

## THE OCI AND THE CIRCUMPLEX

Organizational culture is the set of shared values, beliefs, and customary ways of thinking that shape and guide the behavior of organizational members. Some measures of culture focus on the rituals, signs, symbols, and customs within an organization. The OCI is somewhat different in that its items tap the norms and expectations among an organization's employees. While the two sets of concepts are similar, norms and expectations are more closely tied to behaviors. This results in a more direct measure of culture's impact on day-to-day activities and work behaviors. The OCI contains 120 statements that organizational members use to describe the behaviors, activities, and customary mode of operation that characterize their work environment and relationships with others. The OCI measures "what is expected" of members of an organization, or, more technically, the behavioral norms and expectations associated with a given organization. The OCI can also be used to measure the "ideal" behaviors in an organization; the behaviors and expectations "that should be expected" from members of an organization, to create the best possible (i.e., most effective) organization.

When completing the OCI about the current culture, organization members are asked to describe the behavioral "styles" they are expected to adopt in carrying out their work and when interacting with others. These behavioral expectations have a direct bearing on the activities of members and the functioning of the organization, and have been shown to be related to important outcomes such as member satisfaction, motivation, teamwork, quality of products/services, and other established criteria of organizational effectiveness (e.g., sales performance). These expectations of cultural styles result from and are reinforced by managerial philosophies and methodologies, organizational structure variables, reward systems, and other factors that can be changed—at least to some extent—by those in leadership positions. Consequently, the administration of the OCI is often the beginning of the process of a culture change program.

Similarly, when completing the OCI about the ideal culture, organization members are asked to describe the behavioral styles they think members *should* adopt when carrying out their work and when interacting with others. As with the current culture, these *opinions* about the ideal culture are often shaped by existing managerial philosophies and practices, as well as by environmental variables (i.e., the market, the industry), and even the organization's specific history. It is notable, therefore, that in almost all organizations, there is great consistency among members about the "ideal culture" that an organization should exhibit and reinforce. This general consensus about the ideal culture is what makes it possible to establish relevant, clear, and attainable goals, which are the hallmark of any successful organizational intervention.

The OCI presents a list of 96 statements that describe some of the behaviors and "personal styles" that might be expected or implicitly required of members of organizations. These statements measure 12 different cultural styles. Some of these styles are positive and supportive of constructive interpersonal relationships, effective problem solving, and personal growth; others are dysfunctional and can lead to unnecessary conflict, dissatisfaction, and symptoms of strain on the part of organizational members.

## **CONSTRUCTIVE STYLES**

(11:00) An Achievement culture characterizes organizations that do things well and value members who set and accomplish their own goals. Members of these organizations set challenging but realistic goals, establish plans to reach these goals, and pursue them with enthusiasm. Achievement organizations are effective; problems are solved appropriately, clients and customers are served well, and the orientation of members (as well as the organization itself) is healthy.

(12:00) A Self-Actualizing culture characterizes organizations that value creativity, quality over quantity, and both task accomplishment and individual growth. Members of these organizations are encouraged to gain enjoyment from their work, develop themselves, and take on new and interesting activities. While self-actualizing organizations can be somewhat difficult to understand and control, they tend to be innovative, offer high-quality products and/or services, and attract and develop outstanding employees.

(1:00) A Humanistic-Encouraging culture characterizes organizations that are managed in a participative and person-centered way. Members are expected to be supportive, constructive, and open to influence in their dealings with one another. A humanistic culture leads to effective organizational performance by providing for the growth and active involvement of members who, in turn, report high satisfaction with and commitment to the organization.

(2:00) An Affiliative culture characterizes organizations that place a high priority on constructive interpersonal relationships. Members are expected to be friendly, open, and sensitive to the satisfaction of their work group. An Affiliative culture can enhance organizational performance by promoting open communication, good cooperation, and the effective coordination of activities. Members are loyal to their work groups and feel they “fit in” comfortably.

## **PASSIVE/DEFENSIVE STYLES**

(3:00) An Approval culture describes organizations in which conflicts are avoided and interpersonal relationships are pleasant – at least superficially. Members feel that they must agree with, gain the approval of, and be liked by others. Though possibly benign, this type of work environment can limit organizational effectiveness by minimizing constructive “differing” and the expression of ideas and opinions.

(4:00) A Conventional culture is descriptive of organizations that are conservative, traditional, and bureaucratically controlled. Members are expected to conform, follow the rules, and make a good impression. Too conventional a culture can interfere with effectiveness by suppressing innovation and preventing the organization from adapting to changes in its environment.

(5:00) A Dependent culture is descriptive of organizations that are hierarchically controlled and non-participative. Centralized decision making in such organizations leads members to do only what they are told and to clear all decisions with superiors. Poor performance results from the lack of individual initiative, spontaneity, flexibility, and timely decision making.

(6:00) An Avoidance culture characterizes organizations that fail to reward success but punish mistakes. This negative reward system leads members to shift responsibilities to others and to avoid any possibility of being blamed for a mistake. The survival of this type of organization is in question since members are unwilling to make decisions, take action, or accept risks.

## **AGGRESSIVE/DEFENSIVE STYLES**

(7:00) An Oppositional culture describes organizations in which confrontation prevails and negativism is rewarded. Members gain status and influence by being critical and thus are reinforced to oppose the ideas of others and to make safe (but ineffectual) decisions. While some questioning is functional, a highly oppositional culture can lead to unnecessary conflict, poor group problem solving, and “watered-down” solutions to problems.

(8:00) A Power culture is descriptive of non-participative organizations structured based on the authority inherent in members’ position. Members believe they will be rewarded for taking charge and controlling subordinates (and being responsive to the demands of superiors). Power-oriented organizations are less effective than their members might think; subordinates resist this type of control, hold back information, and reduce their contributions to the minimal acceptable level.

(9:00) A Competitive culture is one in which winning is valued and members are rewarded for out-performing one another. People in such organizations operate in a “win-lose” framework and believe they must work against (rather than with) their peers to be noticed. An overly competitive culture can inhibit effectiveness by reducing cooperation and promoting unrealistic standards of performance (either too high or too low).

(10:00) A Perfectionistic culture characterizes organizations in which perfectionism, unproductive attention to detail, and hard work “for hard work’s sake” are valued. Members feel they must avoid all mistakes, keep track of everything, and work long hours to attain narrowly defined objectives. While some amount of this orientation might be useful, too much emphasis on perfectionism can lead members to lose sight of the goal, get lost in details, and develop symptoms of strain.