Building Blocks of Culture for Facilities Management – Part III, Define Roles of Individuals and Leaders

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I n our last column on culture, we continued to discuss the importance of culture as a management tool. In addition, we started to outline the building blocks associated with purposefully building and nurturing culture within our organizations. The second building block discussed previously was that of defining our values and measuring our baseline.

"Clarifying the Value System and breathing life into it are the greatest contributions a leader can make."

> Peters and Waterman—*In Search of Excellence;*
> *Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*

To be proactive in cultivating our culture, we must carefully select the values that we want our culture to be based upon. This selection process involves a cross-section of our staff in all areas. We want to create a culture that engages them, and is based on the values that they find most important in their workplace.

Once these one or two highest priority values are selected, an initial baseline measurement of the current culture must be completed (an example was provided from the University of Chicago on how to create an empirical scale to measure culture within our organization). This tool helps indicate the norms, bias, attitudes, and behaviors that define our current culture. Next in our path to creating culture is Part III – Defining the Roles of Individuals and Leaders.

REQUIRED: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION FROM STAFF

Once again this building block requires active participation from a wide cross-section of our staff. In the past this work may have been done only by the senior leaders of our organization or external consultants alone, and this has proven to be unsuccessful. Only our staff (who spend one-third of their life in the workplace) understand what makes that workplace engaging to them.

Demonstrating these values through various behaviors becomes the basic substance of our organizational culture. It is not only the large gestures that prove our culture is based on one value or another, but the minute daily individual actions that add up—one after another into thousands—over weeks, months, and years. It is the hard work of determining these actions that define our culture, and must come directly from our staff. Providing guidance and facilitating the process are of utmost importance in this process.

For most within our organization there are four basic working relationships. They are:

- Me and my leader
- Me and my customers
- Me and my peers
- Me and my direct reports
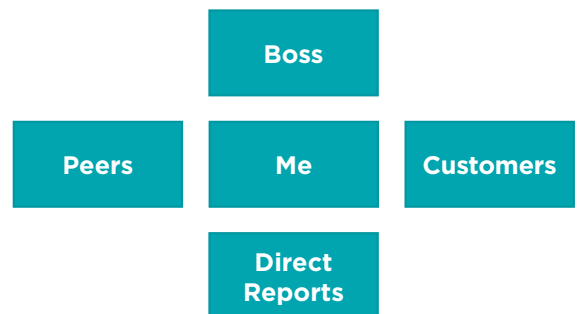
For many, all four of these working relationships apply, although for those without direct reports, only three apply. It is the roles we play in these relationships that provide the relational (or human) basis

of our organization's culture. We each individually influence culture by our actions in these roles. The way we influence culture can be described primarily by these actions:

- Demonstrate
- Reinforce
- Educate
- Enable
- Encourage
- Clarify
- Benefit
- Coach

These actions in general apply to everyone in the roles that they play. Their definition or framework provide a template for interactive working relationships with a variety of staff, and serve to list specific actions that reinforce our cultural values. For example encouragement can take many forms. How it applies to individuals specifically allows for creativity and flexibility for your teams, and are necessary for creation of our culture.

SPECIFIC ROLES PLAY A PART

While the previous rules apply to everyone. There could be more specific roles depending on your position within the organization. In particular, the leadership of our organization plays a vital role in nurturing our culture. Although it is important to note that the leaders do not solely control the culture of our organizations, their role is very important.

Senior Leadership

Many of our peer organizations rely only on the energy of senior leadership or a single senior leader, but that alone cannot sustain a desired value-based organizational culture. The proper roles of our leaders for this initiative are:

- Intentionally support culture
- Live by example
- Recognize successes
- Promote to campus at large
- Make conspicuous efforts
- Identify champions

Champions

The champions are those individuals that leverage the leader's ability to positively nurture value-based culture within the organization. As used in other management best practices within APPA, identification of champions accelerates and solidifies any change within our organizations. In this case,

leadership relies on champions at various levels within the organization to promote this new value-based culture and to lead by example. They are force multipliers, and their roles include:

- Cheerleaders for teams
- My "go to" people for impact
- Referent leaders
- Set examples

Staff

Naturally, everyone in our staff plays a role in organizational culture. The guidelines for the role of each staff member are:

- Individual action plan
- Provide feedback
- Encourage peers
- Adopt new behaviors
- Support leadership in efforts to improve culture

IMPLEMENTATION

Consistent with the other building blocks, much of the work in Part III is based on providing guidance in a framework that will allow everyone within the organization (including our leaders) to suggest, and later specify, unique actions and artifacts that create our culture. These defined rules are the starting point of facilitated discussions meant to identify short-, medium-, and long-range actions that demonstrate our culture. The working sessions create what ultimately becomes the implementation strategy for our organizational culture change.

This work was recently applied to the organizational culture initiative at the University of Chicago. The same definitions of roles were used to facilitate many group discussions to learn from the staff at all levels of the organization.

From these meetings, a large number or actionable ideas unique to that working environment were collected. It will be those ideas that will form the basis for Part IV – Publish Cultural Implementation Strategy.

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