

The mindset that makes a Culture Champion

A survey reveals eight perspectives on the nature and importance of workplace culture that separate the top 11 per cent of leaders from the average manager.



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When it comes to building a successful business, the importance of culture cannot be overstated. Culture is the key to building the team you want to help you achieve the results you desire. To better understand culture, we asked 1000 respondents in a McCrindle survey to share their beliefs and experience about it. As we dived deeper into the answers, we identified a group of 11 per cent who responded differently to the questions than the average leader (whom we named the Moderate Manager). We called this group our 'Culture Champions'. They are a small group of outliers in the study who are working in businesses where expectations of them are clearly communicated, the behaviours are explicitly defined and everybody lives them out every day. When these elements of culture are present, people are twice as likely to rate the culture of their organisation as 'excellent'. Here are eight things our 11 per cent can teach us about culture.

1 Culture can be influenced
Almost two in five Culture Champions (38 per cent) 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disagreed with the statement 'Culture is not something that can be influenced, it just happens', compared with 19 per cent of Moderate Managers. They understand that culture is not something that needs to be left to chance. As a business leader, it's

important to examine your beliefs under a microscope regularly and determine whether you still hold them to be true or, more importantly, whether or not those beliefs are actually helpful to hold. Culture is not something that needs to be left up to chance, it can and should be something you work towards shaping with intention.

2 Culture is in the little things
Culture Champions understand that culture is built through seemingly insignificant daily decisions. We rarely celebrate finishing one page in a book. We don't get the productivity crown for responding to one email. Yet, small decisions can have big consequences. Think about a missed decimal point in a spreadsheet, or using plain flour instead of self-raising flour in a recipe. If you reflect on a decision that had big consequences, you'll probably find that it was the product of a series of small (and, at times, seemingly inconsequential) decisions. Culture Champions understand the importance of the seemingly insignificant decisions in building a culture by design, so they pay attention to the details. Recognise that every decision you make will point you in the direction of the culture you create.

3 Culture is not static
Culture Champions were more likely than Moderate Managers to

strongly agree that culture is dynamic and changes (35 per cent, compared with 26 per cent). The culture you have today may not be the culture you have tomorrow. Consider how the events of 9/11 changed the culture of airline travel, or how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the culture of remote working. Culture Champions know that when the culture no longer serves the team, they can change it. Just as your business evolves and changes over time, so too does your culture.

4 Culture needs a leader
Culture Champions place as much responsibility on themselves as they do on the head of the organisation. Collectively, the managers in our study see communicating culture as their primary role. They also believe they hold the main responsibility in living it out day to day and addressing the cultural inconsistencies in their team. Culture is not just the responsibility of the leader of the business. Every person plays a part in building and shaping it. While some people sit around and complain about the culture they have, Culture Champions are working to build the culture they want.

5 Culture is the key to success
Culture Champions are more likely to believe there is a strong link between culture and the overall success of an organisation. While almost all middle managers (99 per

