

# The CHOICE Connection

Positive strategies. Practical solutions.

constructive  
**CHOICES**  
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## Quotable Quotes

*"Culture is the widening of the mind and the spirit."* ~ Jawarhal Nehru

*"We want to understand what works here rather than what worked at any other organization."* ~ Laszlo Bock, Google

*"Engagement is a renewable decision daily that is voluntarily given when the company has proven worthy of it."* ~ Jason Lauritsen

*"If you do not develop your corporate culture, it will develop itself. Corporate culture doesn't happen by accident and if it does, you are taking a risk."*  
~Monique Winston, CEO, OPT

Dear Jean,

In the previous month's newsletter, I shared comments from a few colleagues about performance management and what it means to them. Each response spoke to an organization's programs focused on its people. People - if an organization is going to maintain an effective performance management system, then its people are the embodiment of the organization. The work we do, the industries and organizations we live in require us to speak the language of that business and dictates the mission and our performance expectations. Our management - people, are responsible for delivering the organization's message and I also believe they are accountable for supporting a healthy and productive work environment. Culture, the nuances of how an organization behaves -- lives and breathes its work -- is demonstrated and visible as you take a look around at who is doing the work and how it is being done. Is it a smooth running organization, a well-oiled machine as you often hear from the management, or is there an element of unhealthy chaos and a sense of misalignment and poor connections or communication? What is it that identifies an organization's culture? Are you aware of the culture that lives and breathes where you work? Read on and I again extend the invitation to keep the conversations going - especially in your place of work.

With Joy,  
Jean

## Culture: The Organization's Core

As many times as I have changed jobs and started working with an institution or company, I have been exposed to a different culture. I have experienced multiple working environments - some that ran very efficiently and effectively - others not so much. In those organizations, I have been a teacher, a postal employee, an instructional designer, a team leader, workshop facilitator, business owner, consultant, etc. Each of these positions and their respective work environments had their own unique mission, expectations, employee management system, strengths and areas for improvement.



The most concise definition of organizational culture defines this as the values and behaviors that contribute to the unique psychological environment of an organization. It is often described as being held together by the organization's expectations, experiences, philosophy and values. You can begin to understand the organization's culture by observing the inner workings, self-image, how it interacts with the outside world and its future expectations.

What is a culture based on? Shared attitudes, beliefs, customs and unwritten rules developed over time and what the employees begin to believe as true. You may label or characterize a corporate culture based on how the organization does business, treats its employees, customer, and community, how much freedom is allowed in decision-making, inclusion of new ideas, personal expression, the commitment of employees towards collective objectives, and how power and information flow through the organization.

Why is understanding the culture of an organization important? Because ... it affects productivity and performance. How does a culture show itself? Through ... guidelines, regulations, standards, hiring practices, care for and of internal and external customers and a concern for the global community.

Nine years ago, I was engaged in a unique opportunity to support a work group designing and implementing internal programs to strengthen new and focused "people" areas of improvement. The organization had already identified its culture type before my work began. Their discovery was based on the work of William Schneider - see "The Reengineering Alternative" resource listed in the Tools and Resources section below. This group, using a checklist from the resource mentioned, identified their culture as a "competency" culture. Imagine a bolt of lightning overhead as they immediately realized their competencies were unknown and undefined for them. While they acknowledged their significant strengths in education, knowledge, skills, and work results, the area of weakness for them was their lack of focus on "people - development, recognition and celebration."

This is not to say this work group didn't have the right people - they did. What they didn't have was a clear understanding and acknowledgement of their talent. They couldn't define what they needed more of and they weren't taking the time to celebrate what made them so unique - their people! Within three years after this shift in focus to their 'people', they were being recognized as the group within the larger corporation that had strong people focused programs - all of this accomplished outside of and without the support of the corporation's human resources department.

