured and properly coordinated.

Uncoordinated functional systems introduce inefficiencies and kills the spirit of accountability; and by systems we mean methods, processes and procedures established to achieve corporate objectives.

Policies on the other hand are the overarching principles which govern results.

When policies are properly structured and diligently followed, they can be leveraged to promote a growth-oriented culture in the workplace.

Conceptual view of the DNA of organisational culture



Fig 6: The DNA of organisational

The Illustration above shows a conceptual presentation of the DNA of organisational culture. The whole essence of this presentation is to help you have a mental picture of these eight principles for better comprehension as well as for ease of remembrance.

Positive Mental Presence (PMP) and culture

One of the reasons why it is critical for organisational leaders to understand and abide by the above eight principles of culture remodelling is that these directly influence the mental disposition of employees during their productive time.

The more employees are subjected to a working environment curated under strict adherence to these laws, the better their positive mental presence (PMP) is likely to become.

What is PMP?

PMP is the degree of mental awareness and consideration an employee gives to his work.

Employees who spend much of their time thinking about how to solve work-related problems have a higher PMP than those who may be present at work but still be preoccupied with other issues of personal concern.

This is particularly true for knowledge workers i.e. those employees whose jobs depend more on their mind than it does on their physical strength. The value of these people in the workplace is derived from their ability to think through problems, make decisions and act in the direction of their decisions.

It takes a focused mind to align thoughts, decisions and actions to get optimal results.

The fact that I have reported for work in the morning does not really mean that I am 100% mentally focused on the job. It is possible for me to be present in the office and yet be thinking of where to get money for my children's school fees; probably because the company I work for has delayed to pay salaries.

It is also possible for me to lose focus and begin searching for jobs on the internet because my present employer fails to provide tools and resources to enable me carry out my job effectively.

Taking into consideration the above two illustrations, you will realise that the foundation of a progressive culture in the workplace is derived from developing a higher PMP.

How often and how engaging employees subject their thoughts to work-related matters will have a direct bearing on their work attitude.

To influence culture therefore entails inducing growth-focused thoughts in the minds of employees.

It is the responsibility of business leaders to ensure that employees are driven to value their work to a point where they will be willing to

spend extra time thinking of how to resolve issues in their respective departments.

How can they achieve this?

Through application of the principles enshrined in the “DNA” of organisational culture.

Required skills for culture remodelling

We have looked at the “DNA” of organisational culture and have outlined eight key areas to focus on if you are going to influence the sub-conscious minds of your followers and develop a positive cultural disposition in the workplace.

Getting back to our conceptual understanding of culture, it was stated that cultural influence is developed from three different fronts as follows:

- (i) *From the intrinsic space*
(Inherent individual behaviours)

- (ii) *From the informal space*
(Acquired social behaviours)

- (iii) *From the formal space*
(Enforced corporate behaviours)

The primary focus of the “DNA” of organisational culture is to deal with *inherent*

individual behaviours of employees with respect to their working environment. It is the foundation for nurturing a growth-oriented cultural disposition in the workplace.

For us to fully benefit from this framework however, we need to find a way of building up on it by addressing culture from all three fronts.

How can we achieve this?

By identifying the skills required to deal with each of these three cultural fronts.

What we need to understand is that the skills needed to influence ones *sub-conscious mind* are different from those needed to *enforce corporate behaviours*; and so are the ones required to influence *social behaviours*.

To influence the sub-conscious minds and realign the mental paradigms of your followers demands that you possess strong *leadership skills*.

To enforce corporate behaviours and ensure policies, procedures, rules and regulations are followed is largely a product of *people management*.

To influence the social aspect of employee behaviour calls for sound knowledge and experience in *social psychology*.

Social psychological skills unfortunately are amongst the most neglected skills in corporate management and leadership. Notwithstanding,

they are amongst the most valuable skills when it comes to culture remodelling.

Human beings are social creatures whose attitudes and behaviours are constantly influenced by their interaction with each other.

Ignoring the social aspect of leadership therefore makes it very difficult to foster cultural change.

The table below summarises the above three outlined skills and provides a guide on related activities for enforcement.

**Required skills for effective culture
remodelling**

CULTURAL FRONT	REQUIRED SKILLS	RELATED ACTIVITIES
Inherent Individual behaviours	Leadership skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Active leading ✓ Training ✓ Coaching ✓ Mentoring
Enforced Corporate behaviours	People management skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Management activities ✓ Skills training
Acquired Social behaviours	Emotional and Social Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Training. ✓ Corporate-social activities. ✓ Team building. ✓ Games/Arts.

Table 1: Culture remodelling skills summary

In my over 14 years of formal employment (as at the time of writing this book), I have met very few managers with the ability to showcase all three levels of skills highlighted above. Majority of

those I have worked with have demonstrated a strong inclination towards people management.

The danger with taking up this disposition is that you are likely to fall into the *blame game* trap where you always seek for *who* the problem is when the issues at hand demand that you look at the "*when*," the "*why*," the "*what*" or the "*how*" questions.

Actually, my strongest conviction is that what has stunted the growth of African corporate leadership and prevented many of us from doing the unimaginable in our leadership roles is that we have paid too much attention on the people and have cast a blind eye on other pertinent issues which determine corporate performance.

Organisational leadership in Africa has become so stereotypical that we move like zombies and do not take time to analyse situations based on sound business doctrines.

As long as we have demanded for that report which we may never even have time to read, as long as we have set those key performance indicators, as long as we have the disciplinary code in place, then we believe that success will be an automatic result; but unfortunately, things do not often work out that way. You might strike a

few wins at the onset but you will fail to sustain your results in the long run.

Summary of initiatives for establishing cultural change in the workplace

Based on what has been discussed this far, it is possible for us to come up with a summary of initiatives to consider when dealing with culture remodelling in the workplace as follows:

(i) Always start with the leaders

The first principle you need to embrace if you are going to remodel culture in the workplace is to start with the leaders.

If you recall what we said earlier, culture in the workplace is largely dictated by the behaviour and attitude demonstrated by leaders at the top.

If you want to initiate culture remodelling initiatives therefore, you must begin with the topmost leaders and then cascade the initiatives downwards.

