

The Influence of Organizational Culture

The fact of the matter is training can not only impact your culture but be impacted by your culture. Culture can make or break a training program, so before you invest money and time into developing your workforce, listen in as we discuss how organizational culture influences the sustainability of any program.

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Fara Allen: Hello and welcome to CETE Works, a podcast produced by the Curriculum and Training team at the Center on Education and Training for Employment—a translational research center on Ohio State's campus. We work where research meets reality. I'm your host, Fara Allen, a Program Coordinator at the Center. This series of podcasts focuses on workforce development and will feature discussions about preparing an organization for implementation or modification of a training program. To learn more about our work, you can visit our website CETE, that's C-E-T-E, dot O-S-U dot E-D-U.

Thanks for joining us today. As we begin our journey with you on considerations you will want to make when beginning or modifying your training program. Today, Keli Bussell, a training and development specialist with the center, is here to discuss an arguably overlooked topic Keli, welcome. Tell us a little about yourself and share a little on what you would like to discuss today.

Keli Bussell: Thanks, Fara. I'm excited to be here. Spread over the last 15 years or so, I have had the opportunity to engage with a variety of organizations, within a variety of positions. And for the majority of that time, it was in a human resource capacity. And then based on those experiences I have seen firsthand the importance that culture has within organizations. Both positively and negatively those experiences have led me to my research focused during my graduate studies which looked at the impact that career development activities have on organizational culture.

So today, as you mentioned, I would like to discuss a very important topic which is often overlooked in planning development and implementation stages of any type of training program. Whether it's technical training or any other type of professional development activities and that topic, which I already referenced just a bit ago is culture Any training or professional development related program, whether an organization considers it in this light or not is directly contributing to their culture.

Talent development is occurring in your organization's whether you're intentionally approaching it strategically or not because the reality is if you are recruiting, hiring, onboarding performance managing offering some sort of technical training or professional development opportunities you are engaging in talent development activities. Now some organizations do approach the strategy, a little bit more strategically than others through things like intentional planning needs assessment forecasting.

But like it or not, training and development related activities directly impacts your culture, whether it's negative or positive So the more proactive approach an organization takes at the beginning of the planning stages to truly reflect on this part of their organization. And how they might strategically influence their culture from the beginning as part of their training initiatives, the better. They'll be off.

The primary way in which this is approached proactively in the planning stages is through a needs assessment. Although an organization may assume training is the issue. It may not be the case. And it's only partially the case so whatever else is going on as a contributing factor also needs to be addressed not just technical or soft skill training.

Fara Allen: Thanks Keli. I find this really interesting, culture sounds to be a very integrated component and talent development, especially positive culture. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Keli Bussell: Yeah, you are correct. There's no doubt that a positive culture influences, an organization in multiple ways. Organizations with positive culture have a more highly engaged workforce, which results in higher efficiency and productivity. Better customer service lower turnover rates and ultimately an increase sustainability and if I have to say it. Obviously, all of these things direct the bottom line. And I just, it's so well researched that I just, I can't understand if an organization which used to argue against this particular topic. And as a consultant in Training Program Development, I believe it is our duty to bring this issue to surface when working with our customers and clients if we don't, the training program is likely doomed to failure. Which may sound dramatic, but it not only makes you look bad. Since after all you help them develop the program, but the organization ultimately risk dumping a ton of resources into an initiative that basically has no return on investment.

Fara Allen: Keli, I would imagine, you know, everybody has different opinions, I would imagine organizations have maybe different ideas of what culture means. So how would you define culture? And what does it mean exactly?

