

CHANGING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

In a sector experiencing almost constant change, few social housing organisations in Wales are likely to aspire to constancy and the status quo moving forward. In the 21st century, stability in an organisation can be interpreted as stagnation, and major organisational change is recognised as the norm. However, embedding change across an organisation has proved to be challenging for many leaders, and the failure rate of change initiatives is high across all sectors. What is increasingly being recognised within organisations is that the success of change is linked directly to organisational culture – i.e. failure to change the organisation’s culture is most likely to result in the failure of any organisational change. So how do you define organisational culture, and how do you go about changing it?

The dictionary definition of ‘culture’ is ‘a system of behaviour or beliefs’. Organisational culture encompasses the ‘taken for granted’ values, underlying expectations and memories that are present in an organisation. It represents ‘how we do things around here’ and conveys a sense of identity to employees – providing unwritten and unspoken guidelines on how to approach situations within that organisation. Often people and organisations are unaware of their culture until it is challenged through organisational change initiatives, or until it is made explicit through a framework or model.

Through the use of one such framework, Insight is currently working with an RSL undergoing organisational change in order to achieve a redefined vision and business objectives moving forward. An organisational culture tool has been used to assist in both the identification of the current culture, and the type of culture required to facilitate the changes moving forward. The model is based on four different culture attributes of an organisation - Family, Entrepreneur, Hierarchy, and Results Cultures.

Offices at: Cardiff Gatwick Glasgow Kent

VAT Registered Number 550 5942 42
Registered in England No. 370844
Registered Office: Leonardslee House, Brighton Road,
Lower Beeding, West Sussex RH13 6PP

Leonardslee House
Brighton Road
Lower Beeding
West Sussex
RH13 6PP
Tel 01403 892910
Fax 01403 892919
info@insight-hr.co.uk
www.insight-hr.co.uk

Insight

Through the completion of questionnaires which focus on the core attributes of an organisation that reflect its culture, the Executive team have provided ratings which enable us to produce a graphical indication of the types of culture which are dominant within the organisation. The same exercise has also been carried out to identify the cultural attributes required moving forward and these have been validated through facilitated group discussions. This focus on culture has enabled the Leadership team to begin to articulate for both themselves and other members of the team 'What does our organisation need to look like to be successful moving forward?' Further work is now being carried out to involve and inform others across the organisation, and also to develop strategic plans around the changes which need to be made to achieve the required shift in culture.

In summary therefore, changing an organisation's culture is obviously not an easy exercise. If the leadership team hold a vision of the future that requires a major organisational change however, it can be argued that commitment to a cultural change process is crucial to the future success of the organisation.

For further information please contact Mark Glinwood, Managing Director, Insight on 07712 132970 or 01403 892922.

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