

Culture – what it's all about

Business culture

Business culture is all those symbols, actions and beliefs in your business that tell people “how we do things around here”. It is the single most important factor determining staff performance and the strongest signal comes from their managers. Every organisation has a culture, positive or negative – by accident or by design. You need to make yours by design or you are asking for trouble.

National culture

National culture is a learned, socially transmitted set of behavioural standards. It is held, expressed, and shared by individuals through their personal values, norms, activities, attitudes, thought processes, interpretation of symbols, feelings, ideas, reactions and morals. In childhood people learn how the world works and their role in it. Each person learns what is right and wrong and how to tell the difference, how to relate to other people, to the environment and to time. **All of these vary distinctly depending upon where you come from.** National culture works by filtering the data received by the brain and providing mental models and heuristics for the interpretation of what data makes it through the filtering process. Such mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions and generalisations that influence how people understand the world around them and how they take action.

National culture is more influential in how people process data, draw conclusions, and decide upon their actions than their age, race, gender, religion, education, or occupation.

Why Culture has never been more important

The net effect of increasing diversity in the workplace and amongst our customers is not some sort of averaging where the significance of national culture is diluted but rather the exact opposite. Globalisation increases intercultural interactions and also increases the probability of cultural misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts. That is, a greater proportion of the workforce is operating outside of their own national culture context and are managed by and work with people and serve customers from different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the need for managers to accommodate national culture within their strategies for management of their staff and engagement with their customers is heightened not lessened.

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Forté Business Group Ltd

Office: 1st floor 6 Scott Street
Mail: 73b Maxwell Road,
Blenheim 7201,
Marlborough, New Zealand
Local calls: 579 1010
National calls: 0800 43 1010
tony@forte-management.co.nz
helen@forte-management.co.nz
www.forte-management.co.nz