Rather than being observers and judges of the masses, directors and managers must take up the front role and become agents of change. They must be ready to demonstrate to their followers the culture they desire to see in the workplace.

(ii) **Correctly interpret the vicious cycle of cultural change**

The second thing you must do as an organisational leader to remodel culture is to correctly interpret the vicious cycle of culture and determine the best position from which the downward spiral effect can be stopped.

As was discussed earlier, there are five points making up the vicious cycle of organisational culture. These are: "A" Poor leadership/leadership culture, "B" Poor corporate culture, "C" Poor employees' working culture, "D" Poor corporate performance and "E" wrong root cause diagnosis.

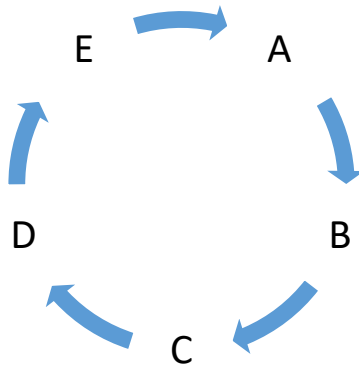


Figure 7: Simplified version of the vicious cycle of organisational culture

When you look closely at these five points on the vicious cycle of culture, you will realise that the best positions from which poor culture can be dealt with effectively are points “A” and “E” which talk about leadership decisions/culture and problem diagnosis respectively.

As a starting point, you must be able to correctly diagnose the root cause of the cultural problem you are faced with and then develop leadership skills to deal with those problems.

Attempts to deal with poor culture at point “C” where it manifests as employees’ behaviour is not likely to generate desired results.

When you approach culture from this point, you are likely to be dealing with symptoms and not the root cause; and in this respect, confrontation will be the best option at your disposal to trigger change.

There is however a downside to adopting the confrontational approach when dealing with cultural issues in the workplace.

What is this downside?

Confrontation by nature breeds resistance in the sub-conscious minds of those you are confronting, except there is deep conviction for the wrongs done.

Rather than taking up the confrontational approach therefore, you are likely to produce better results when you apply the law of challenge.

According to this law; *a mind you cannot challenge you are not likely to change for the better.*

What does this mean?

Instead of being confrontational about every display of poor working culture, you need to develop the habit of challenging the people you lead in relation to their work.

How do you do this?

- By assigning them with more challenging tasks.
- By delegating work to them.
- By publicly recognising good performance.
- By offering rewards for demonstrated improvement.
- By opening up merit-based opportunities such as educational scholarships etc.

There are lots of other initiatives you can explore and implement in addition to the above to challenge employees towards positive growth and change.

(iii) Understand organisational history

The third thing you need to do to foster cultural change in the workplace is to understand the history of the organisation and ride on this knowledge to recalibrate your approach to change.

History has a way of explaining the present and directing the future.

In order for you to understand why people behave the way they do at the workplace therefore; you might need to dig into the past and understand the origin of such behaviours.

Some of the areas you can focus on in this regard are:

(a) *Inherited cultural norms*: There are certain organisations which have inherited poor working culture from the past and sustained it into the present time.

A typical example of these are some government departments and agencies in our local communities.

Local councils in Zambia for instance have created for themselves a very bad name with regards to working culture. The negative perception towards their work culture is so deep that when someone wants to express

their displeasure against an employee's negative attitude towards work, they will cite these institutions as the epitome of poor working culture.

If you are a Zambian reading this book, then you certainly must have heard statements like *"don't behave like council employees"* or *"this is not the council where you can do things the way you want to."*

The inherited poor working culture in these institutions is so deep seated that it has been turned into a corporate identity for them.

An understanding of how this poor culture came about would be of great benefit to those who desire to bring about positive change.

(b) *Leadership Transitions*: When looking at past leadership transitions, you will need to ask yourself questions like; "which CEOs or departmental heads worked for this organisation in the immediate past?"

"What were their leadership styles like?"

"How was the performance of the organisation during their reign?"

Asking and providing answers to such questions will help you gain insight into the

origin of some of the cultural issues you could be dealing with in that organisation.

- (c) *Mergers and acquisitions*: If the organisation you are leading is a privately owned company, then you will need to understand organisational history with regards to ownership.

Have there been any mergers/acquisitions?

How were these changes structured?

Was there a merging of staff with different cultural backgrounds?

These are some of the questions you need to consider under this category.

If you are dealing with a public institution or government agency, there could be a possibility that overseeing structures have been altered several times thus affecting the cultural disposition of employees. You need to gain insight into such matters as well if you are going to succeed at remodelling culture.

- (d) *Successes and failures*: How has the performance of the organisation been in the past?

Has it been predominantly successful or otherwise?

Are there any notable levels of achievement worth considering?

Successes and failures have a way of finding their way into the cultural disposition of the organisation. Identifying their effects therefore increase your chances of succeeding at culture remodelling.

(e) *Product and service evolution*: Although this might sound out of context at the onset, we need to understand that product and service evolution has a way of filtering into cultural disposition in the workplace. It is therefore important for you to understand how the business has evolved over the years with regards to products or services.

(f) *Financial history*: The other critical component of the past you need to understand is the financial history of the organisation you are leading.

How has the company performed financially over the years?

If it is in debt, then how was this debt accrued?

Is the company positioned to recover in the near future?

How has the financial position of the company affected the employees?

These and many other historical facts will help you understand why the organisation you are leading has been demonstrating certain cultural traits. They will literally point out to you some of the reasons why employees do things the way they do and help you chart a new course for the business.

(iv) Follow the growth path

The next principle to help reorient culture in the workplace is to follow the growth path. I will talk more about the subject of growth in relation to culture when we come to deal with how to develop the right skills for culture remodelling in the next chapter six.

(v) Initiate cultural exchange programs

Another way to influence culture in the workplace is to identify organisations which have developed a positive culture and initiating exchange programs with them.

Such an initiative will provide a platform for your employees to remodel their behaviour and align to positive elements.

One of the bright sides with exchange programs is that they create an environment where those on the downside of events will be challenged to perform better. As we stated earlier on; a mind you cannot challenge you are not likely to change for the better.