Keli Bussell: Right, we hear this term all the time I would guarantee that everybody listening has heard this term, at least once. Within their professional lives and I would even further bet that a lot more than that. Or maybe I just feel like I hear a lot from coming from an HR background but it is something leaders really need to consider and have a part of their vocabulary and within their daily communications and making sure that they're evaluating it within their organization. So, culture, broadly speaking, is ultimately the degree to which everyone within an organization is working towards saying goals and encompass the same values and vision, along with the behaviors that form. More or less, the psychological atmosphere culture, to me, is something you feel you can witness it to. But ultimately, I think you feel it culture exists. No matter what. So, you can't turn a blind eye to it and ignoring it certainly will not make it go away because it exists, good or bad.

Fara Allen: Right. So, when I hear you describe it this way it sounds a bit intangible. I guess I would say. So how would an organization even begin to create or change their culture?

Keli Bussell: No, you are exactly right, Fara. Culture as intangible as it may seem, is tangible and everyday interactions. Work processes product quality ease of hiring process all those types of things, especially when it is really good, but also when it is really bad. So, people work to support one another in their work processes are efficient customers love the end product people want to work for the company. So, you constantly have a great pool of candidates to choose from, or on the other end of the spectrum, people are fighting constantly. They're always working overtime because processes aren't efficient. Customers are complaining about your

products, and they stopped buying them maybe or you're constantly finding yourself with turnover, as far as employee turnover and because of bad reviews, maybe that are occurring on job board websites relative to the culture. People don't want to apply. They don't want to work there. And those are all very real, tangible scenarios that can result from culture. And you asked, how would an organization think or go about creating and changing a culture. I like to think of, it's sort of like exercising. So, a half marathon or even a marathon. It can seem like a huge goal. But more or less you examine your end goal and then you work backwards, you identify what you need to plan in order to accomplish that goal. You estimate how many days. What types of activities, you're going to need to engage to be able to reach that goal? And so, for example, maybe, day one to get you started as getting off the couch or maybe it's walking a mile, maybe, day three, it's running a mile. each day. Essentially, it gets easier and easier and that is what building a positive culture is like you recognize where you're at and where you want to be as a culture, and then you work backwards and you start to get to work and identify what steps and actions, you need to engage in to get there. And each step toward fostering and supporting a positive environment, the easier it becomes. And then the more naturally it will show up in your organization.

Fara Allen: So, it sounds like organizational culture is a fairly big thing. What would you recommend focusing on as organizations begin their journey because it sounds like this isn't something that you can just turn off? And turn on and turn off. It's a journey. And it's a long process or could be a long process if you have a lot of growth that's needed.

Keli Bussell: Yep, you're exactly right. if I had to pick one place to start. I would say one component that is especially important it's become quite popular and say, over the last few decades, and it's called Being a learning organization. So that's the term and Robert Senge who wrote the book. The fifth discipline. This is one of the terms, he made popular. Learning organizations are critical to cultivating an organization's agility within its environment and as well as increasing efficiency and productivity.

Fara Allen: Well, how does a learning organization happen is it organic or is it planned?

Keli Bussell: I think it can be both, I think that planning definitely is an important part to it. The Association for talent development accounts for four primary reasons why learning culture doesn't actually manifest, and those four things are things like lack of leadership support, lack of team environment, lack of growth motivation and just having an overall short term focus no long-term strategies. So, to combat these barriers, Robertson, who I mentioned just a minute ago, he recommends that organizations and talent development professionals work to support their managers, help them understand what their role is and their sense of purpose in their employee's development. And the overall vision of the organization building learning teams making time to get together, figure out what went wrong. How can it be done better the next time? Supporting employees and their ability to be autonomous while helping them to understand what their role is in the larger picture.

And I think it is often underestimated the critical roles that managers play and holding them accountable so ensuring that they are supported in their development is crucial, as well. And like I said, holding managers accountable to what their role is. And this is imperative.

I mentioned a second ago making time for learning as important reflection and what we may see as a failure and how they might be completed better in the future is definitely key.

Talent development is fostered through strategies like formal instruction, but informal as well. It can be mentorship non structured technical training organizational integration just all sorts of activities.

