Re-Examining Culture: The Employee Experience

The past two years have certainly been a rollercoaster. While the COVID-19 pandemic has calmed, current supply issues, inflation, and input and commodity pricing are in flux. We know challenges and a pace of rapid change will remain with us.

Cooperatives can't control many of these outside factors. However, coops can control their response to external factors and intentionally create a positive environment where employees have the tools to thrive.

CULTURE CHECK

SHRM defines organizational culture as the proper way to behave within an organization. Organizational cultures are best seen through the eyes of employees. Let's take a few minutes to step into someone else's shoes in your organization. How do you think they would respond to the following questions?

- What gets rewarded in this cooperative? Examples include: numerical results, cooperation, customer service, favorites/friends of leaders
- How do coworkers interact with each other? Consider how conflict is resolved, if people assume positive or negative intent of each other, amount of drama or friendship within the office.
- How does the cooperative and leadership respond to employee mistakes? Are mistakes seen as learning opportunities or as a personal failure?
- How do employees hear about changes to the cooperative, their department, job or customers?
- Do employees have the resources and skills to meet the coop's needs?
- What are the best parts about working for this cooperative?
- What are the worst parts about working for this cooperative?
- What has changed for the better/worse over the past two years?

Now, think about those questions from the perspective of different employees. There is no "one definition" for culture.

Each employee experiences culture in their own way. They have their own lens to witness organizational culture, including different experiences based on their manager, location, job, background and personality. All these stories make up the collective culture of your cooperative.

Think about how an employee's experience may vary based on the following factors:

• New hires compared with long-term employees
• Central office compared with branch or field locations
• In-office, hybrid or remote work arrangements
• Recent high school and college graduates compared with mid-career and late-career professionals
• Leadership versus individual contributors

This simple exercise begins a longer conversation about the current and preferred culture. However, it is flawed. It assumes the person doing the exercise is empathetic enough to understand others' points of view in the coop. This is why employee engagement surveys, stay interviews, exit interviews and other data points are critical in identifying existing culture and focusing on the preferred future state.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT CULTURE

The best organizations are intentional about culture, consider cultural implications during strategic planning and create an environment that supports organizational goals. They utilize their mission and vision as a backbone to determine how best to meet employee needs.

What type of work environment and supports are needed for employees to achieve the goals that the organization has set out for them?

Metrics. Organizations often take the following metrics into consideration:

• Employee engagement scores and feedback
• Onboarding success and time to full competency
• Employee retention by department, location, generation, race/ethnicity, gender and tenure
• Exit interview trend data
• Skills gaps and strengths

While businesses take time to set annual and long-term business and financial goals, fewer take time to analyze and ensure the foundational organizational values, beliefs and behaviors support that strategy.

Employee Touchpoints. Employee touchpoints are times when *how* things are done are most important to employees. A positive or negative interaction can significantly impact an employee's perceptions about the organization and help define their experience of the culture.
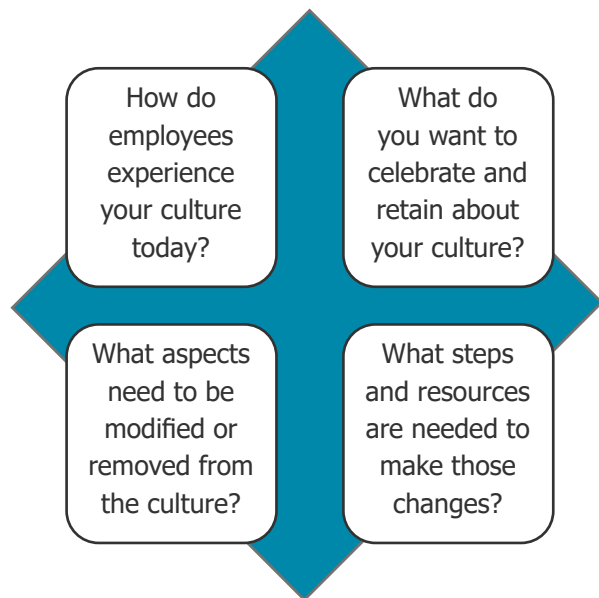
Assess how the following employee touchpoints impact employees, leaders and organizational culture in your organization. Are these touchpoints working to support the desired culture? What training, process changes or modifications are required to support the intended culture?

- Recruiting and interview experience
- Onboarding
- Compensation changes (increases, promotions, bonus payments)
- Performance discussions (informal and formal)
- Recognition by leadership and peers
- Treatment of employees who leave the organization
- Communication channels and delivery methods
- Meeting protocols and norms
- Work location and schedule decisions
- Crisis management (when tragedy strikes, how the organization responds to employees)

MOVING FORWARD

Organizational culture changes quickly when you aren't looking, especially with increased turnover and hiring. The culture will continue to shift as employees come and go, and organizational and employee expectations of the employment relationship change.

How do employees experience your culture today?

What do you want to celebrate and retain about your culture?

What aspects need to be modified or removed from the culture?

What steps and resources are needed to make those changes?

Meet the Foundations CONSULTING TEAM

BETH OSTREM
651-282-8718
beth.ostrem@
farmcreditfoundations.com

AMY RYAN
651-282-8498
amy.ryan@
farmcreditfoundations.com

HEATHER BINGER
651-282-8807
heather.binger@
farmcreditfoundations.com

CLAIRE BRANDENBURG
651-282-8449
claire.brandenburg@
farmcreditfoundations.com

TINA RATSAMY
651-282-8397
tina.ratsamy@
farmcreditfoundations.com

Much has been written about "the great resignation." Research shows that employees who feel supported and enjoy the culture of their organization are less likely to leave than employees who are struggling or suffering at work.

Foundations Consulting has helped organizations identify and update HR processes and procedures to align with organizational strategy and support organizational culture. Contact us to learn more about how we can help your organization move forward to revise HR processes and procedures to support your intended culture.