

The impact of leaders on organizational culture



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Leaders define the direction and tone of their organizations, both through large-scale decisions and everyday behavior. Their actions and choices can make or break a company's success.

The same is true for culture—leaders play a key role in shaping and promoting a strong culture that supports both organization-wide goals and the employee experience.

Organizational culture matters. It impacts nearly every aspect of a business. A thriving organizational culture can lead to increased efficiency, improved employee engagement, a greater sense of belonging, and more.

Given the high level of influence they have, leaders are responsible for ensuring their organization's culture measures up. But a few of the ways in which leadership impacts culture can be subtle and hard to quantify.

Identifying how leaders influence organizational culture is important. Awareness is the first step to building a strong company culture that serves each individual employee as well as the organization as a whole.

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Understanding the relationship between leaders and organizational culture

Organizational culture can be defined as the shared values, beliefs, and perceptions that influence how employees behave within an organization.

Although this culture is shared and forwarded by all members of the organization on a daily basis, leadership plays the most significant role in shaping it.

At the start, leaders are the ones who define what values are adopted and transmitted. They decide on the ethics, guiding principles, and norms that will drive the organization. Getting clear on these elements of

organizational culture helps create a concrete, shared vision among various leaders so that everyone is on the same page.

Once an organization's culture has been established, it's also up to leaders to reinforce it. They can do this through high-level decision-making about policies, events, and workplace traditions, but also in more subtle ways.

Organizational Culture

The shared values, beliefs, and perceptions that influence how employees act within an organization.



Here are five ways you or the leaders you work with can positively impact company culture.

01.

Motivation

Leaders should be a company's most enthusiastic motivators. As visible figures, they can be instrumental in creating a culture of purpose and shared goals.

Motivation is key for employees. It gives them the push they need to keep doing their jobs well. When employees have a sense of purpose, it creates a strong organizational culture that leads to improved performance and engagement.

There are a few ways leaders can motivate employees. The first is by regularly reaffirming the company's mission and values. The daily grind can sometimes obscure the reasons people are doing what they do, so reminding workers why they come to work every day can unlock deep-seated motivation.

Another way leaders can motivate is through positive reinforcement. When there is a significant accomplishment, whether by an individual, a team, or the company as a whole, leadership should be the first to call attention to it. This type of recognition motivates employees to keep up the good work.

Top tip

Leaders should be the first to call attention to and celebrate accomplishments in the workplace. Positive reinforcement creates a culture of motivation.

02.

Strong vision

A strong vision is an essential quality for leaders of all types and a crucial part of organizational culture.

Leaders should ensure their organization's vision is front and center, bringing it up frequently and making decisions in accordance with it.

They should also have their own sense of vision, with the ability to think about the future and plan ahead strategically. This vision is key to business objectives and organizational culture.

A leader with vision isn't just going through the motions. They encourage innovation, make things happen, and provide a clear path forward. This promotes an organizational culture of idea-sharing and action that will trickle down to all employees.

Top tip

Leaders should keep their organization's vision front and center, as well as share their own visions for the future.



03.

Coaching and mentorship

Leaders are important mentors and coaches for an organization, and a big part of creating a culture that embraces professional development.

Leaders can impact company culture by serving as coaches, developing a framework that outlines the goals, strategy, and details necessary to push your organization forward.

Coaching can happen in many areas, from leading teams on large projects to mentoring individuals. Working to elevate others in the organization reinforces a culture of growth and makes those individuals more likely to extend the same mentorship to others.

Top tip

Mentors lead by example, and your intranet can be a place for leaders to do so through blog posts, videos, and more.

One of the most important parts of mentorship is leading by example. To do this, leaders must make their choices and actions visible to their staff. An intranet is a great vehicle for leaders to share their updates and views with the rest of the organization, whether through a blog post, short video, or company-wide forum.

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04.

Setting expectations

An organizational culture with clear expectations is a strong one. Leadership has an important role in setting these expectations.

An organization's norms around communication, productivity, standards of work, and behavior are a key part of its culture. It's important for employees to know what is expected of them so that they can thrive.

Enforcing these norms and expectations is the responsibility of your leaders. Establishing rules and holding staff to them is a key way leaders shape organizational culture.

Providing documents via an intranet can assist leaders by compiling necessary information in one location. Mandatory reads ensure staff acknowledge the receipt of required information.

Top tip

Leaders can set expectations with an intranet that contains detailed descriptions and documents related to company policies.



05.

Boosting morale

Attitude is contagious and tends to trickle down. Leaders who serve as their organization's loudest and proudest cheerleaders make a big difference to company culture.



Culture is also visible at the top. Leaders set the tone for the organization as a whole.

It is leadership's responsibility to embody the organizational culture they want to see. A disengaged leader will breed disengaged employees, so it's important for them to demonstrate their commitment to and belief in the organization.

This means showing up at events and having a strong presence in the digital workplace, including joining as many formal and informal conversations as possible, whether they be digital or in person. As visible figures, they need to show staff their dedication loudly and often.

Top tip


Leaders should show up at events and maintain a consistent presence in the digital workplace.

Next steps

A healthy organizational culture is key to success, and we hope this guide has shown you how leadership can play a part in improving yours.

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