
GROWTH POINTS

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Impact of Culture

A church's corporate culture can be both an asset and a liability. It is an asset with it guides a church to higher levels of mission attainment; It is a liability when it moves a church away from its mission. It is an asset when it improves cooperation and communication; It is a liability when it stymies cooperation and communication. It is an asset when it improves decision-making; It is a liability when it interferes with proper decisions.

A Closer Look

Several processes are at the heart of any church. Together they demonstrate how cultural realities impact behavior and justification of behavior in churches.

Decision-making

Corporate culture guides a church's decision-making process since the shared assumptions give the leaders and congregation a clear set of preferences. Having a clear understanding of a church's culture allows for fewer disagreements, particularly when constructive dissent is one of the shared assumptions.

Cooperation

Cooperation cannot be mandated in any volunteer organization. A corporate culture that encourages goodwill, mutual trust, and personal involvement is a solid foundation for overall cooperation. Some churches place more emphasis on using personal gifts, while others stress being a team player. In both situations true cooperation is strongly influenced by shared assumptions.

Control

The ability to take action to accomplish the church's mission is the essence of control. It is most often seen in the areas of leadership and followership. Strategies and plans that are supported by the corporate culture are more likely to be followed by the members. The shared assumptions of values and beliefs provide a organizational compass to everyone.

For help identifying your corporate culture and how to change it,
Email cgnet@earthlink.net
for full details on coaching,
consulting, and leadership
training events.

Commitment

Commitment to a church is empowered when people experience some emotional attachment to it. While a variety of issues affect a person's feelings, when they identify strongly with the core corporate assumptions, it fosters strong commitment. This is especially true when multiple values and beliefs are shared.

Communication

A clear understanding of corporate culture improves communication in two major ways. First, when everyone knows the culture, certain things don't need to be said. Second, in situations where communication is not entirely clear, the shared assumptions provide clues for proper interpretation.

Behavior Justification

People in a church justify their behavior by referring to the expectations of the prevailing corporate culture. This is good when their behavior is an asset for fulfilling the church's mission. But, it is a liability when the behavior is negative.

Prevailing Influence

Corporate culture is a major influence on people's behavior in churches. However, most don't recognize it since it operates at an unconscious level. Some aspects are visible, e.g.,

ambiance, words, and actions, but the underlying beliefs and values go unnoticed.

As someone once noted, fish don't recognize the impact that water has on their lives. In a similar way, people in a church don't realize how the prevailing corporate culture affects decision-making, cooperation, control, commitment, and behavior justification.

Cultural Change

A change in the corporate culture can take place either before or after behavioral change.

To see the culture change *before* the behavior does, leaders must demonstrate persistently that one or more of the assumed beliefs and values no longer works, and that new beliefs or values have greater merit. Essentially a leader must get people to buy into new beliefs and values. If the old values and beliefs cannot be invalidated and replaced, the culture will not change.

The other approach to changing the culture is to *socialize* people into a new process, habit, or approach. If the behavior can be changed and maintained for a significant period of time, the culture will gradually change to justify the new approach.

Think About It

Is your church's corporate culture an asset or a liability? What needs to be changed?

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