



The Overlooked Connection Between Motivation And Culture

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Many employers believe that company culture is derived from the organization's mission, values and shared beliefs. For a company that is new, small or operated out of a single location, this may be very true. When organizations are vibrant, young and centralized, implementing cultural themes is infinitely more manageable.

But where does culture come from in enterprise-level organizations that have been around for decades? Is it defined and approved in a boardroom? Does it exist in the words seen on posters in break room and cafeteria walls? Or is organizational culture connected by something different that's invisible and difficult to describe in most organizations?

This whitepaper aims to redefine organizational culture by studying an often-overlooked link between the intrinsic motivations of its employees and the culture of the company as a whole.

Why Is Culture Important?



Many organizations design culture inside the human resources department or at the very top levels of the organization. Either way, culture is put into words and then communicated to the rest of the organization with the intent of wide adoption and implementation. Despite the painstaking exercise of defining and managing culture, few tend to know exactly why it's so important.

Some may say that a strong, well-defined culture aids in keeping all employees in vast organizations on the same page. Others may feel that culture is a tool for managing

behavior and decisions when leadership isn't in the room - that it's a beacon all employees should look to when making choices in their day-to-day work. Others may see competitors poaching their employees and assuming it's the opposition's culture that's luring talent away.

It's widely known that top-performing organizations are frequently companies with strong cultures. For example, Southwest Airlines - a company known for its nonconformist culture - continues to beat out industry competitors each year. Since it was listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1977, the airline's stock has delivered 17.5% average annual returns compared



with the 11% average gain for the broader market over the same span. In 2014, Southwest was the top-performing stock in the S&P 500, posting a 122% return.¹

Every theory around why a culture is important suggests that a part of an industry-leading organization's success has to do with its culture - whether that manifests in its ability to make sound decisions, recruit top talent or achieve high financial performance. Therefore, if organizations can master defining and implementing a strong culture, at least one - if not multiple - aspects of organizational performance should improve.

For this impact to occur, the true culture of large, enterprise-level organizations cannot merely exist on a poster or in the boardroom. Culture implementation fails when organizations define culture in a vacuum and attempt a top-down approach. However, the effort to define a company culture has the potential to be successful for organizations that adopt an inside-out approach.

Identifying What The Organization Values



It's challenging to establish a culture without understanding what the organization finds valuable. In order for each organization to perform at its peak, certain values that are unique to that company are critical.

Zappos is known for its passionate values in customer service and strong company culture. Values and culture were both critical imperatives that its founder, Tony Hsieh, held dear from day one. The organization began in 1999. Up until the time when Amazon purchased it ten years later, the culture set forth by its owner remained visceral throughout every department of the rapidly growing organization. However, not all values and cultures are the same. For example, some organizations in the technology space

may deem that innovation and creativity are critical. For other companies within the financial sector, it might be stability and reliability.

Frequently, these defined values are apparent to the organization's top performing employees. Unlike some at the company, they "get" the company's goals, vision, mission and values more so than the others. And as a result they contribute to quantifiable success measures that prove they are top performers in their department or business unit.

In order to leverage these successes throughout the organization, leadership should look to uncover exactly what about these top employees motivates them to perform.

Analyzing The Motivations Of Top Performers



Organizational Psychologists have studied why people are motivated to work for nearly a century, but a major breakthrough happened in the 1980s when professors Edward Deci and Richard Ryan from the University of Rochester studied intrinsic motivation. They coined Self Determination Theory, which studies the various motivations behind choices people make without external influence and interference.²

If organizations desire cultures that inspire employees to perform at a certain level, then it makes sense to study the motivations

behind top performing employees who are already contributing to the organization's success – particularly individuals working within the business units that exemplify the values of the organization every day.

To cite an earlier example, a technology company may deem innovation and creativity as two top values within the organization. Therefore, it makes logical sense to assess the motivational profile of top-performing employees in the development and product design departments. This provides the organization with intrinsic motivational insights into why these top performers are naturally driven to achieve the results they've achieved to date.

Mapping Culture Based On Motivational Evidence



Once an organization understands the motivation profile for top-performers that exude the company's values, it can begin to map its culture with those motivations in mind.

Additional benefits also arise from defining culture in this way: The culture is defined using an inside-out (rather than top-down) approach by studying the individuals performing at the highest levels in the organization, thus improving adoption rates. It makes ongoing management of culture easier and also makes culture a living and breathing thing - additionally, the motivations of top-performers can be re-assessed and changes to culture can be discussed annually.

Recruitment efforts of hiring based on cultural fit becomes easier when candidates can be assessed for their motivational profile in the same way. Current employees can be re-aligned into roles or departments more fitting for their cultural profiles.

Perhaps most important of all, connecting the missing link of motivation to a company's culture allows the practical existence of culture to be leveraged and utilized in a more meaningful way. This logical view of organizational culture should be adopted by leaders in order to truly understand the common motivations behind it's strongest employees - and to have any hope of leveraging culture to achieve higher overall organizational performance.



The MotiveX Motivation Assessment is a scientifically validated instrument that identifies and measures what intrinsically motivates employees in the workplace. These insights are leading indicators and predictors of engagement, productivity, turnover intentions and job satisfaction

Schedule a consultation to discuss how our solution will help your organization thrive.

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1. Tully, Shawn, "Southwest Bets Big On Business Travelers," Fortune Magazine, September 23, 2015.

2. Deci, Edward and Ryan, Richard M. "Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior," Springer US Publishing, 1985.