

Workplace Culture: Why the Gap? The 5th Reason

There is no debate about the importance and value of culture. It is axiomatic: a healthy culture enables a business to attract, build, motivate, and retain outstanding employees. And talent drives success. Yet many companies struggle to build and protect such a culture. Why?

If (a) leaders have power and (b) they want to have an outstanding culture, then why are they not more effective in using that power to get what they say they want?

BetterCulture has spent over a decade exploring that question, and we now have the answer.

For many years we have taught that the gap between the culture business leaders say they want and what they actually have results from one of (or a combination of) four things:

1. Leaders don't know how to build and protect a healthy culture.
2. Leaders think they know how to build and protect a health culture, but they don't.
3. Leaders believe their culture is healthy, but it's not.
4. Leaders don't want a healthy culture badly enough to do the work to achieve it.

All of those reasons still apply, but this paper will outline a fifth cause for the gap – and it may well be the most frequent and problematic of all.

The 5th Reason

Most companies of some size have a CFO, a senior HR professional, and a CTO. Why? Could they not just have a committee in charge of financial operations or technology or personnel and benefits management? The committee could meet every month over lunch and discuss what the company could do to manage technology, financial operations, or personnel issues – you know, spread out the responsibility so no single person has the burden of driving the process or being held accountable. And then when questions arise about when to purchase new software, how to account for an expenditure, or how to handle a possible employee termination, others in the company could get guidance or approval from any one of the committee members who might be handy. How would that work out?

As absurd as that sounds, is it not a close description of how many companies address culture? Is it not common to set up a committee that meets periodically to talk about how the company can build and keep the culture healthy? Or if the company doesn't have a committee, they at least have a culture code and something that says or implies that everybody is in charge of culture. **If everybody's in charge, then no one's in charge; i.e., nobody is held accountable.**



Work Culture - Why the Gap? - Kim Hoogveen at TEDxOmaha

595

Share

Download

Clip

Save

...

67K views · 10 years ago

Kim Hoogveen is the creator and owner of MindSet®, an innovative, functional, and expansive leadership training, consultation, and executive coaching company. A licensed psychologist holding his doctorate from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Dr. Hoogveen is a former CEO whose company (QL), under his leadership, experienced remarkable growth and was four times recognized as the #1 Best Place to Work in Omaha. Show more

Dr. Kim Hoogveen's 2012 TED-Talk on Workplace Culture: Why the Gap?

Few would argue that a healthy work culture is any less important than solid financial operations, compliant HR practices, or reliable technology. So why do we have an HR leader, CFO, and CTO, but not a CCO (Chief Culture Officer)? The answer can be found when we examine what is required for such an operational leader to be effective. To be effective, a CFO, HR professional, or a CTO must have four things:

1. Subject matter **knowledge**,
2. **Tools** to make good use of that knowledge,
3. Ongoing skill development plus timely **expert support** as needed, and
4. **Power**.



In the domains of finance, HR, and technology there is clarity as to (a) what **knowledge** a leader needs to possess, (b) the **tools** they need to have access to, (c) where they can go for outside support and expertise, and (d) the power they must be given. This clarity of thought has resulted in (a) training programs where college credentials and professional certifications are awarded, (b) a commonly understood inventory of necessary tools, and (c) agreement as to who has the expertise to provide additional training and consulting support when needed.

But when we turn to the topic of culture, there is no clarity on how we go about getting those three essential elements. Good intentions abound, but they are undermined by extraordinarily muddled thought.

- What is the specific **knowledge** base someone needs to have to function well as a Chief Culture Officer? Who offers that curriculum?
- What are the **tools** a Chief Culture Officer needs to have at their disposal? Who provides those tools and the training to use them well?
- Where does a Chief Culture Officer turn for on-demand expert consultation and **support**? Who can provide ongoing, high-level professional development?

This lack of clarity is why most companies fail to do with culture what they do with finance, HR, and technology: they fail to have a specific person responsible for driving cultural health – someone we would designate as being a Chief Culture Officer (CCO). But what if...what if we could change the situation so that there was clarity of thought as to exactly what a CCO needs to have in terms of knowledge, tools, and support?

The Opportunity

The identified Chief Culture Officer need not have that formal title – they may well already have a title such as CEO, CCO, VP of HR, Director, etc. – but the company should designate a specific individual to monitor and oversee cultural health and be responsible for its continuous improvement.

The designated Chief Culture Officer must have solid interpersonal skills and have (or can earn) the respect of other leaders and employees throughout the company. Once that criteria is met, just as it is with the other operational leaders, we must then address the **four hard and fast requirements** for someone to be successful in the role of Chief Culture Officer.

