

# Workplace cultures and pharmacy

The culture of an organisation can influence its successes or failures. In this article, Ruth McGuire looks at workplace cultures and how they can be changed

The word “culture” probably brings to mind another country or its people but organisations also have cultures and these can be just as diverse. A corporate culture is more complex than the mission statement that an organisation adopts. It is about what makes the organisation tick and what shapes its values. This means what an organisation really values as opposed to what it says it values. The gap between these is called the “rhetoric-reality gap”. This gap occurs because the values of many companies are based in rhetoric rather than reality — making statements about values is always easier than living them.

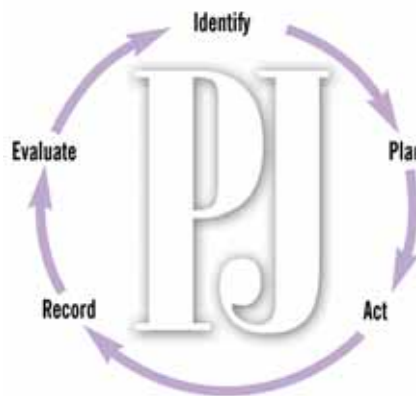
A common definition of corporate culture is that it is the shared beliefs that are reflected in habits and behaviours (eg, the way employees dress and address each other). Culture is the personality of an organisation but it is not necessarily just about the abstract. An organisation’s culture can also be seen in its tangible objects, such as decor, brochures, logos, corporate stationery and so on. Websites also give an indication of culture. The following extracts provide an insight into the respective cultures of two companies:

- Google: “Though growing rapidly, Google still maintains a small company feel. At the Googleplex headquarters almost everyone eats in the Google café (known as “Charlie’s Place”), sitting at whatever table has an opening and enjoying conversations with Googlers from all different departments. Topics range from the trivial to the technical, and whether the discussion is about computer games or encryption or ad serving software, it’s not surprising to hear someone say, ‘That’s a product I helped develop before I came to Google.’”
- Pfizer: “We will strengthen the culture of our organisation by rewarding those who live the Pfizer values. To achieve our purpose and mission, we affirm our values of integrity, innovation, leadership, performance, teamwork, customer focus, respect for people, and community. We demand of ourselves and others the highest ethical standards, and our products and processes will be of the highest quality. Our conduct as a company, and as individuals within it, will always reflect the highest standards of integrity. We will demonstrate open, honest and ethical behaviour in all dealings with customers, clients, colleagues, suppliers, partners, the public and governments”

Culture cannot always be easily defined by employees. However, various culture types



GSK Corporate HQ,  
Brentford, Middlesex, UK



## Identify knowledge gaps

1. Can you define the culture of your organisation?
2. What are the characteristics of a “winning culture”?
3. How can the culture of your workplace be changed?

Before reading on, think about how this article may help you to do your job better. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s areas of competence for pharmacists are listed in “Plan and record”, (available at: [www.rpsgb.org/education](http://www.rpsgb.org/education)). This article relates to “interacting and working with people” and “being a manager”.

have been identified by researchers. These include the following:

- **Power culture** A power culture is based on the control and dominance of one or a few individuals in an organisation, who make key decisions. This culture is characterised as being competitive, power oriented and political.
- **Role culture** In a role-driven culture individuals have clear functions to perform and tend to stick closely to their job descriptions. Work in this type of culture is driven by procedures and rules and power is linked to positions rather than people.
- **Person culture** A person culture allows individuals to operate in a fairly autonomous manner and make decisions for themselves.
- **Task culture** A task culture revolves around teams and tasks. Teams have tasks to complete and do so with a reasonable degree of autonomy for decision-making. This type of culture is based more on expert power than on position or personal power.

