



Tips From Research

Managing Organizational Culture, Climate and Change

Culture develops as a natural human process, with or without an intentional direction. It encompasses the values shared, or the reasons behind, what members of a defined group of people say and do. The term *organizational culture* refers to the values held by members of an organization. This culture affects the experiences and involvement of all stakeholders and affects the organization’s ability to achieve success. Because of this broad reach, creating and managing change to the organizational culture is a critical component of operating 21st CCLC programs.

Organizational Culture vs. Organizational Climate

The differences between culture and climate are small, but real.¹ Gruenert and Whitaker liken culture to an organization’s personality and liken climate to its attitude. They provide insight with the table below and this example: “Simply announce to the school that tomorrow is a snow day and you might notice a sudden change in climate as educators’ and students’ attitudes suddenly lift. The promise of a snow day doesn’t change the school’s personality (i.e., culture), but the collective shift in attitude (i.e., climate) *allows the school to reveal what it values*” (p. 11).²

Culture vs. Climate

Culture	Climate
...is the group’s personality.	...is the group’s attitude.
...gives Mondays permission to be miserable.	...differs from Monday to Friday, February to May.
...provides for a limited way of thinking.	...creates a state of mind.
...takes years to evolve.	...is easy to change.
...is based on values and beliefs.	...is based on perceptions.
...can’t be felt, even by group members.	...can be felt when you enter a room.
...is part of us.	...surrounds us.
...is “the way we do things around here.”	...is “the way we feel around here.”
...determines whether or not improvement is possible.	...is the first thing that improves when positive change is made.
...is in your head.	

Climate is often referred to in terms of specific behaviors, making it relatively easy to discuss, manage and measure. For this reason, many organizations concentrate on climate and fail to manage the larger influence of culture.

Leading and Managing Change

Just as “change is inevitable: so is resistance to change.”³ Leading change is knowing how to overcome resistance; it is about inspiring and guiding people to the new future, not simply instructing them to move. By pre-emptively addressing staff concerns, adhering to a proven process, and avoiding common mistakes, leaders can successfully effect organizational change.

¹ Hoy, W.K. and Feldman, J.A. (1999). Organizational health profiles for high schools. In H.J. Freiberg (Ed.). *School Climate: Measuring, Improving and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

² Gruenert, S. and Whitaker, T. (2015). *School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess, and Transform It*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

³ Moorehead, G., and Griffin, R.W. (1998), *Managing People and Organizations: Organizational Behavior*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.





Tips From Research

Recognize Staff Concerns

Change is emotional; when individuals feel unable to influence what is happening to them, they resist.⁴ Some change management researchers liken the emotional reactions to those described in the 1969 Kubler-Ross model of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Respecting the natural human responses to change enhances a leader's ability to successfully manage and navigate the change.

Use Proven Processes

Among the often-cited change management strategies are these: Kotter's [8-Step Process for Leading Change](#), the [Prosci ADKAR Model](#), Fullan's [Six Secrets of Change](#), and Kubler-Ross's [5-Stage Model](#). Each proposes a slightly different approach to change management, and you may find it useful to review them (just click the hyperlinks).

Avoid Common Mistakes

Some researchers have developed lists of predictable mistakes leaders make when trying to implement organizational change.⁵ Here are tips for avoiding those mistakes:

- Know that announcing the change is not the same as implementing the change.
- Be sure to develop a guiding team, and give all participants opportunities to be involved in the process.
- When communicating the need for change, describe the vision for the future and the pathway forward.
- Set benchmarks, monitor progress and celebrate achievement of short-term wins.
- Respect the existing culture.
- Set priorities.
- Enable development of new, needed skills.
- Avoid complacency and hold people accountable.

⁴ Zigarmi, P., and Hoekstra, J. (2006), *Leading Change*. In K. Blanchard (ed.) *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on Leadership and Creating High Performing Organizations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

⁵ Kotter, J.P. (2007). *Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail*. *Harvard Business Review*, https://wdhb.org.nz/contented/clientfiles/whanganui-district-health-board/files/rttc_leading-change-by-j-kotter-harvard-business-review.pdf. Kotter, J.P. (2012). *Leading Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press. Zigarmi and Hoekstra (2006).