Fara Allen: So, thank you, Keli, if we have organizations listening right now, they're trying to figure out what their culture is what it's like, what, their employees may think, how would they figure that out?

Keli Bussell: Well, I think there's a number of ways. I think you start to figure out a way to measure it all. But I highly encourage first just taking a step back and having true reflection really true and difficult, hard reflection on what's the reality. Of embracing what you have and what you don't have as an organization is critical.

For instance, recognize the level of transparency your organization has between leadership frontline managers and employees. Do you have trust? Could you ask your employees, managers, and leaders, if these things exist? Yes, but I would consider that if you are lacking and trust. You may not necessarily get a truthful response. In which case I would recommend going through either your human resources team or if that trust doesn't exist. I would probably more highly recommend using an external consultant to at least administer an initial culture survey to sort of get a feel for, for what the reality is of the situation.

Employees who already lacked trust just they may not trust the anonymity of a survey coming directly from anyone in the organization, you know, regardless of who sends it. But once you garner some feedback then talk to managers about the results get their input and how to start correcting negative themes that may surface.

You can do this directly depending on what those themes are you can continue to facilitate that through an external consultant until you feel like you're getting, you know, really get good information. And then create a talent development strategy that focuses on learning organization concepts that will bring your workforce together and working toward a common goal that ultimately supports the organization's sustainability. And you're right, this doesn't happen overnight, but it is 100% achievable, there is no doubt about that. There are many organizations out there doing this work and being successful at it. But I do think that once organizations figure this out and they can be unstoppable.

Fara Allen: So, on this journey that organizations take to change their culture because they recognize that they need and more positive culture and they recognize the return on investment is something that is appealing. How do they know if their culture is changing and other ways that they measure that?

Keli Bussell: Yeah, you can definitely measure it, you can evaluate, you know, a variety of impacts that all of the actions that you've taken and implemented and strategize are actually having. Basically, proving like is our efforts worth it. As you evaluate you can correct as needed. You likely won't ever get it right the first time. So, keeping a close eye on it. Changing and

adjusting as needed and continuing to monitor the return on your investments, such as training costs, you know, what are your productivity levels, employee engagement levels, things like that. But, for example, what impacted adding team learning meetings to the schedule at the end of every week to analyze a problem, come up with solutions and implement ways to fix it.

What did that have on your organization, do people feel like they're coming out with better ideas and better solutions? How far have employees come in understanding their role in the organization's mission? Do they believe in the mission? Are you having more widgets made? Does it take less?

Ultimately, I guess, less to produce the widget, but your customers are still satisfied. How's your turnover is that improving or people staying longer while still being productive. Are you getting a better pool of candidates, you know, like I mentioned before people review people those reviews online are real and people look at them and the less quality your reviews are the probably less quality of candidates, you're going to receive? So, things to keep in mind and all these things and so much more can be measured, just depending on who you are as an organization, what you produce as far as goods and services. It just depends on what's important to your organization and how you wish to quantify what your success is and if you're meeting those goals.

But don't get me wrong talent development that has done well is much bigger than this. It's bigger than culture and being a learning organization, if you don't start there with having a positive culture and being a learning organization. You're just you're building blocks are missing. And it's going to be very difficult to build.

But like I said, it's absolutely doable if you have the right level of awareness reflection and support organizations can complete the marathon. It's just important to remember that you never stopped training. You keep moving and keep working towards improvement.

Fara Allen: Thanks for sharing your expertise, Keli. I think most of us would prefer to work in a positive work environment that supports us and our own journey to always learn. We really appreciated your time today and we look forward to learning more.

Keli Bussell: Yeah, thanks for having me on.

Fara Allen: Thank you for listening to this episode of Organizational Culture with our guest Keli Bussell. We hope you enjoyed it and will share with your friends. If you'd like more information on this topic, you can contact us at go.osu.edu/OhioState4Work. See our description for details. Be well and bye for now.