Ruth McGuire, BSc, is a journalist from West Yorkshire and a lecturer and trainer in personal development

New employees or outsiders can often be more objective in defining an organisation's culture than established employees, noting common behaviours (eg, good time-keeping) and attitudes (eg, to absence due to sickness). An organisation's culture can also be assessed by considering the following questions:

- What really counts as the key values in my organisation?
- What kind of behaviours are tolerated or rewarded?
- What kind of people fit in my organisation?
- What type of person gets promoted?
- Does my organisation really value people? How?
- How are decisions made and implemented?
- Is employee participation in decision-making encouraged or discouraged?
- Do senior managers listen to employees?
- Does the organisation encourage or discourage innovation and creative thinking?

Culture assessment tools (eg, a survey to check on attitudes) can be used to collect qualitative and quantitative data about an



Boots the Chemists, Bond Street, London

organisation and provide information about its real values and norms. These tools are commercially available and can help companies identify areas for improvement. Websites containing information about culture assessment tools include [www.employeedevelopmentsolutions.com](http://www.employeedevelopmentsolutions.com) and [www.hcgnet.com](http://www.hcgnet.com).

### How cultures develop

Workplace cultures tend not to be prescribed by rules or regulations. Rather, they develop organically as a direct consequence of the way the organisation is led and managed. The behaviour and personality of a leader or senior managers often shapes the culture and practices of a company. Leaders or company founders bring to their companies their own backgrounds, experiences and beliefs, and these can all influence the way in which a company culture develops. For example, the culture of the Virgin group of companies reflects the style and personality of Sir Richard Branson.

As with countries, the values, behaviours and ethos of the previous generations in an organisation tend to be passed on through successive generations of employees or members. However, as organisations grow, a cultural shift can occur to accommodate the changes that have to be made as a result of expansion or modernisation.

Cultural change within a company can be either conscious or unconscious. For example, technology has had a significant impact on the way organisations operate and the culture in some organisations has changed from one where administrative staff always typed external letters to one where a PC is standard work equipment and staff are now expected to be self-sufficient when it comes to producing letters.

Zwell<sup>1</sup> argues that there are key characteristics of cultures that apply to the way they develop. For example, he says that culture is learnt. Just as people learn from the cultures they are born into, new employees learn the right and wrong ways of doing things and are usually shown the ropes by a mentor or manager. They learn and adopt the behaviours of their colleagues.

Each culture will have its own norms and customs, for example, clocking in, wage deduction for lateness and return-to-work interviews. However, some employees will not adhere to those norms even though they are aware of them.

Some norms and customs are common to business cultures (eg, board meetings and target setting). Cultures operate mostly subconsciously and many aspects to company culture are performed without conscious thought. For example, in some companies break time might be at a particular time because it has always been at that time, and for no other reason.

### Changing workplace cultures

Culture changes in an organisation can be intentional but more often than not, they happen. For example, new employees will

### Winning cultures

Whereas the culture of a nation might not be defined in terms of success or profit, winning company cultures are deemed to have particular characteristics. In 'Creating a culture of competence', Zwell<sup>1</sup> defines these as follows:

- The culture fosters employee development and encourages them to meet their full potential in order to maximise successes.
- The culture has programmes and processes to help employees take the initiative, set challenging goals, be innovative, become better leaders and managers and, in general, take more responsibility for the success of their work unit as well as for the organisation as a whole. Simple examples of such processes include suggestion boxes and employee feedback sessions.
- The culture provides an avenue for highly competent employees to exercise their talents.
- The culture creates a work environment in which employees are engaged, challenged and motivated. For example, where leaders hire and develop managers who motivate their staff.
- The culture's system of compensation (if something goes wrong) and recognition rewards employees for their performance and their contribution to the organisation's success. Compensation can be financial but such a system might include rewards that, for many people, are at least as important. These include recognition and acknowledgement of contributions, leadership opportunities, training and development that improve competence and a work environment that is challenging and stimulating.

**Winning company cultures are deemed to have particular characteristics**

bring their own values to an organisation. Like other habits, cultural behaviours are comfortable and familiar. Within organisations, employees become accustomed to the culture and feel comfortable and safe with the behaviours they know and use. Change of any kind is challenging but cultural change within an organisation can be more so because it takes employees out of their comfort zone. For example, within some companies, it is the norm that meetings never start on time. To change the culture to one where meetings are punctual and where latecomers are not allowed to join the meeting would be a cultural shift for employees.

