

# Redefining culture

Crowd-sourced views on  
the meaning of culture



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In August 2021, founder and business communications strategist, Jenni Field, asked her LinkedIn community how they would define culture.

With over 65 comments on the post, we thought we would collate them and share in a handy PDF for you!

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For me, it's how the company's values translate into the atmosphere and attitudes of the workplace. Are staff there as assets to be developed, or does the business just hope for 2-3 years of work out of them before they move on? Do teams collaborate to drive innovation and move the business forward, or do they work to their remits and nothing more? Is a work-life balance encouraged, or are you expected to run yourself into the ground? And do managers coach their teams or just administer them...?

**Stuart McBride**  
**Communications Manager, R3**

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How people behave when no-one is looking, or what happens automatically, what the company/its people defaults to.

**David Orford**  
**Transformation Communications**  
**Manager, Nomura**

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I was taught "How we do things round here."

**Alan S Morrison**  
**Owner,**  
**ASM Media & PR**

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The aggregate of the predominant behaviours displayed on a daily basis by the humans in the organisation.

**Nick Propper**  
**CEO,**  
**Impact Human Performance**



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If company culture is the combination of different influences acting within an organisation and flowing from it... then national culture could be the combination of different influences acting within that nation and flowing from it.

**Matthew Partovi**  
**Founder, Culturevist**

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At a very basic level, the gap between the stated values and priorities of an organization and its actual values and priorities, combined with the tone, pressure and language used to manage that gap.

**Mike Klein**  
**Principle, Changing the Terms**

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For culture today I like, Deal and  
Kennedy's definition:  
'it's the way things are done around here.'

For culture tomorrow I like:  
'it's how we will do our best work together.'

I think the really interesting bit is then what  
fits inside these high-level statements  
because that's where organisations can start  
to get purposeful and tune/design e.g.  
decision-making, org-structure, feedback,  
org-learning, approach to change, approach  
to conflict and a few dozen more :)

**John Faulkner Willcocks**  
**Founder,**  
**Wild Ducks**

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Schein has a really good one focused on the concept of shared assumptions. Makes sense to me. I really don't understand why some people believe you can't define it. I've heard that of course but can't see why not.

**Adam Zuckerman**  
**Product Leader,**  
**Willis Towers Watson**

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In reality, the work cultures I've experienced is closer to this definition, i.e shared 'assumptions' rather than the more ideal shared 'values', because different staff (depending on where they are in the organization) will experience it somewhat differently than others would. I also believe who gets fired, promoted and exit can also demonstrate the true reflection of an organization's culture.

**Noor Yuslinda**  
**Freelance writer**



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I had to really wrestle with this when writing my first book, *The Power of Company Culture*. In the end, I created this definition which resonated with me and other leaders I surveyed the most.

Hope it helps:

"Company culture is the combination of the easily seen ideals like vision statements and values, combined with the harder to see norms, behaviors, languages, beliefs and systems."

**Chris Dyer**  
**Author and speaker**

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Vibe, sounds silly but can't think of a better word to describe it.

**Chris Lane**  
**Strategic Engagement Manager,**  
**Heathrow**

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A set of shared values, beliefs and behaviours which glue and hold the organisation together.

**Rod Cartwright**  
**Strategic Communication Consultant**

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Well, an organisational culture consists of beliefs, attitudes, practices and customs to which people are exposed during their interaction with the organisation.

**Usman Islam**  
**Accounts, Spatial**



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I think this is difficult to define because it is so subjective and depends on your ethnic background, age, education, sex, personal taste etc. Also lived experience. An individual's experience of culture, can change over the course of time. I grew up in a small Devon market town but went to university near London and worked abroad and in an around the home counties before returning to Devon 8.5 years ago. My exposure to different cultures has shaped my own feelings about culture.

**Julia Besooijen**  
**Marketing,**  
**National Trust**

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How it feels to be part  
of our organisation.

**Carrie-Ann Wade**

**Director of Communications and Engagement,  
Cat's Pajamas**

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Simply its the way of life of a  
group/community living in a specific area.

