



Law Office of Maija West, PC

• majawest.com •

Maija West, Managing Attorney

Features of dominant work culture

We all have culture which we express in how we interact and what we value and hold to be true. A company's culture consists of the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that employees share and use on a daily basis in their work. Some company spaces may not be as inclusive as it should be as it follows an old school exclusive culture. This dominant dinosaur culture can be harmful when they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group.

Perfectionism

Issue: Appreciation is typically directed to those who get most of the credit anyway while not acknowledging other employees. It is common to point out mistakes that employees make and/or discuss these issues about them rather than discuss with them directly. Employees are not separated from their mistakes and they do not learn from them because everyone around them sees them as a mistake, rather than a mistake made.

Solution: Develop a culture of appreciation and learning, where the company takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated, and it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning. Separate the person from the mistake and when offering feedback and speak to the things that went well before offering criticism. Being your own worst critic does not improve the work but often contributes to low morale among the group and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes.

Sense of Urgency

Issue: There is a continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take the necessary time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making and to think long-term. This often results in sacrificing potential allies for quick results.

Solution: Develop realistic workplans and have company leaders who understand that some things take time to complete.

Defensiveness

Issue: The organizational structure is set up so that energy is spent trying to protect power as it exists rather than to facilitate the best out of each person because of either/or thinking. Criticism of those in leadership positions are viewed as threatening

and inappropriate. When leaders are presented with new ideas, they respond with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise new ideas.

Solution: It is important to first understand the similarities between defensiveness and fear of losing power. Discuss with your team the ways in which defensiveness and resistance to new ideas obstructs the mission.

Quantity Over Quality

Issue: All company resources are directed toward producing measurable goals because things that can be measured are viewed as more valuable than goals that cannot. For example, valuing deliverables alone rather than the ability to constructively deal with conflict. There is no difference between following processes and what it says.

Solution: Include process or quality goals in your planning and make sure that the company has a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work. Make sure that everyone in the company knows and understands the values. Develop ways to measure once non-measurable goals and understand when it is appropriate to update processes rather than continue with an outdated method.

Only One Right Way

Issue: The belief that there is only one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it and if they do not, then something is wrong with them.

Solution: Understand that there are many ways to accomplish goals. Once the group has made a decision about which chosen method, honor that decision and see what you and the company will learn from doing it a new way. Evaluate employees for innovation and integration and note those who push to keep the same methods.

Either/Or Thinking

Issue: Things are either/or, right/wrong which is similar to perfectionism and it makes it difficult to learn from mistakes. This increases sense of urgency, as people feel they have to make quick decisions with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives.

Solution: Notice when people use 'either/or' language and push to come up with more than two alternatives. Slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis. When people are faced with an urgent decision, take a break to give people some breathing room to think creatively and avoid making decisions under extreme pressure.

Power Hoarding

Issue: Little, if any, value around sharing power because power seen as limited. Leaders feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the company. Suggestions are a reflection of their leadership skills. Leaders assume they

have the best interests of the company in mind and assume those wanting change are ill-informed or inexperienced.

Solution: Include power sharing in your company values and discuss what good leadership looks like with your team. Understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others.

Fear of Open Conflict

Issue: Leaders are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore when someone raises an issue that causes discomfort. A response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue which is actually causing the problem.

Solution: Roleplay ways to handle conflict before conflict happens with various scenarios to distinguish between politeness and raising hard issues. Don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in 'acceptable' ways. Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently.

Objectivity

Issue: Believing that you or the company is being objective and that emotions are destructive and should stay out of the decision-making process. Requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring those who think in other ways.

Solution: Push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you and assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is.

Summarized and edited. Source: [dRworks](#), a group of trainers, educators and organizers working to build strong progressive organizations and institutions.