Cultures have to change because of new technology or expansion. Other reasons for change include:

- The existing culture does not match current environments (eg, regulatory requirements)
- A company is underperforming or has a high staff turnover rate
- The company merges with another company or companies
- The business environment within which a company operates is becoming increasingly competitive

In 'Manage to win', Paley<sup>2</sup> describes the way corporate cultures have changed in two well-known companies. Microsoft has changed from "an obsolete corporate mantra of a PC on every desk and in every home" to "a reinvigorated corporate vision with a clear mandate whereby employees have the power to do what they want, anywhere they want, and on any device". And Alberto-Culver, a major manufacturer and marketer of personal care products, has changed from "a patriarchal and secretive culture driven with a top-down management style that resulted in its flagship brands losing market share" to "a bottom-to-top friendly and upbeat work environment, expressed in highly personal ways where employees' business and individual achievements are recognised by such office trappings as balloons, gift baskets, mementos and food".

Cultural change takes time because it requires a change to existing values and behaviours. It could also involve the following:

- Changing the mission, vision and values of an organisation
- Implementing training for staff to support cultural change
- Relaunching and rebranding of the corporate image

The starting point for changing culture is to identify the existing culture, then identify the characteristics of the desired culture. Changing a culture requires a clear vision of where an organisation wants to be. This vision then has to be communicated to all staff so that they can buy into the culture and share the vision. Armstrong and Stephens<sup>3</sup> suggest the following sequence of activities for changing culture:



Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Lambeth, London

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- Analyse the current situation in terms of environment, strategy, performance, structure, systems and process, and the availability and quality of resources (human, financial and material).
- Diagnose the causes of any problems identified by the analysis that will need to be overcome.
- Make plans to change or reinforce the culture and deal with the requirements and problems. Plans may deal with specifically cultural matters such as creating and disseminating mission and value statements and ensuring that they are acted upon, or they may be concerned with human capital factors such as the skills, behaviour, motivation and staff commitment.
- Implement the action plan to deliver results.

**Overcoming resistance** If a culture lends itself to flexibility and change, then the change to a new culture will probably be welcome. However, in established cultures where change is resisted, this is less likely. The most challenging aspect of changing an organisation's culture is persuading employees. Ruth Spellman, chief executive of Investors in People, believes that motivation is the key to successful culture change. Spellman offers the following advice.

**Lead by example** Be visible around your organisation. If employees can see you and talk to you, they are more likely to believe in you. Demonstrating energy and enthusiasm is likely to rub off on others. Listening to employees and acting on their concerns will increase your credibility. And the converse is true — employees will interpret your inactivity and react accordingly. Make sure employees see you as part of the place, and as involved and committed as they are. Appearing aloof is a short route to losing them.

**Communicate, communicate, communicate** Making a clear and consistent effort to communicate with your staff is vital to ensuring

### Action: practice points

Reading is only one way to undertake CPD and the Society will expect to see various approaches in a pharmacist's CPD portfolio.

1. Reflect on the culture in your workplace. Apply the questions on p448.
2. Consider where you would like your workplace to be in five years.
3. Next time you interview a potential employee, discuss what he or she might contribute to the culture in your workplace.

### Evaluate

For your work to be presented as CPD, you need to evaluate your reading and any other activities. Answer the following questions: What have you learnt? How has it added value to your practice? (Have you applied this learning or had any feedback?) What will you do now and how will this be achieved?

## Cultures in pharmacy

**Hospital** John Farrell, director of pharmacy service at the Whittington Hospital NHS Trust, London, says that the culture in his department is related to his management style, which is open and inclusive. "I like to see staff being successful at what they do," he said. Mr Farrell's department is currently sponsoring two staff to do part-time PhDs and another has just completed an MBA. "While training budgets are limited we take advantage of any internal management and clinical training events. We have a weekly staff meeting and although work commitments prevent us from closing the department for away days, I would, nevertheless like to do this," he added. The pharmacy service department also supports part-time working (eg, women who return from maternity leave). "At one time over 15 per cent of our staff were working on a part-time basis, which meant we retained a lot of good people. We welcome comments from staff about service improvements," he said.