What made this work group shine? First, a leader and champion that was not afraid to speak to their failings, acknowledge the truth of who they were, recognize and speak to their strengths and commit to integrate a new focus and shift for people development, recognition and rewards and celebration. Second, a request for employee engagement and ownership of programs - in essence - 'people' focused programs organized and administered by the people for the people. It was a top down and bottoms up strategy. Yes, it did work - culture didn't change so much as shifted and became stronger as they recognized what they had and what they needed to strengthen. Other work groups and larger divisions sought them out for guidance on the people programs they were implementing.

For as long as they had this leader and champion this work group continued to shine! When the leadership changed along with the commitment from new management, the programs began to slowly die. The employee owned and managed programs have held on and yet struggle to exist. Lessons learned ... there are many. What is real and important to remember - a culture is embodied in all who work and live in an organization and yet it seems to be the leaders, the managers who define it. If they are brave enough to define who they are, what they have and still need AND engage their people, they will continue on a path toward success.

## **Tools and Resources**

### **FROM THE BOOKSHELF**

[The Reengineering Alternative: A Plan for Making Your Current Culture Work](#) By William Schneider(1999)

[Organizational Culture Change: Unleashing Your Organization's Potential in Circles of 10](#) by Marcella Bremer (2012)

[Change the Culture, Change the Game - the Breakthrough Strategy for Energizing Your Organization and Creating Accountability for Results](#) by Roger Connors and Tom Smith (2012)

[Building a Culture of Distinction: Facilitator Guide for Defining Organizational Culture and Managing Change](#) by Sheila Margolis (2010)

[Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework \(3rd Edition\)](#) by Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Kim (2011)

### **THE INTERNET CONNECTIONS**

[The Key to Changing Organizational Culture.](#) Forbes/Leadership (2012 article)

[Organizational Culture.](#) Reference for Business (Article)

[9 Types of Organizational Culture: Which One are You?](#) by Britanni Sponaugle (April 2014)

[Four Types of Organizational Culture](#)

[Four Organizational Culture Types](#) (White Paper.pdf) by Bruce M Tharp

## **Reflection**

If you could define what your organization's culture is - what words would you use to describe it?

Create the list. Now take a look at it again.

What words that made it on the list that surprise you?

If you gave a co-worker this list, would they agree with your characterization of the organization?

What do they believe is missing from the list?

Are 'people' a factor in your organization's culture?

It isn't always an easy thing to describe your organization's culture - what is at its core ... what makes it run the way it does ... what behaviors are protocols ... are expectations ... are standards? This is one of those areas, that I encourage you to read a bit more about organizational culture. Decide if there is a better way to describe and understand the environment where you work and spend a good portion of your day. Do you see control, collaboration, competence, cultivation and growth? If you don't see these, what do you see?

What do you want to see in your organization?

## Choose To

Question your organization's practices, values, mission ... be open to define the current culture ... acknowledge your strengths ... embrace these strengths ... have courage to identify what your culture lacks ... take the first step .... ask for help ... realize that you are successful in your work because of your people ... ask them what they need ... seek to improve.



## February Joyful Observances

Bake for Family Fun Month

Library Lovers Month

National Laugh-Friendly Month

[National Haiku Writing Month](#)

Women's Heart Week (February 1-7)

International Coaching Week (February 7-12)

Great Backyard Bird Count (February 12-15)

National Pancake Week (February 21-27)

[Western Monarch Day](#) (February 5)

[Popcorn Day](#) (February 7)

All the News That's Fit to Print Day (February 10)

Clean Out Your Computer Day (February 15)

[Love Your Pet Day](#) (February 20)

Leap Year Day (February 29)

## Administrivia

My Constructive Choices Audience...

- \* Professionals wanting to be at choice in their career and daily work,
- \* New managers (and aspiring leaders) transitioning to establish a leadership role in their communities,
- \* Individuals wanting to sort through the choices, build a more fulfilling life, live in their voice, and...

\* Coaches who choose to step out, show up, and say - YES, it IS all about YOU!

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