WHAT SHAPE IS YOUR MUG?

Create the container in the shape of your desired culture

One of our clients was discussing having us help them with putting a reliability strategic plan in place. They are building a new plant and wanted to ensure it would be off to a great start. We discussed the need to develop their governing principles, objectives, goals, and performance targets related to operations, maintenance, and reliability. Everything was going fine until we asked about the organizational structure they had in mind.

The prospective maintenance manager's face transitioned into a look that was a cross between being perplexed and anxious. After a moment he spoke up. "The strategy is important, and I understand that. But how do I take a group of people and get them to have the right culture?"

I told him that people in an organization have a characteristic similar to a fluid such as beer. One property of all fluids is that it will assume the shape of the container they are in, such as a beer mug. The trick is to have a mug — organizational design — in the shape you want the beer — culture — to conform to.

There are a few key points for determining the shape of the mug. It really doesn't matter whether it is the culture in an established organization or a new organization that has no history. The concepts are to:

- provide a framework — mission, vision, core values, governing principles, objectives and goals
- develop guidance — policies, processes, and procedures
- require people in positions of authority to model the behaviors you expect
- develop performance measures and reports that track performance
- keep guidance current, keep modeling, continue to review, and act on measures.

The framework for the culture should be thought of as what people will think of and act in alignment with if there is no other specific guidance. At the end of the day you should have confidence that current team members and potential hires can take the right message from the framework you establish.

Developing guidance starts with a description of the functional sub-organizations and definitions of what each function is accountable for. Describe the performance levels that are expected and provide the organizational structure, facilities, tools, software, budget, and staffing for each functional department. For new organizations, use organizational benchmarks to develop organizational structure so it can be based on reasonable staffing levels. Processes can then be developed providing clear direction and expectations.

The best way to develop processes is through flow charting; responsibility, accountability, support, and information (RASI) tables; and a manual that clearly explains these activities. This can be time-consuming, but this group of documents provides a training manual and reference to

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implement and sustain a culture.

One sure way not to create or sustain the culture you want is to have supervisors, managers, and other leaders not respect the mission, vision, core values, and governing principles. As an example, if an objective is an orderly, clean work environment, the plant manager, maintenance manager, and shift supervisors should model the right behaviors by picking up trash when they see it. Don't think it is beneath you or call someone else to pick up a candy wrapper. Do it yourself. Do it often. Do it when other people see you do it. Continuously model the behaviors you want others to follow.

Nobody can be everywhere at once, and you can't spend all your time looking at data, so, to ensure things are on track, you can monitor performance issues with measures and reports. Don't kill your organization with data collection. Not long ago, we worked with a research organization that was printing out a half-inch-thick stack of measures weekly, and nobody ever looked at them.

The top three pitfalls are letting guidance get out of date, not modeling behaviors, and not providing both positive and corrective feedback. When leadership lapses happen, people increasingly believe management doesn't truly care about the culture they say they want. If management doesn't care, why should the rest of the team. ⊗

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