**Industry** According to Dominic Wake, communications manager at Lilly UK, the Lilly culture today harks back to its founding principles. Lilly was founded by Colonel Eli Lilly in 1876, a pharmaceutical chemist and a veteran of the US civil war, who was frustrated by the poorly prepared and often ineffective medicines of his day. Colonel Lilly said "research is the heart of the business, the soul of the enterprise". Mr Wake told *The Journal* that today Lilly invests the highest proportion of money into research and development of any major pharmaceutical company. Lilly was also the first pharmaceutical company to publish comprehensively the results of major clinical trials of marketed medicines on a publicly accessible website ([www.lillytrials.com](http://www.lillytrials.com)). Lilly is a rare pharmaceutical company because it has not merged in 130 year history.

**Community** According to Justin Ash, managing director at Lloydspharmacy, the culture at Lloyds is based on five core values which are: "passionate", "challenging and brave", "listening and respect", "acting decisively" and "accountability". "We try to put the values into practice by talking to staff and asking for feedback about what we do as a company and what we can do better. We also celebrate success and have a bonus scheme in operation," Mr Ash said. The company holds managers' forums around the UK and all pharmacists regularly meet up with their area managers. "We say thank you to staff and give out prizes, which might be a box of chocolates or champagne," he said.

Lloydspharmacy board members try to get out to meet the staff because they believe that they should not delegate the promotion of company culture to human resources staff — they have to do it themselves. "One exercise we ran with success was to ask pharmacists how they feel about their role. We used picture cards to enable them to describe their role in visual terms. As a company we feel it is important to listen to staff and respond," he added.



NICE, Covent Garden, London

To attempt a  
"big bang"  
cultural shift  
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they feel motivated to contribute. Explain your goals and how they support the organisation. Share progress whenever possible, invite comments and views from employees. Give them the chance to see where the organisation is going, how they fit in and what more they need to do.

**Remember the personal touch** Employees are individuals, not just workers. They have lives outside work and they may encounter issues that affect their approach or commitment to work. Get to know them, learn a little about their lives, understand their circumstances and where they are coming from. If they need a little flexibility every now and then, help to make this happen. They will appreciate your effort and feel more committed as a result.

**Be consistent** Consistency in the way people are treated and managed is vital. Make sure, for instance, that everyone has clear goals and that measurement processes are in place. Ensure everyone has clear development plans. Give everyone the same opportunity to raise questions, issues or concerns. These are all steps to develop a level playing field for all team members, no matter what their role or status.

**Thank employees for their work** Research frequently highlights the importance of praise for a job well done. A simple "thank you" can be easily forgotten in the midst of a hectic day but it is vital for continued effort and enthusiasm. It also helps people see any constructive criticism in context. Give praise where and whenever it is due to keep motivation levels high.

**Demonstrate the difference** If employees make suggestions or give feedback that makes a difference to the organisation, make sure you communicate this widely. It is something that is often forgotten in the midst of other priorities, but celebrate that success: it will recognise the person concerned and inspire others to follow suit.

## Conclusion

An organisation's culture will affect its achievements. To attempt a "big bang" cultural shift within any company may be too ambitious. The key to successful cultural change is to reduce the rhetoric-reality gap and to aim to change, gradually, behaviours and norms to achieve desired values.

## References

1. Zwell M. Creating a culture of competence. New York: Wiley; 2000.
2. Paley N. Manage to win. London: Thorogood; 2005.
3. Armstrong M, Stephens T. A handbook of management and leadership. London: Kogan Page; 2005.

## Resources

- Investors in People is a national quality standard which sets a level of good practice for improving an organisation's performance through its people ([www.investorsinpeople.co.uk](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk))