

Is there a one-size-fits-all culture model?



An organisation's culture can be defined as the organisation's prevailing ideas, values, attitudes, norms and beliefs that guide the way employees think, feel and act. An organisation's culture directly impacts the decisions and actions of that organisation. Another way to look at culture, is the manifestation of the values and behaviours that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organisation.

If the definition above encompasses culture, then is it possible for two *different* organisations to share the same culture? Thus, can *one* culture model be applied to many different organisations?

Organisations can be compared to individuals. It is widely accepted that no two individuals are *exactly* the same, even genetically identical twins. Even if two individuals have the exact same set of values, they are likely to display different behaviours as a result, as they have different personalities.

An example is that of Amazon, which established their culture based on their 14 Leadership Principles, to reflect the behaviours that they feel will best enable Amazon to continue to compete effectively. This was consciously designed *specifically* with Amazon in mind.

The word “model” suggests that it is a generic representation. If a culture is unique, then it would be illogical to apply a one-size-fits all approach to it. Culture is not one thing. It is a result of the type of industry an organisation is in, the size of the organisation, the type of leadership an organisation has, the employees, the business strategy and how a person perceives the culture of an organisation. Often people speak of strong vs. weak cultures; good vs. bad cultures. This is entirely incorrect. Cultures can only be viewed within the context that they exist.

As one example, Charles Handy (1976) defined four different kinds of cultures: Power; Role; People and Task Cultures, and what they would look like. This suggests that two organisations labelled as “Power” Cultures will look the same and that if you are part of a “Power” culture you cannot have any elements or degrees of a “People” culture. This is very prescriptive and short-sighted, when culture is so complex and unique. To continue with the “culture is personality” analogy, there still does not exist one model that can be generalised to every single individual from different cultural groups.

References

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