**SF Shah Tirmizi**

**Facilitator, Aims Education System**

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Such a good question but also a complex one  
to define in words. For me personally, culture  
is defined by how people feel and - stemming  
from that - how they behave because of how  
the interactions, environment and  
relationships make them feel.

**Sophie Thomas**

**Marketing Manager, Marketscan**



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“The way we do things around here” but this can also be split down further to: “the way we SAY we do things around here” and “the way we ACTUALLY do things around here.”

**Caroline Birch**  
**HR Consultant and Culture Specialist**

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I think people often have unrealistic expectations of a homogeneous culture in organisations. You might achieve that somewhere that has invested a lot of time and money into defining what they want their culture to be, and then made it happen through leadership, policies, training, comms, consequences for not conforming etc. But generally, where this has not happened, there are micro cultures all over an organisation and it can vary a lot, from great to absolutely stinking, depending on the individuals that have influence in each immediate environment.

**Josephine Graham**  
**Marketing and**  
**Communications,**  
**Bradford Council**



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Internal brand.

**Lyndon Johnson**  
**Founder,**  
**Think Different(ly) Communications**

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Shared values, beliefs  
and behaviours!

**Cassie R**  
**Student**

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How we behave when  
no one is looking.

**Charlotte Goodban**  
**Executive Coach**

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Short version "it is the company's  
character. It is WHO they want to  
be doing what they do!"

**Debra Ann Thurtell**  
**Business Solutions Coach,**  
**Simply Going Beyond**



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How many stars are there in the sky? A question of equal importance. And just as likely to have a meaningless answer. I used to consult with CEOs on culture. I would begin by asking the CEO and each officer to describe what they believed was their current culture. I had to stop doing this because it was so embarrassing. You could not have recognized they were talking about the same company. So, let's say, Chris, you have the right answer, now what and how many people do you suppose would agree? The thing we should notice when talking about culture, for all the definitions and experts, there are few if any stories documenting how a company, or even if any company changed its culture to the extent the business was impacted, without changing the leader, of course. Culture, along with employee engagement and employee experience, are topics making vendors rich and companies unchanged.

**Jim Smith**  
**CEO,**  
**Enterprise Management Group**

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In the last place I worked they talked about culture as: Who we are going to be on the journey? What's it like to be around us? What do people experience when they're with us? It's not very concise but I think it goes some way to explaining what we mean when we talk about culture.

**Carly Cook**  
**Freelance,**  
**Carly Cook Comms**

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Culture is made up of a collective of habits, behaviours, values and attitudes. It is the heart beat of a business or a society.

**Jenny Chapman**



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Culture is what defines a company and the way that it acts everyday to its customers and staff. Values mean nothing if no one follows them or people are not assessed or supported/developed against them.

I know or sounds weird but you cannot pretend to have an inclusive culture if you are not inclusive etc... so many talk about cultures that cannot be measured or noticed.

**Paul Morgan**  
**Director of Learning,**  
**Organisational Development**  
**and Benefits at ForHousing**

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It's people's default behaviour informed by their learned personal characteristics and their observed and experienced personality of their employer in action. The latter being much harder to acquire these past 18 months while WFH.

**Mike Bickerdike**  
**Colleague Communications Manager, Tesco**

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For me, the real definition is often: what behaviour will this organisation not tolerate? I think that's when you see the real culture, for better or worse.

**Ed O'Brien**  
**Head of Issues & Media Management, Global  
Corporate Affairs team at KPMG**

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When I think culture, I use Flamholtz and Randle’s definition of organizational culture as the “corporate personality”. The values, beliefs, and norms which influence the behaviour of people as members of an organization.

As with many concepts that relate to organizations, it is important for an organization to define what culture is for itself and ensure that colleagues are aware of that definition, and viewing the environment through that lens when discussing challenges and opportunities.

**Gail Baxter**  
**GB Communications,**  
**Principal**

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# Redefining Communications

Taking you from chaos to calm by helping you:

- Diagnose the root cause of chaos
- Training and coaching your teams
- Working with you to take the chaos away

**Get in touch:**

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