6



DEVELOPING THE RIGHT SKILLS FOR CULTURE REMODELLING

In chapter five we highlighted three sets of skills required for one to be able to effectively champion culture remodelling in the workplace and deal with the termites in the guestroom.

In this chapter we deal with the aspect of developing these three sets of skills. Our focus at this point is to address deficiencies in corporate leaders.

Skill set No. 1: Leadership skills

The first set of skills we will deal with are leadership skills; and as we discussed earlier, the leadership skills possessed by a business leader will primarily deal with inherent individual behaviours of their followers.

What this entails is that if you are going to culturally influence your followers to a point

where they begin to change their inner perspectives of life and work, then you must develop your individual leadership skills.

A recap on something we already talked about on leadership:

There are two dimensions of leadership. These are self-leadership and people leadership. Self-leadership is one's ability to align intentions, thoughts, words and actions together. That is to say; an effective leader of self says what they mean, mean what they say and do what they say and mean.

People leadership is one's ability to influence others towards a common objective and in the process help them to discover who they really are and what their purpose in life is.

Taking these concepts further, we need to unbundle secrets to help directors and managers develop their leadership skills and equip them to deal with negative cultural elements in the workplace.

I have deliberately used the words "*directors*" and "*managers*" in the above statement to reemphasize to you that it's not enough to be a good manager to positively influence culture in the workplace. Culture is three dimensional. It calls for *leadership, management* and *social*

psychological intelligence to attain notable results. At this point, we are still discussing leadership and will get to the other two skillsets in a short while.

Growing yourself as a leader

What does it take to develop leadership skills and ensure you are empowered to deal with the termites in the guestroom?

Here is something for you to think about as a starting point:

The taste of what a mango tree produces is not in the roots of the tree and neither is it in the leaves. You cannot harness the sweetness hidden in this tree by chewing the leaves or boiling the roots.

The real value of a mango tree is hidden in the fruit produced by the tree.

Similarly, the value of leadership lies not in the position a person assumes in the workplace. The fact that you hold a high-ranking position does not make you a good leader. The value of leadership is in your ability to “bear” leadership fruits; and in order for you to do so, you must grow yourself to that fruit-bearing level of leadership.

The above takes us to the next part of unbundling principles to help you develop your leadership skills.

The four areas of leadership growth

There are four areas of growth every leader must look out for and aim to grow in if they are going to position themselves better for cultural influence.

What are these four areas?

(i) **Wisdom**

The first area leaders need to grow in to become better influencers of culture is the area of wisdom.

What is wisdom?

By definition, wisdom is the soundness of an action or decision with regards to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgement.

There are three key words to pay attention to in this definition of wisdom: *experience*, *knowledge* and *good judgement*; and the foundation of these three is knowledge.

What this entails is that if you are going to grow in wisdom and become a better leader of yourself and of others, you must fall in love with knowledge; and not just any kind of knowledge,

but knowledge which is relevant to your area of function.

I say relevant because there is a whole lot of information out there which is not likely to add value to your personal growth.

Be passionate about learning and at the same time be specific with what you need to learn.

(ii) **Physical health**

The second aspect of leadership development which unfortunately many leaders tend to neglect is the aspect of body health.

“What has body health got to do with leadership?” you might be asking.

Well, everything!!!

What you need to understand is that you can never be an effective leader from the sickbed.

If you are going to grow yourself as a leader and build capacity to influence corporate culture, you will need to develop a strong, healthy body capable of withstanding high stress levels which often come with corporate leadership.

Eat healthy, take a lot of water and exercise regularly.

With consistent habitual practice, you will be surprised at how much contribution these habits

will make towards development of your leadership skills.

Not only do exercises benefit your body physically, it is also a scientifically proven fact that consistent physical exercise has a way of propping up and sharpening your mind.

Evidencing the above assertion is a study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society which reveals that practice of tai chi, a Chinese martial art practiced for personal defence, showed the potential to enhance cognitive function in older adults.

Exercise certainly has a role to play in determining your brain power. As you exercise to gain physical fitness therefore, know that you are also building up on your brain's capacity to deliver better results in your work.

(iii) Relationships

The third area of growth you should focus on to become a better leader is the area of relationships. Who you relate with and how you interact with them has got a great deal to do with how you develop yourself as a leader.

It is often said "*show me your friends and I will tell you who you are.*"

The people we relate and constantly interact with in our daily lives play a significant role in shaping our own beliefs, attitude and character. As such, you need to invest time and energy in relationships which will help you grow your leadership capacity.

(iv) Purpose

The fourth area of growth you should focus on in order to develop your leadership capacity is the area of purpose.

Here is something we need to wrestle with and settle at this point:

Your job is usually not aligned to your purpose.

A job is what you do for a living. Your purpose is what you do for life.

What this essentially means is that every person on earth has got a purpose they need to fulfil in their life; and discovery of that purpose is what repositions them for greater success as leaders.

There are a lot of frustrated leaders in the workplace today who because of misguided career pursuits have found themselves chasing goals they were not supposed to chase.

If you are going to grow as a leader and succeed at what you do, you need to discover your

purpose and focus on pursuing it the rest of your life.

It is ok to start with any career of your choice but as you grow, you might have to transition into your life purpose.

Sometimes your career can align with your purpose. If it does, then you should build yourself up and grow in that field. If it does not, then work towards transitioning into your purpose.

How do you know that your present career path does not align with your purpose?

Well, that's a subject for another book; but just to give you a hint, when your career is not aligned to your purpose, there will be a point where you will feel like there is nothing more in it for you.

At this point, your desire to branch into a field you have been desiring to get into and have possibly been preparing for, will grow stronger by the day.

Skill set No. 2: People-management skills

The second set of skills you need to develop in order for you to be able to remodel culture in the workplace are people management skills.

What is the difference between leadership and people management?

Do people really need to be managed?

Yes, they do.

When we talk about people management in relation to culture, we are basically talking about four areas of focus which cannot ordinarily be dealt with by applying leadership skills.

What the above entails is that if you are going to effectively implement transformational programs and successfully remodel culture in the workplace, then you will have to develop skills to deal with each of these four areas.

What are these areas?

- (i) *Policies:* Effective people management demands that you understand how to work with policies to ensure alignment and compliance in specific areas of the business.

- (ii) *Processes:* Processes constitute methods and techniques which you are required to perform to achieve desired objectives. When business leaders fail to effectively manage their processes, they will be nurturing a retrogressive culture with potential to bring the business to its knees. You therefore need to develop specific skills to help you manage processes

effectively through the people assigned to each process function.

Effective process management may sometimes call for you to identify gaps in your followers and deal with them accordingly. Some of these can be dealt with through correction while others can be handled through training. The nature of deficiencies will of necessity determine the nature of interventions to be implemented.

(iii) *Procedures:* The third aspect of people management you need to deal with is the aspect of procedures. Procedures are what sustains the integrity of processes and guarantee consistency of results. You therefore need to develop skills to help you manage compliance to standard procedures.

(iv) *Production/Productivity:* The fourth aspect of people management you will need to pay attention to and develop capacity to manage is the area of production or productivity. How you manage productivity in the workplace will play a

significant role in determining cultural orientation.

There are a lot of performance management methods and tools which have been developed to help deal with this aspect of people management. It is up to you and your team to choose what works best for you and for the organisation.

Skill set No. 3: Emotional and Social skills

The third and last skill set to be developed in order to build capacity to remodel culture in the workplace is your emotional and social intelligence (ESI).

Emotional and social intelligence talks about two of the four recognised types of intelligence possessed by human beings.

Intelligence in a nutshell

According to psychologists, there are four types of intelligence every normal human being has capacity to demonstrate; and each of these four are measured using a statistical value called a “quotient.”

What are these four types of intelligence?

(i) *Intelligence Quotient (IQ)*

Intelligence quotient or IQ measures a person's level of comprehension, which predominantly manifests in form of academic abilities. Individuals who demonstrate superior academic prowess are considered to have a high IQ while those who tend to struggle in this area are categorized to be of lower IQ.

(ii) *Emotional Quotient (EQ)*

Emotional Quotient refers to one's ability to identify and manage their emotions as well as identify and correctly respond to other people's emotions.

(iii) *Social Quotient (SQ)*

Social Quotient talks about one's ability to interact and communicate with others effectively and to build successful lasting relationships.

(iv) *Adversity Quotient (AQ)*

Adversity Quotient is an individual's ability to overcome challenges and deal with adversity in different situations without breaking down,

losing their mind or making decisions which could cause harm to them and to others.

Highlighted above is what we can call intelligence in a nutshell.

Taking into consideration these four types of intelligence in relation to culture remodelling, you will agree with me that the following two stand out as prominent: EQ and SQ.

AQ can form part of the culture equation depending on the situation at hand. Notwithstanding, you cannot talk about culture without talking about the emotional and social perspectives of human interaction.

How to develop your emotional and social skills

How do you improve your EQ and SQ as a leader?

(i) *Develop a strong sense of self-worth*

One of the first things (*and in my opinion the most important thing*) you need to do to improve your EQ and SQ is to develop a strong sense of self-worth.

What does this mean?

You need to have a clearly defined position with regards to how much value you represent in your sphere of influence.

The price you place on yourself has a direct effect on how you interact with others and the level of emotional intensity you will engage during these interactions.

People with a strong sense of self-worth are less insecure and will likely keep a balanced and growth-oriented emotional profile.

What does it take to build a strong sense of self-worth?

The first thing you need to do to build a strong sense of self-worth is to know yourself.

Who are you?

What is your purpose in life?

What gifts and talents do you possess?

What is that one single thing you would want to do for humanity before you die?

Your ability to provide solid answers to these questions will determine how prepared you are to build a strong sense of self-worth.

Once you have affirmatively answered the above questions, the next thing you will need to do is to work on your personal growth.

Remember the four areas of growth we talked about earlier: *Wisdom, Physical growth, Relationships, Purpose.*

You must develop disciplines and habits which will help you develop in each of these four areas of growth.

The sad reality

As important as this aspect of skills development is to culture remodelling in the workplace, the sad reality is that many corporate leaders at the helm of business institutions have not been able to develop themselves in this area.

Why is it so?

There are two primary reasons:

The first reason is that some of them are simply not aware that they need to do so.

The second reason is that most of these people are on the job for the money and have not found an inner connection between their purpose and the work they are doing.

For one to develop a strong EQ and SQ in relation to their work, there has to be a strong connection between their purpose and their work. If that connection is weak or does not exist, exhaustion is likely to step in with time. At this point, one loses interest in their work and will only report every morning to secure their monthly pay cheque.

(ii) *Build your capacity to value people*

The second thing you need to do to enhance your emotional and social skills is to develop inherent capacity to value people.

The fundamental law guiding this point is that the value of a person lies not in the job position they hold or their status in society but in their very existence as a human being.

When you gain this understanding and begin walking by the precept, you will transmit positive cultural energy across the corporate organogram and widen your social spectrum beyond the confines of the office.

With regards to the above concept, Albert Einstein stated: *"I speak to everyone the same way, whether he is a garbage man or the president of the university."*

The above statement is something worth considering and possibly adopting as a way of enhancing your emotional and social skills in your leadership roles.

Apart from relating with people equally regardless of their position, you also need to understand that human behaviour is as diverse as the word diversity itself implies. No two people in society or in the workplace are likely to demonstrate the same kind of behaviour under

similar circumstances. Learning how to deal with different personalities therefore will stabilize your emotional scale and help you to further develop your social skills.

(iii) Work on your communication skills

The next thing you need to do to build your EQ and your SQ is to work on developing your communication skills.

What does communication have to do with development of emotional and social skills?

Everything!!

Taking emotions as an example; you will agree with me that the larger part of human emotional displays is directly linked to communication. Talk of emotions like happiness, sadness, anxiety, fear, shame, embarrassment, amusement, contempt, envy, calmness, hostility etc. All these often build up and are controlled through communication.

Similarly, your ability to communicate effectively will dictate your social skills and determine the kind of people you attract and retain in your social circle.

