

QUESTION #1

What is corporate culture? How is it formed? How is it sustained? (Answer each part of this question in your own words. Do not quote the textbook.)

Corporate culture is a sort of strategic branding within the company. Just as clusters of friends, social cliques, and clubs have an environment of shared interests, styles, and activities, corporate environments have a shared vision, public appearance, and expectations of their workers. Walk into one company and you will find everyone wearing suits and ties, walk into another and you will find t-shirts and blue jeans. Different corporations encourage different social activities, such as casual drinks after work or formal corporate-sponsored social functions. The strategies for achieving company goals also affect the culture, with some employees worked to the bone while others are encouraged to go outside for regular breaks.

QUESTION #2

Describe the corporate culture of the company where you are currently employed (or formerly employed)? How is it sustained? What happens to those who go against the established culture? How does (or did) the culture make you feel about working for the company - share as much as about *your personal feelings* as you feel comfortable?

I walked out of an interview with AmeriCorp after finding their corporate culture too oppressive. Employees were not allowed to have any personal effects on their desks, nine-hour work days were expected of employees, and the interview focused on pedantic demonstrations of knowledge. Booze, Allen, and Hamilton has a similarly cut-throat Corporate Culture, results-focused and demanding. There you wear a suit and tie even if you're a janitor, but this intensely professional work environment really appealed to their employees, many of whom were pursuing a long-term goal of becoming a partner.

At the opposite end of the spectrum was Workforce Technologies, a mom and pop software firm residing in a small town-house style office building, chosen for its proximity to an expansive park. Employing no more than 20 personnel, the company was content with the millions of dollars it pulled in yearly, and did not aggressively seek growth. Management had no problem with employees coming into work late, and mornings were characterized with chit-chat over coffee and the bagels someone would inevitably bring to work for everyone. While all the employees were happy, some clients disapproved of the relaxed atmosphere and would drop their contracts, but the clients WT kept were very loyal because the quality of their product was fantastic.

I am currently working for the Information Services Division of the US Coast Guard. Our employees are a mixture of military personnel, government contractors, and civilian contractors employed through various companies. The company that employees me only cuts my paycheck, while it's the Coast Guard that manages my work. Being extremely under funded, our department, and the USCG in general, prides itself on being able to produce a great deal of quality work with very few resources. Because people's lives depend on the quality of our work, a strong emphasis on Standards of Procedures is demanded, but without the stuffy professionalism that usually accompanies it.

This is the military culture influencing our corporate culture. As our managers wear flight jumpsuits and work with outdoors operations, they don't much care if the people programming the computers wear button up shirts and ties. What they do care about is results, and they demand volumes of metrics on our productivity and quality of service to aid them, not only in requesting funding, but in fending off attempts from other divisions to provide the same services we provide.

Regarding those who go against the "established culture," it depends on what type of employee we are talking about. As it is very difficult to dismiss government employees (there is a long-running joke about it requiring an "Act of Congress"), poor-performers are usually transferred into positions where they can do the least damage. Corporate Culture is also maintained by focusing on positive reinforcement. For instance, we have monthly awards for employees who complete projects or provide outstanding service, this encourages everyone to take pride in their work, so that we don't have many problems with poor performance.

Responses:

Buying casual days for charitable donations... I really like that idea! Once a year we have a summer picnic, and one of the big draws is a "Dunk Tank," where employees buy votes to have someone put into the tank and the proceeds go to local charities. The event is also great for morale and a chance for everyone to interact in a non-professional setting.

I'm very sorry to hear this about your company. Unfortunately some companies lose sight of everything else when they focus on the numbers. Our department had to begin focusing on metrics a few years ago in order to justify our funding, and we had many employees complain that we were becoming so focused on process that we were sacrificing our human concerns for bureaucracy. Luckily, these same "squeaky-wheels" have helped to streamline our processes and get rid of redundancies. The metrics remain crucial to our operations, but management has also incorporated them into our corporate culture, sort of giving ownership of the metrics to the employees so that we can see how we as a team produce good numbers and why those numbers translate into quality service that our customers depend on. Our management successfully uses our metrics to give us pride in our work.