#1 | Knowledge

Your Chief Culture Officer has to know something. Actually, they have to know quite a bit. Being a good person with a positive attitude is necessary, but it's far from adequate criteria to appoint someone to the role of CCO.

Fortunately, there is a large body of knowledge available to help someone function well as CCO. BetterCulture has assembled that knowledge and can provide your designated CCO with a concentrated training experience that will greatly enhance their ability to diagnose, strategize, train, and coach. Training and supporting Chief Culture Officers is one of the primary services BetterCulture offers as we strive to make the world a better place to work.

#2 | Tools

Your Chief Culture Officer needs to have access to tools, technology, assessments, and training content that will enable them to make good use of their knowledge.

BetterCulture provides our certified CCOs with a wide array of high-quality assessments and training tools. Examples include:



- BetterCulture's Engagement Survey©,
- BetterCulture's on-demand leadership development program that the CCO can use as a whole to facilitate a topnotch leadership development initiative or more narrowly to coach or assist individual supervisors,
- BetterCulture's Team Assessment tool,
- BetterCulture's 20 Tenets of Culture and Success,
- BetterCulture's Mentor Training Program,
- BetterCulture's Predictive Index for Supervisor Selection,
- BetterCulture's Backbone and Heart coaching tool, and
- BetterCulture's Characteristics of a High Functioning Executive Team.

All the above are resources that a Chief Culture Officer should have at their fingertips to effectively monitor cultural health and drive improvement.

#3 | Ongoing Support

Your Chief Culture Officer needs to have access to an outside resource to call on for support and guidance when needed and to help them continue to develop their skills.

Being responsible for driving cultural health is a big job. With each setting having its own unique quirks, a paint-by-numbers approach is unlikely to work well. Having access to a knowledgeable and responsive consultant can make the difference between a Chief Culture Officer who offers surface level training and guidance and one who makes a major impact. BetterCulture delivers needed support by providing 1) on-demand consultation, 2) frequent prompts and encouragements to keep this work a priority, 3) ongoing learning opportunities, and 4) opportunity to regularly exchange ideas and best practices as part of a peer cadre of certified BetterCulture Chief Culture Officers.

#4 | Power

Your Chief Culture Officer needs to have, or be delegated, sufficient power in your organization to ensure others attend to their requests, suggestions, and (on occasion) directions.

When the CEO or Owner functions as the Chief Culture Officer, there is no problem with power. You just have to make sure the CEO has knowledge, access to the right tools, and reliable ongoing support.

When a CEO or Owner chooses to delegate the Chief Culture Officer role to someone else, they must give that designated executive the power to hold others accountable regarding employee interactions and cultural standards.

Failing to do so will likely result in the Chief Culture Officer being viewed akin to a cheerleader, mediator, or trainer. All three of those roles can be helpful, but will lack the clout to significantly move the needle on culture. A CEO must be wise enough to make it clear that all executives and supervisors are expected to work collaboratively with the CCO, openly accepting guidance as to how they can more positively impact the culture and deferring to the CCO whenever they are determined to be doing damage.

The Challenge

In the 1960s, air conditioning was not yet standard in cars. Many thought that air conditioning wasn't necessary – until they had it. Then a car without air conditioning was unthinkable. Of course, air conditioning would not have become standard equipment if it had been ineffective, just blowing hot air and making no real impact on comfort.

If you pick the right person and delegate adequate power, BetterCulture will provide your Chief Culture Officer with the knowledge, tools, and ongoing support to be effective.



There is a parallel here for the idea of a clearly designated, competent Chief Culture Officer. If you have not had one, you may well not appreciate the value. But for those who do follow our advice to designate a Chief Culture Officer, assure they have adequate power, and then have BetterCulture provide your Chief Culture Officer with the knowledge, tools, and ongoing support they need to be effective; not having a Chief Culture Officer will soon become as unimaginable as driving a non-air-conditioned car across Arizona in the middle of July.

So here's the challenge for BetterCulture. Can we get decision makers to understand the benefits of having a clearly designated Chief Culture Officer and the importance of implementing it well?

If companies proceed without each of the four essential elements we have pointed out, the concept of a Chief Culture Officer is destined to fade away as little more than a passing fad, and a big opportunity will have been lost as a victim of getting the "what" right and blowing the implementation because of a failure to focus attention on the "how."

Our goal is to have BetterCulture clients smiling at what they are achieving with a knowledgeable, well-resourced, and well supported Chief Culture Officer – a smile they will take all the way to the bank.