(iv) Build positive mental paradigms

The next thing you need to do to develop your emotional and social skills is to build positive

mental paradigms which will foster emotional balance and help you develop strong interpersonal skills.

What are mental paradigms?

Mental paradigms are windows of knowledge and experiences which guide your perceptions. They are knowledge maps through which you picture and interpret life opportunities and events.

To help people understand the concept of mental maps, I often give the example of two people who were sent to a native country to survey business opportunities and ascertain the possibility of setting up a shoe company there. When these two guys arrived, the first one noticed that the people of this country did not wear shoes. Seeing this, he hurried back to his home country and gave his side of the story.

What was his side of the story?

It was not going to be profitable to set-up a shoe company in this place. The natives were not interested in wearing shoes.

When it was the second gentleman's turn to tell his findings, he gave a different report to his superiors. There was great potential for setting up a shoe business. The natives were not wearing shoes. According to him, the fact that the natives

were not wearing shoes was an indication that there was no competition for the business they were planning to set-up; and as the story goes, the company to which the second guy belonged built a shoe brand which we call Bata today.

Here is the question we need to answer:

What made these two gentlemen perceive two different results from the same situation?

Mental paradigms!!

The gentleman who saw no business opportunity in the native land saw things through the window of his knowledge and experiences; and according to what he saw, it was not possible to set up a shoe company in a place where people did not wear shoes.

The guy who saw a shoe company where none existed also pictured and interpreted the situation through his own window of knowledge and experiences.

This is the big lesson we should pick:

Our interpretation of what we see or experience in life is always determined by the mental maps we have created in our sub-conscious minds.

Developing positive mental maps

How are these mental maps created?

There are three primary ways:

(a) *Intentional learning*

The first one is through intentional learning. The kind of knowledge you chose to expose your mind to will determine the mental maps you will create in your sub-conscious mind. You therefore need to be intentional with the kind of books you read, the television programs you watch, the videos you watch online etc.

One thing I have realized in relation to the above is that even what we call entertainment is not really entertainment as we consider it to be. Whatever we expose our minds to through audio and visual content forms part of the building blocks for our mental maps.

(b) *Interactive learning*

The second method through which mental maps are created in our sub-conscious minds is through formal and informal interactions. The more you interact with people, the more you exchange perceptions and convictions.

This type of learning is involuntary and often takes place without you being fully aware of the learning process.

(c) *Experiential knowledge*

The third way through which mental maps are created is what I call experiential learning. This type of learning is a product of your personal experience through exposure to certain environments such as your work environment.

**Enhancing emotional and social stability
through the unity of consciousness**

In chapter one we talked about the unity of consciousness as one of the virtues you need to develop as a leader if you are going to influence the organisation positively and nurture a growth-oriented working culture.

The relevance of this idea becomes more pronounced at this stage because emotional and social displays are more a product of the sub-conscious mind than they are of the conscious mind.

Your emotional and social programming as an individual sits on your sub-conscious mind and is only expressed as responses to specific triggers.

Developing the unity of consciousness?

How do you develop the unity of consciousness?
How do you bring yourself to a point where your conscious and subconscious minds actively interact to come up with solid responses and decisions?

(i) *Believe in yourself and know your self-worth*
Just as the case is with development of emotional and social skills, have a clear and proper estimation of yourself and what you are worth will help you develop the unity of consciousness.

Knowledge of self has a way of drawing the conscious and subconscious minds towards a common point of agreement and awareness.

(ii) *Establish a personal value system*
Determine the values you will live by as an individual and discipline yourself to live by them. Consistency of personal values re-orient your thoughts and aligns your inner self with your outer self.

(iii) Build a strong moral standing

Have personal boundaries. Determine what you can and what you cannot allow yourself to do regardless of prevailing circumstances or pressures.

(iv) Learn the art of mental exercise

Just as the body needs physical exercise to remain in shape, so does the mind. The degree of strength of your conscious mind determines how deep it can dig into your subconscious mind to bring alignment.

How do you exercise your mind?

(a) Consistent study

(b) Meditative thinking

(c) Engaging and meaningful conversations

(d) The habit of writing and taking notes.

(v) Develop mental discipline

As you learn the art of mental exercise, you also need to practice mental discipline. Mental discipline is one's ability to intentionally focus on specific lines of thought without entertaining any level of external interruptions.

What this means is that you should not allow your thoughts to be interrupted by noises and events happening around you.

When you master the art of mental discipline, you will discover that your consciousness of the inner voice will be just as sound as that of the outer voices.

(vi) Practice intuitive listening

The other practice you need to embrace to attain the unity of consciousness is intuitive listening. You must always find time to shut down all other noises and pay attention to the voice within. It is one of the greatest ways to explore the hidden treasures of the subconscious mind.

7



THE UPWARD SPIRAL EFFECT OF CULTURE REMODELLING

In this chapter I want to talk about a new concept I am calling “*the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling*,” which is actually the opposite of the downward spiral effect we talked about in chapter three.

Before we get to that however, I would like to narrate a real-life experience from which I picked valuable lessons relating to culture remodelling in the workplace.

The day I was pushed to the front desk

In October 2022, I got a job as District Manager for Luapula water, one of the 11 water companies in Zambia.

The government of the republic of Zambia through the Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation had placed the company on statutory

management and needed to build a new team which would restore operational integrity and order.

Having gone through the rigorous interview process, I was granted an opportunity to be part of this new team and was assigned to oversee Kawambwa District.

During my first week in Kawambwa, I received notice that the employee who sat at the front desk was scheduled for a disciplinary case hearing on Monday the following week. He had been charged for failure to account for money collected from customers.

By the time we got to Tuesday in the week of the case hearing, I got word that the gentleman had been relieved of his duties.

With this unforeseen development at hand, I had no option but to take up the front office roles.

The organisational structure at the district was very small. We were only 8 of us.

At this point, I was not able to identify another person to take up this role. Remember I was less than 7 days old in my new role. I hardly knew any of the people I was given to work with.

Within three days of interacting with customers at the front desk, I began to get a grip of why the company had been placed under statutory

management. Business processes had broken down and controls were almost non-existent. I shuttled between the district manager's office and the front desk for about a week or so and during this time, I gathered priceless information and learnt valuable lessons which helped me recalibrate my actions and reorder my priorities as the leader of the district.

