

## What is (the importance of) corporate culture?

Corona is raging again. Uncertainty stands for our business gates. The old never comes back. So companies need to adapt to the changing, corona-surrounded, but also digitally driven, context. Strategy, organization and underlying processes are redrawn. Those who adapt to the new normal are primarily looking for a new "consciousness". In short, what was formulated earlier is being reformulated. But who looks at the unconscious? Who has an eye for the habits that we share as employees and call "our corporate culture"? But what exactly is this and why is it so important? How do you put your finger on your corporate culture? By the way, does anyone notice that working from home risks diluting the culture, causing misunderstandings and conflicts to emerge unexpectedly? Why is it so important now that you as a manager have an eye for it? You will find answers to these questions in this article ...



First of all, **research shows that companies with an eye for "culture" achieve much better results than where they are not.** And this claim can immediately be extended to other organizations, in short to all places where people work together ...

But what exactly do we mean by corporate culture? When you ask employees this question, you often get the following answers: the way we do things, the atmosphere that is there, the way we interact with each other, the rules that were agreed upon, etc.. All correct by the way!

**You could compare the culture of an organization with "its personality", within which a unique set of "norms and values" is used.** And just like any individual, no two are the same.

I would like to elaborate on the expression "norms and values". These two words are often pronounced together. But what is the difference between the two? And where do they complement each other? And I will also go deeper into the question of how "norms and values" are situated in a business context.

Norms and values are often confused with each other. We actually prefer to speak about values and norms. There is always the value first and then the norm.

Values guide your behavior and your choices. Values are also always formulated positively. I give an example in the corporate environment: "teamwork" can be a value. Other values include trust, respect, integrity, openness, individual responsibility, positivism, customer focus, result orientation, quality, a 'can-do' attitude, innovation and change. And there are many others.

A "norm" is the translation of how you experience the value, which behavior you expect. From our example, a standard for "teamwork" could be "the team members consult each other at the start of each working day". The typical thing about norms is that you can violate them. You do it. Or you don't.

**How do you deal with this as a leader? Well, if you strive to know and improve your corporate culture, it is desirable to list all the values that are important to you as a team or as an organization.** Once you have determined these values, you can arrange and order them. What value is paramount? Which value is more important than the others? Which values do you want to improve?

It is also appropriate to define each time which norm (and therefore which behavior) you as a leader expect for each value. How can a value be (better) filled in from day to day in the workplace? By giving meaning to each value, you can then highlight the priorities and the unique differences within your own culture.

When selecting new employees, it also seems more than relevant to gauge the values they cherish and pursue. This allows you to check whether these are in line with the values that you also apply as a group and as an organization.

You can also ask the open question how the candidate would fill in each value to the best of his ability. Only then do you feel how the candidate will perform the job effectively. And whether he or she fits within the group and can easily find a connection with your intended culture.



*The progress in society is due in large part to the trust  
that people with common values and beliefs have in each other  
(Simon Sinek)*

### **But is culture still important tomorrow?**

Yet the question arises whether "corporate culture" will still remain an equally important lever in the future. After all, the corona era has led to us working from home much more independently. And many experience the positive effects of this. Virtual meetings run faster and are more focused. Some even have the feeling that by working independently from home you now contribute more to the whole than before. Is it still important to consider the ways of thinking and behaviors that connect us? By all means!

First of all, working from home is based on **mutual trust**. That trust is all the more robust if values and views are also shared "remotely". This increases the chance that the colleague who works from home will make that extra effort and will keep an eye on the bigger picture. Not just once, but every time ...

As an intermediate jump, I also share a personal holiday experience. For several years in a row, I have been exploring the most beautiful places in Burgundy with my wife. In doing so, we always use the formula that allows us to really mingle with the French, namely the "chambres d'hôtes". Depending on the situation on site, we experience a slightly different breakfast experience. Sometimes all host families sit at separate tables, and at other times we sit at the same table - albeit at a safe distance from each other this year. It strikes me time and again that it is much easier to seek out contact and conversation if you share the table (the space). This also applies in business, in any room, even in the canteen, or better ... especially in the canteen!

If the organization runs like a smooth machine, where expectations and objectives are sufficiently clear to all employees and a short consultation is sufficient to make adjustments or make practical agreements, working from home will indeed allow you to focus better and faster on the final outcome to be achieved. The underlying values and norms are then rather latent.

However, if you want to handle a crisis situation, explore new alternatives together, test new things or simply want to share an emotion, personal contact is the best way. You can then actually look your interlocutors in the eye and therefore read better between the lines. You can also informally share opinions after the formal exchange. What is said is not always understood in the same way by everyone. And then it pays to exchange your views with others: "I understand this. You too?'. This often unconsciously allows you to look together for a better interpretation of "what was said". And this unconscious approach is now a bit more obvious if you share the workplace. So it is not a matter of "either/or". It is an "and/and" story. The challenge is to find the right balance.

In these times of corona, where teleworking is once again the norm, the challenge is to consciously let the unconscious live via PC or smartphone. This can be done, for example, by encouraging colleagues to contact each other again after the virtual meeting, for a chat and a good understanding ...

*Call it inspiration or competition, athletes like to train together.  
I also run faster during a competition than alone.  
(Nicholas Bloom)*



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*Thank you so much for reading this article, I hope you found it helpful. You can find other articles on my website. You can always ask a question or leave a comment. If you would like to test the cultural values within your organization and/or give your employees a helping hand with a lecture, training or workshop, I would be happy to guide you. Bye!*

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