Dimensions of Organizational Success

Skills   Work Mastery
Continuous Training/Development

Structure
Rules/Regulations
Chain of Command
Information Flows
Program Design

Culture
Values
Goals/Objectives
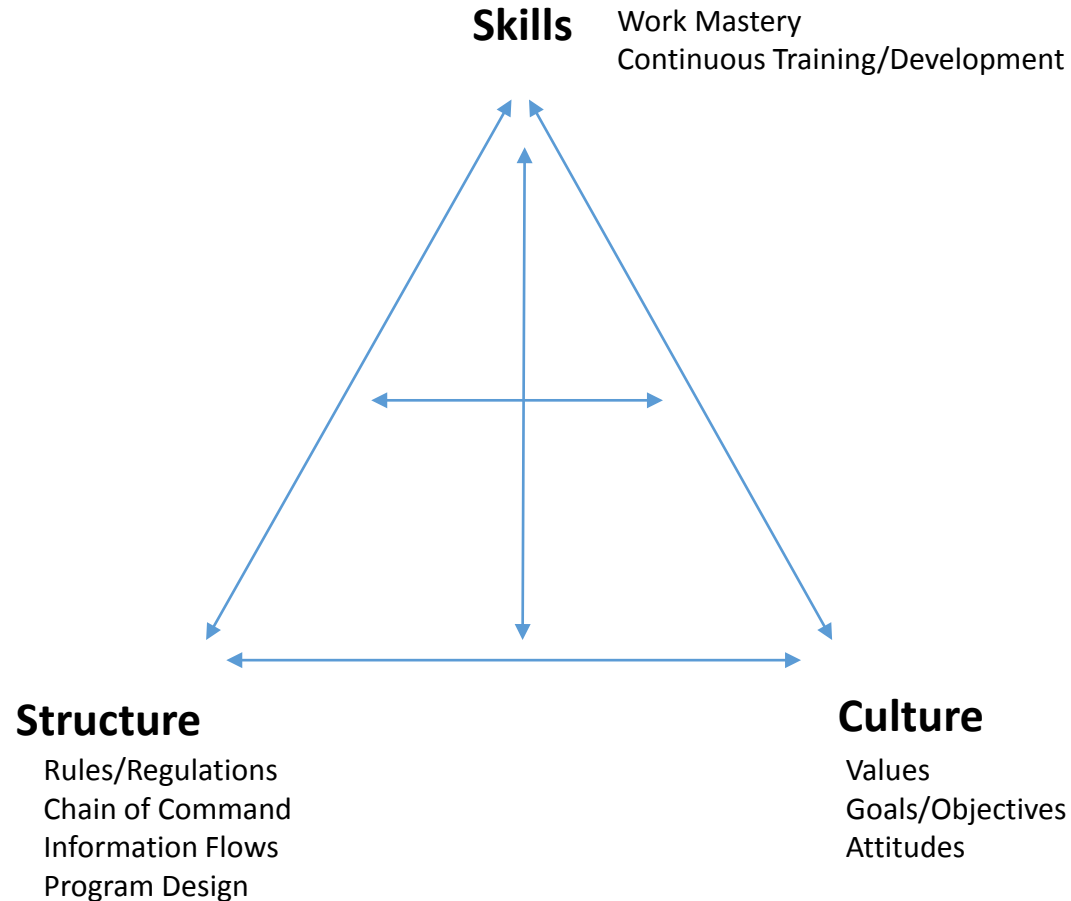Attitudes

Successful teams are (1) well-organized groups of people who (2) have the right skills and (3) the right attitudes to achieve their objectives. In public administration, these characteristics can be described as "Structure, Skills, and Culture."

All three elements exist in all organizations. Understanding (even diagnosing) the strengths and weaknesses in each area is the best way to improve team performance. This isn't rocket science . . . every sports coach knows that all three elements are important, right?

Where you place the emphasis depends on the circumstances. If you don't have a pitcher or a goalie, you need to focus on structure. If your team was recently demoralized by a big defeat, then you may need to focus on building confidence (culture). If you've got a great Center Forward, but a weak Left Wing, you may spend practice time working on the wing's skillset.

I tend to think that in most organizations (including SK Town government), the greatest gains are to be made by focusing a little more on Culture than anything else (but not to the exclusion of the other areas). In most cases people find ways to do what they're good at and to avoid doing what they're not good at . . . skills tend to find their own level (of course, learning new skills is a life-long exercise). Structure – rules and regulation – is important but the basic principles underlying all government rules are pretty simple and are readily understood. Sometimes the rules need to be reinforced or modified, but there isn't as much power in changing the rules as there is in changing the mind-frame within which the rules are written and interpreted.

Culture, on the other hand, is a complicated, changing and powerful thing. The right attitude can – AND DOES – make all the difference. Bad attitudes can kill an organization.

So, what constitutes a healthy organizational culture? For me the answer is this: "A healthy (governmental) organization is one that respects the needs and abilities of its individual members while obsessing about integrity, accomplishment and fairness. And the greatest of these is fairness." Fairness consists of treating each person in the room as you would like to be treated . . . and treating everyone who is not in the room as it they were. Fairness is balancing the needs of individuals and the general public.