Learn to manage from the front

One of the most important lessons I learnt from this experience was that as a leader, there are times you will need to manage the business from the front; especially when you are dealing with customer perception and cultural issues in the workplace.

What does this mean?

Devise ways of experiencing what your front office employees experience when they interact with customers on a daily basis.

Taking time to leave your office and walking down the corridors of the common employee who deals with customers first hand will literally take you to the place where workplace culture is expressed in its raw form.

When I sat at the front desk during those few days, I got to see the level of compromise employees had gotten to for personal financial gain at the expense of corporate performance.

Benefits of managing from the front

There are a number of benefits we can draw from the above experience, which you are likely to derive from adopting a culture of periodically visiting the front office and getting customers experiences first hand. Some of them are as listed below:

- (i) It will expose you to the raw elements of your employees' working culture.
- (ii) It will help you quickly identify the areas you need to begin with to bring about a cultural shift in the workplace.
- (iii) It will help you to identify your strengths and weaknesses as an organisation with respect to service delivery.

- (iv) It will help you gain a general understanding of how customers perceive your business.
- (v) You will quickly learn how effective your service delivery teams are since you will be interacting with the people who ultimately use your products or services.

The upward spiral effect of culture remodelling

Whereas failure to deal with poor culture in the workplace produces a downward spiral effect on organisational performance, effective implementation of culture remodelling strategies produces the exact opposite; *the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling*.

What does this mean?

This means that organisational culture improvement is not linear and does not come about by implementing a one-off strategic item enlisted in your business strategic plan; but unfortunately, this is the practice of many executive leaders.

I remember attending strategy implementation meetings (during the time I was working for

Mulonga water and sewerage Company) based on the balanced scorecard framework where the only thing we did was to tick whether an activity was done or not, after which we would look at what went well and what did not go well during the meeting.

Once an item was ticked as done, no one would bother to make a follow-up and measure the effectiveness of that activity.

Our meetings ended up becoming a “to-do-list” monitoring meeting.

Such an approach does not foster strategic growth and neither does it hold for cultural change. To remodel culture, you need to consistently work out your planned initiatives and monitor your progress.

What does culture remodelling look like when you effectively implement your initiatives?

The upward spiral effect model illustrated below paints a clear picture for us.

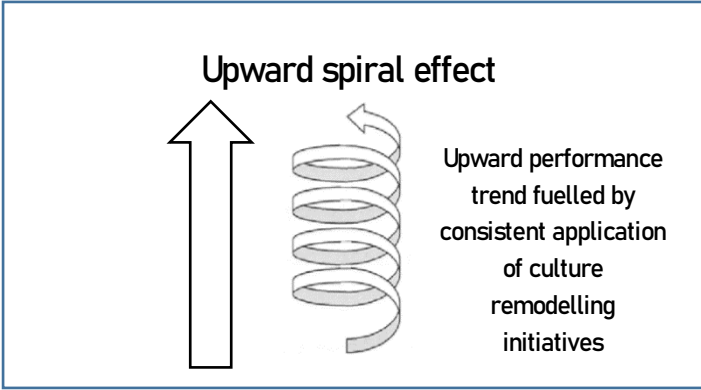


Fig 8: The upward spiral effect of culture remodelling

The six stages of the upward spiral effect

There are basically six seamless steps making up the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling. These stages are seamless because you are not likely going to detect the exact point at which you shift from one stage to the next one. The predominant features characterizing each stage will however help you to detect major transitions. Let us take a moment and briefly consider each of these steps.

(i) The “adoption” stage

The adoption stage is where culture remodelling initiatives are devised and introduced in the workplace. At this stage, there

are high levels of anxiety because employees are not sure of what is about to come their way and what effects it would have on their work, their pay and their stay.

Effective communication and active engagement of all parties involved in the change program is the most relevant prerequisite at this stage.

(ii) The “adaptation” stage

The second stage of the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling is the adaptation stage. At this point, employees begin getting acquainted with the changes introduced in the workplace. Some degree of resistance is expected at this point but consistent engagement and effective communication will subvert any adverse effects.

(iii) The “acceptance” stage

The third stage of the upward spiral effect is the acceptance stage. At this point, employees begin to see sense in what is being demanded out of them and demonstrate willingness to change. It is very possible that you will encounter resistance to change from some quarters but normally there will be a general buy-in from the majority.

(iv) The “alignment” stage

At this stage, employees do not only demonstrate willingness to change but they actually begin aligning to the core principles outlined in the change program. Consistency at this stage is key as it will determine the ultimate direction of change.

(v) The “performance” stage

When employees are fully aligned to the changes meant to remodel culture in the workplace, they begin to put in their efforts to ensure corporate goals are attained. This is what is called *the performance stage* of culture remodelling.

(vi) The “Pinnacle” stage

At the pinnacle stage, employees are not only willing to deliver but are ready to go the extra mile to achieve the highest level of success for themselves and for the organisation. People who function at the pinnacle level are mostly goal-oriented and focused. They are ready to sacrifice time and possibly burn candles outside formal working time to ensure goals are met.

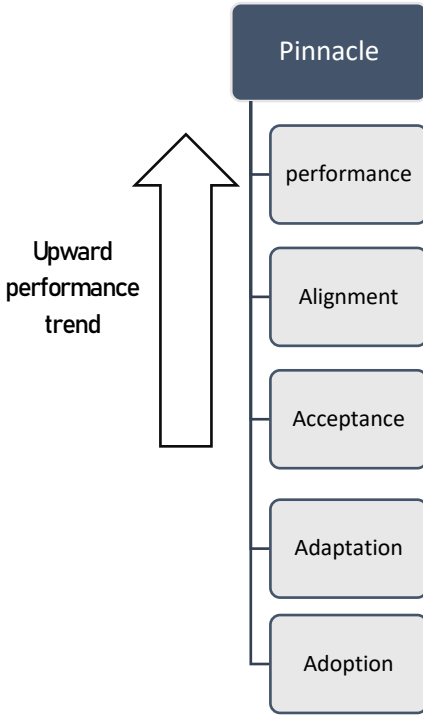


Fig 9: The five stages of the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling

Features characterizing the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling

S/N	STAGE	PREDOMINANT FEATURES
1	<i>Adoption</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High levels of anxiety ▪ Possible tension ▪ Employees protection of interests ▪ Advocacy by representative groups
2	<i>Adaptation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employees get acquitted ▪ Resistance to change ▪ Low levels of buy-in
3	<i>Acceptance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrated willingness to change ▪ Individual alignment ▪ Acceptance levels increase
4	<i>Alignment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Groups alignment ▪ Increased buy-in ▪ Minimal resistance
5	<i>Performance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employees drive the change ▪ Performance levels grow ▪ Accountability increases
6	<i>Pinnacle</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creativity and Innovation ▪ High sense of ownership ▪ Willingness to go the extra mile ▪ High productivity levels

*Table 2: Features characterizing the upward spiral effect of
culture remodelling*

Guiding principles for the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling

The following are the guiding principles of the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling. You need to follow each of these if you are going to succeed at bringing about the desired cultural change in the workplace:

(i) *Consistently apply effort*

Implementing culture remodelling initiatives is like rolling an iron ball uphill. The moment you stop applying the force, the ball will roll right back to its starting point.

What does this imply?

You need to consistently apply effort in implementing culture remodelling initiatives if you are going to achieve tangible results and bring about the change you want to see.

(ii) *Results are gradual*

Culture remodelling is a gradual process. You do not expect to see results immediately after implementing your initiatives; but as you consistently put in more effort, you will eventually attain your expected results.

(iii) Efforts are complementary

Culture remodelling in the workplace is not a one man show. You cannot do it all alone and expect to win. You will need all the support you can get from the people around you.

(iv) Initiatives are not casting concrete

If you are going to sustain an upward spiral growth, you need to understand that some initiatives may not work the way you expect them to work. As such, you need to be as fluid as possible. Embrace what works and quickly review and change what does not.

The upward spiral effect of culture vs the three orientations of culture

In chapter four we stated that there are *three orientations of culture* in the workplace. Having talked about *the six levels of the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling*, it is important that we parallel these two concepts and establish the relationship between them.

As already demonstrated, the upward spiral effect shows the stages of improvement during implementation of properly structured culture remodelling initiatives.

The three orientations of culture on the other hand represent three different categories in which cultural dispositions in the workplace can be classified.

If we are to place the models for these two concepts side by side, we would get something like this:

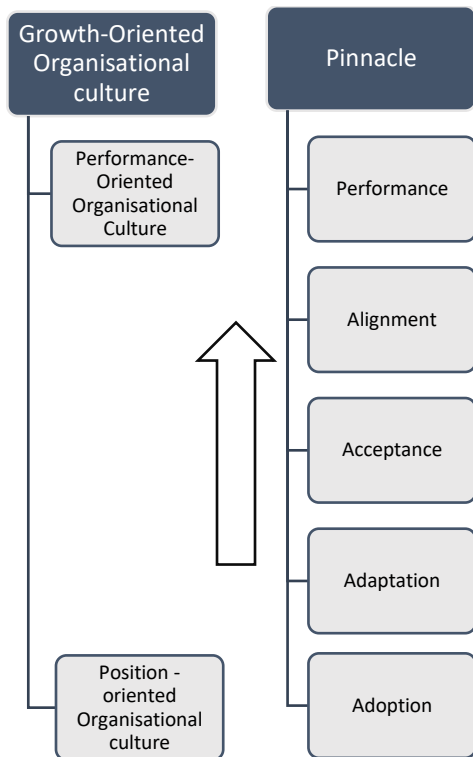


Fig 10: Comparison between the three orientations of culture and the upward spiral effect of culture remodelling.

When you take a look at this comparison, you will notice that the only point you attain notable change on the upward spiral model is when you hit the performance mark.

What this means is that attaining the first four “As” of the upward spiral model does not result in a positive cultural shift. It basically sustains the position-oriented corporate mindset where employees are focused on maintaining their positions at the expense of corporate performance.

The “uncertainty” zone

A critical review of the above two models reveals a space in the cultural transformation journey which I call “*the uncertainty zone.*” In this space, leaders are mostly struggling with *adoption* of the correct culture remodelling initiatives, employees’ *adaptation* and *acceptance* of these initiatives and *alignment* of individual and corporate behaviour to the same.

Looking at the two diagrams in the figure above, we identify the uncertainty zone as the marked space between “position-oriented” and “performance-oriented” cultural disposition.

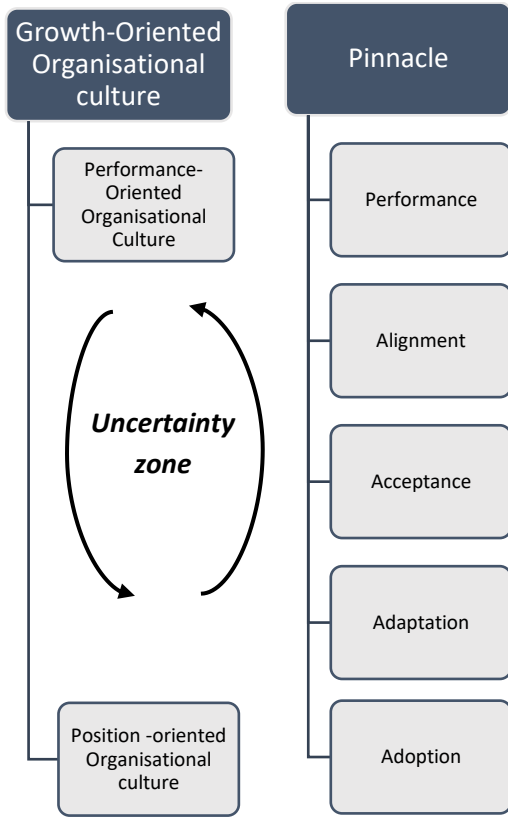


Fig 11: Uncertainty zone

Organisations existing in the uncertainty zone are those which have acknowledged the need to remodel culture, have taken steps to devise and implement change initiatives but have failed to break through the barrier separating *alignment* and *performance*.

