

Building Blocks of Culture for Facilities Management—Part V, Implementing Your Cultural Strategy

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In this, our fifth building block of culture for facilities management, we are exploring how to implement our cultural strategy. Up to this point we've identified the importance of culture as a management tool within our industry, and we've examined how to go about developing our culture and defining it.

The **first building block** emphasized self-examination. In this component, we validated the presence of workplace culture by examining our current work practices, both positive and negative. The **second building block** guided us through the selection of our core values—which are the basis for our workplace culture. In the **third building block**, we

examined the roles of our leaders, champions (those who promote the culture we are trying to implement), and staff, using the servant-leadership model and a 360-degree viewpoint. The **fourth building block** involved publishing our cultural strategy. This is the written document with its various components that lays out our strategy and guides the creation of an engaging workplace. The completion of this step leaves us with implementing the plan.

THE IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing a cultural strategy is much different than simply managing a project from A to B with checklists, completion dates, and milestones. Building a culture is an emotional process that involves the experiences, beliefs, actions, and results of everyone in the department. It is more of a coaching and team exercise than a project management exercise. The amount of energy, enthusiasm, and persistence that leaders, champions, and staff put into creating culture is directly proportional to the success of that culture. In addition, this task calls for a greater level of individual accountability than is needed for any other job responsibility in the workplace. For the most part, it's up to the individual to be on the honor system and do the hard work. This work involves carrying out "small," daily, monthly, and annual actions; these actions display the attitudes that demonstrate our selected values and ultimately generate the culture.

For their part, leaders need to keep some important points in mind. First, the adoption of a culture is a gradual process that typically takes years, so in order to sustain the amount of effort required by everyone, it's important to recognize wins and successes along the way. Second, leaders need to contribute the most to building the culture. They have participated in selecting the values, identifying the roles of

the staff, and publishing the cultural strategic plan. They must act in the capacity of leaders by example, especially when it is most difficult to do so. Finally, achieving this implementation requires a more sensitive, dynamic, and robust level of communication. It's not enough to check the boxes; it's necessary to listen, to understand, and to recognize if our strategy is engaging our peers or not.

PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT

There are several processes available to help facilitate implementation. Some are better tailored for complex projects such as construction or reorganization; others allow more flexibility for issues such as cultural strategy. Recently, at the University of Chicago, we adopted W. Edwards Deming's "plan, do, check, act" process for our values, strategic plan, and Vision 2022 Plan.

In Deming's approach, the "**plan**" stage is the same as the cultural strategy that we published in building block four. However, this plan is a living document and does change over time. There are two distinct phases for implementing the cultural strategy that should be recognized; the first is the adoption phase. This could be considered the most difficult, because it involves the period of time when the plan's activities and initiatives are new and often uncomfortable for those participating. Sustainment is the second phase and lasts anywhere from one to three years after the adoption phase is completed. In this phase, adjustments to the plan are refined and reinforcement of the plan's successful elements become more common.

The second stage of Deming's process is the "**do**" stage. Much of this work has been detailed in the cultural strategy plan, however, leadership and personal determination will be called for, to encourage staff and verify that the multitude of activities required in this stage are taking place. Organizational culture is developed through daily, monthly, and annual demonstrations of the values selected to reflect it.

In addition to actions, artifacts must be created to reinforce the new value-based culture. The leaders and champions of the organization need to foster a sense of accountability to ensure high levels of participation. This will require discussions of ownership and open communication regarding the reaction staff has to the new initiative. Ultimately the activities introduced in this stage gradually become standard and expected.

In the "**check**" stage of the process, we are measuring our progress just as all good continuous

improvement systems do. The first step in this stage is the baseline initial measurement, as described in building block number two. As part of implementing the culture, this measurement is updated or reassessed at least annually. To get a true sense of staff engagement, this measurement should take several forms and is both formal and informal. For this step, it would be reasonable to solicit feedback from all areas of the institution that interface with facilities. Small focus groups would be appropriate, consisting of carefully selected participants who are known to communicate openly and who accurately represent staff who are typically uncomfortable communicating about such issues. Examples of negative values in terms of actions and artifacts would be appropriate feedback to collect during this exercise. As demonstrated in building block number one, this is one effective way to illustrate the current organizational culture. "Softer" descriptions of feelings and experiences in the workplace are appropriate data for this collection effort.

Finally, there is the "**act**" stage. This is the adjustment or alignment stage that utilizes the data collected in the previous step. However, care must be taken not to make major adjustments too quickly, because some changes need to be introduced gradually. The sensitivity required of the leaders, champions, and working group members will become more and more apparent to them during the adoption phase and later sustainment phase of implementation. The activity that takes place during this stage is much like any strategic planning session, where the measured results of success or lack of success are compared against the intended actions and artifacts detailed in the cultural strategy plan. Ideally, one person would serve as a facilitator to help the group compare the measurements to the plan and look for alignment or adjustment opportunities and ideas. The results of this activity and, in particular, the recognition of feedback, must be openly communicated with staff in order to reinforce leadership's determination to recognize that engagement in the workplace can be a subtle feature that is more difficult to measure and identify.

At this point, the "plan, do, check, act" process begins again, and the cycle repeats itself year after year until the organization reaches the sustainment phase of its new values-based culture. ☪

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