

“Matching People with Organizational Culture”

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### **Author Biography**

Asim Khan is the Chief Executive Officer of Business Management Group, Inc., a consulting firm that specializes in engineering, marketing and management. His international business experience spans a wide range of industries, including commodities, energy, aerospace, defense, electronics, manufacturing, computers and technology, health care, publishing and financial services. In addition to his role as an executive consultant, Asim has served on the boards of directors for several corporations and nonprofit organizations. He holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a master's degree in Technology Management from the University of Phoenix. Mr. Khan is also an Honorary Chairman on the National Republican Congressional Committee's Business Advisory Council.

### **Executive Summary**

The success of any company depends in part on the match between individuals and the culture of the organization. Organizational culture is the set of operating principles that determine how people behave within the context of the company. Underlying the observable behaviors of people are the beliefs, values, and assumptions that dictate their actions.

Managers need an accurate understanding of the organization's culture in order to direct activities in a productive way and to avoid the destructive influence of having employees who are not committed to the company's goals. A shared sense of purpose starts with the hiring process and continues with careful attention to how employees are motivated and rewarded for their efforts. Managers need to continually transmit the values of the culture through efforts such as story telling, rituals and firm-sponsored social events, as well as consistent positive feedback that gives each member of the organization a sense of importance.

## **MATCHING PEOPLE WITH ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

Matching individuals to organizations is a crucial part of success for any company. The match between people and the companies for which they work is determined by the kind of organizational culture that exists. The degree to which an organization's values match the values of an individual who works for the company determines whether a person is a good match for a particular organization.

The collective rules by which an organization operates define its culture. These rules are formed by shared behaviors, values and beliefs. Culture forms the basis for how individuals operate within the context of the organization. The way a group or individual behaves, defines what is "normal" and sanctions what is not normal is determined by his or her culture. Culture can be defined either by a set of observable behaviors or by the underlying values that drive behavior. In large organizations, vision statements, mission statements and statements of values are often formalized to describe the company's culture.

On the most basic level, culture is observable as a set of behaviors. Examples of culture at this level include the degree of formality with which employees conduct themselves, the organization's dress code, and the type of technology used. Beneath the level of observable behaviors are the values that underlie behavior. Though these values determine behavior, they cannot be directly observed. At an even deeper level are the assumptions and beliefs that determine values. While an organization or individual's values may remain within awareness and can be stated, assumptions and beliefs often exist beneath the surface and out of conscious awareness.

Being aware of an organization's culture at all levels is important because the culture defines appropriate and inappropriate behavior. In some cultures, for example, creativity is stressed. In others, the status quo is valued. Some cultures are more socially oriented, while others are task-oriented, "business only" environments. In some company's teamwork is key. In other's, individual achievement is encouraged and valued. An organization's culture also determines the way in which employees are rewarded. Management tends to focus on a dominant source of motivation, such as pay, status, or opportunity for personal growth and achievement. The accessibility of management and the ways in which decisions are made are reflections of an organization's culture as well.

It is important for individual values to match organizational culture because a culture of "shared meaning or purpose" results in actions that help the organization achieve a common or collective goal. An organization will operate more productively as a whole when key values are shared among the majority of its members. To that end, employees need to be comfortable with the behaviors encouraged by the organization so that individual motivation and group productivity remain high. High functioning organizations are comprised of individuals whose overt behaviors are consistent with their covert values.

All of this is of crucial importance to managers. Senior executives usually set the tone by exerting core values that form the overall dominant culture shared by the majority of an organization's members. So, if management does not take the time to understand the culture that motivates an organization, problems are inevitable. New procedures and activities will be very difficult to implement if they do not mesh with the organization's culture.

Steps to ensure that individuals are responsive to the goals and operating procedure of the organization start with the hiring process. Managers can foster the development of a positive culture by employing people who share the same values and vision that the organization represents. To do this, employers can spend time with prospects before they enter the organization as new employees. Once new hires are indoctrinated with the organization's values, they will form an objective perception of the environment that will solidify the organization's personality or culture.

In addition to hiring people who fit the organization, managers need to have a solid understanding of the dynamics of culture and how to transform it so that they can direct activities in a manner that gets results. Some ways to continually transmit the culture of an organization in a productive way include telling stories, having corporate "rituals," and using symbolic language when referring to the organization's mission. Firm-sponsored social events and mentorship programs may be effective as well.

Having a positive and aligned culture benefits the organization in many ways. One important benefit is a high level of productivity. The destructive influence of hiring someone who does not share the same set of values, goals and commitment espoused by the organization will weaken a strong chain of links and bonds. An employee's performance depends on what is and what is not proper among his or her peers, which in turn affects that individual's behavior and motivation to participate and contribute within the organizational framework.

An effective means of keeping employees aligned with the values and goals of an organization is by developing a culture that encourages employees to focus on a higher purpose for their work. Values that support this kind of cohesive operation include the idea that people

are basically, good, rational and interested in achievement. Leaders that unify an organization believe that everyone has something to contribute to the organization and decision-making should involve people at all levels within the organization.

Creating an environment where people enjoy and value their work is key. To do this effectively, leaders must be sure to communicate clear expectations for every member of the organization. These expectations should be supported by the words and actions of managers who regularly let people know how their work is important to the organization. Individuals should be given assignments that are consistent with their strengths and interests, and opportunities for continued learning and growth should be provided as well.

The importance of understanding organizational culture cannot be overlooked. The bottom line for managers who want to create a culture of success is to start with creating a positive environment. Bring in people whose values are in line with the organization's culture, and continue to acknowledge success and involve the whole organization in maintaining an environment that allows people to enjoy working hard to meet the company's goals.