Breaking through the uncertainty zone

What does it take to break through the uncertainty zone?

To break through the uncertainty zone will demand that organisational leaders master the dynamics of organisational culture and work through the process to develop themselves, their people and their systems.

It all boils down to consistent learning and application of all the culture remodelling principles discussed thus far.

8



BUSINESS DECISION MAKING AND CULTURE

The last point we are going to discuss in this book is the aspect of business decision-making in relation to organisational culture.

Of paramount importance is our understanding of this fact that the level at which culture is demonstrated is not usually the level at which it is created.

Remember the extremities of organisational culture?

Culture is predominantly shaped at the topmost layer of the corporate structure; but it only becomes clearly visible to organisational leaders at the bottom.

How is culture created at the top?

Through decisions and actions.

We have covered the aspect of actions to a great extent; but one thing we need to understand is that actions are born out of decisions.

If we cannot decode the principles of decision-making in relation to culture therefore, our actions are not likely to give out the best results.

The six levels of decision-making

Every organisation has got six levels at which decisions are made to influence actions and command direction. These are: The “*principal*” stage, the “*policy*” stage, the “*process*” stage, the “*people*” stage, the “*procedures*” stage and the “*practices*” stage. Any decision you will ever make in the business will have to fall within one or more of these categories.

What constitutes each of these six levels of decision making?

(i) Principal stage

The principal stage of business decision-making is the highest stage covering the conceptual level of business.

What does this mean?

Every business is driven by four key variables: *Value, Customer, capital and people*. Value is what the business generates as goods or services; customers are the people willing to pay for that value; capital is the resource injection required to

generate the value and package it in the form people will be willing to pay for; and the people are the employees with the skills to ensure this value is generated and delivered to the customers in the most acceptable form.

These four are what collectively constitute the principal stage of business decision-making. When you take any of them out of the business equation, that business ceases to exist.

Decisions made at the principal stage are high level decisions. These are often made by boards of directors and senior management to steer the organisation in a particular direction.

(ii) Policy stage

The policy stage of decision-making is the stage at which policies are implemented and enforced to achieve rational outcomes.

Policies provide the basis for consistency and standardization in key decision areas.

The people responsible for making decisions around policy frameworks are the managers, with endorsement from the board of directors and other key business stakeholders.

(iii) Process stage

The process stage of decision-making covers the methods, techniques and technologies employed to ensure effective operation of the business.

The process stage incorporates specialized functional areas such as production, sales, finance, human resource engineering and information technology.

Key decisions made at this level are usually a prerogative of functional managers with validation from senior management.

(iv) People stage

The “people” stage of decision-making deals with the human resource aspect of business. Decisions made at this level deal with matters such as the organisational structure, conditions of service, performance management, discipline and leadership.

Decisions made at this stage are subject to the level of authority one possesses in the organisation.

(v) Procedure stage

The procedure stage of decision-making deals with the procedural aspect of carrying out specific business functions.

Procedures are often designed to standardize business practices and direct actions to ensure processes are not compromised.

Any individual making decisions at the procedure level will have to follow clearly laid out standard operating procedures (SOPs). Any deviation from these is likely to compromise business processes and affect results.

(vi) Practices stage

The practice stage of business decision-making is the lowest ranking level of decision-making in the organisation. At this stage, employees exhibit their inherent behaviours and demonstrate working habits which they have accumulated over time.

Decisions made at the practice stage are individual-centred. These are solely dependent on sub-conscious programming.

One does not need to think twice to act on something at this stage. Decisions are almost always prompt and seldom allow for moments of reflexivity.

Business decision-making and culture

Viewing the concept of culture through the window of decision-making, we realise that culture – as was stated earlier - is created at the top five stages of decision-making.

When boards of directors and managers alter business *principles, policies, processes, human resource* and *procedures*, they are actually influencing the culture of the workplace; and guess where this culture is mostly visible:

At the *practices* stage of decision-making where employees showcase their inner perspectives of how to run business affairs in their respective job positions.

What needs to be done?

In order for business leaders to nature positive culture in the workplace through effective decision-making, they need to learn to make decisions at the stage where they will get the best results.

What does this mean?

When you notice poor workmanship amongst your engineering staff for example, instituting disciplinary action may not be the best approach

to deal with this deficiency at that particular moment. You will need to understand the decision stage at which the problem is emanating from and deal with it at that level.

Could it be that procedures are not clearly laid out?

Revisit the procedures and provide clear direction.

Could it also be that your employees are not skilled in a certain area?

Harness the people-stage and provide some training to improve their skills.

Could it be that your employees do not have the required experience to operate certain functions?

Consider running exchange programs with companies which have advanced in those particular areas.

If the issue is disciplinary, then deal with it from that perspective.

The bottom line is that as a manager you should be able to align the problem at hand with the right decision point to give the best results.

Build mental maps for effective decision-making

Your ability to know at which stage you can deal with specific cultural problems is a skill you will not acquire through any other means except by building the correct mental maps.

Do you recall our earlier discussion on mental maps and the story of the two salesmen who were sent to assess the market and determine whether a shoe company could be established in a native land?

The same concept applies here. You cannot make decisions which are more accurate than the accuracy of the mental maps you have created in your sub-conscious mind.

How do you do this?

How do you build mental maps to guarantee effective decision-making in the workplace?

- (i) Learn and understand how businesses function at the principal stage.
- (ii) Understand policies and learn how they can be used to alter business functionality and culture.
- (iii) Master your business processes. Know the ins and outs of every business function. You may not have the time and energy to learn

everything you need to learn but at least understand the core principles.

- (iv) Learn how to deal with the various aspects of human resource.
- (v) Develop capacity in the organisation to formulate and alter standard operating procedures as required.
- (vi) Build personal and organisational capacity to understand organisational behaviour and develop the means to alter and correct wrong behaviours.

All in all, build an exponential learning curve and master the critical aspects of the organisation you are leading. This is the only way you will improve the accuracy of your sub-conscious mental maps and position yourself to be a better decision maker.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a writer, course developer, trainer and speaker.

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