Workplace Culture as an Internal Control

Have you ever worked for an organization that had a great culture? You could feel it as soon as you stepped in the door. It’s an intangible yet powerful feeling. Similarly, have you ever worked for an organization that had a less than positive culture? You could feel it as soon as you stepped in the door. It’s an intangible yet powerful feeling.

Recently my family had the opportunity to visit Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. This is a place known for its patient-centered culture. Every person we encountered made us feel like we were stepping into a place of competence and caring. From the live piano player in the atrium, to the person who told us which direction to go, to the person who checked us in, to the two doctors we saw, all had the same efficient, yet caring attitude.

Often, when we think about culture, we think about what is known as “tone at the top,” or the attitudes and priorities top organizational leadership communicate and exemplify. However, culture is so much more. The “mood in the middle” is also an important part of overall workplace culture. This speaks to the attitudes and priorities others, such as managers, supervisors, and employees, communicate and exemplify. It should be monitored as much as, if not more than, the tone at the top.

A great workplace culture can inspire employees in an organization to do amazing things. It can lead to improved retention and greater collaboration and teamwork. Employees are often willing to go the extra mile in an organization where they feel valued and respected. A less than positive culture can have the opposite effect. Fraud and other organizational misbehavior have more of a chance to thrive where the culture is less than positive. Have you ever heard the phrase “culture will eat strategy for lunch”? That translates to “attitudes will cause an idea to fail or succeed.” It is nearly impossible to implement changes or new initiatives without support and willingness to make them happen - and this means at all levels of the organization.

What can employees do to support a positive culture?

- Set clear direction and expectations for your employees. Support them and ensure they have the skills, tools, and resources needed to meet those expectations.
- Convey an upbeat and positive attitude – it’s contagious!
- Consider employee surveys to test out the “mood in the middle” and take action to improve the mood if necessary.
- Ensure there is a process for reviewing and resolving conflicts of interest in your organization. If you don’t know the process, ask.

Questions?
Contact Amy Jorgenson, Director of Enterprise Internal Controls