

How you can better understand the workplace culture of the places you work.

Chances are that you've heard about workplace culture, you might have had your teacher lecture you about it in way, or maybe a manager you had mentioned it. One thing is for sure, workplace culture is one of those things that we often hear a lot about.

What is it? Well it can cause a lot of good or bad, and it's an incredibly powerful force, yet it's so often misunderstood.

Put basically, workplace culture is the general characterisation of the conventions and ways that people interact with each other in a group within a workplace. Large organisations can even have multiple cultures, and these can be dramatically different from each other.

A local perspective

Consider the local Sunshine Coast economy, traditionally it's been known for construction, hospitality and tourism industries. If we were to take this economy as an example and use it to understand workplace culture, we could use hospitality and make some generalisations in order to think about what the workplace culture of the Sunshine Coast hospitality industry is like.

Maybe we consider that the hospitality businesses that operate in the area have staff that for the most part, enjoy what they do, most of the staff might be casual, and maybe they are studying something and hospitality is something they're doing until they graduate.

We could start to make a whole lot of guesses about that the workplace culture is like in Sunshine Coast's hospitality industry, we might be some parts right, and we might get some wrong.

Here is an important issue, that when we talk about workplace culture, we have to be careful that we don't make assumptions.

A changing economy

In the local area, there are many significant projects which, led by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, are being supported by all three levels of government and private investors. Some of the biggest projects which will underpin new economic opportunity are:

- Submarine Internet Cable
- Sunshine Coast Airport Upgrade
- Maroochydoore CBD
- Sunshine Coast University Hospital
- Upgrade to Bruce Highway

While these projects are in the construction phase, they are themselves workplaces, but many of them will leave behind workplaces, such as within the hospital and its various departments. One other thing they all have in common is that each of these projects will contribute over time to supporting new types of businesses being able to operate in the area. Each of these businesses will also have their own workplace cultures.

In order to succeed as a professional in the area, it's key for you to be able to understand how you can potentially fit in within the workplace cultures of the businesses that are in the area, as well as those many businesses that will be attracted to the area due to the new economic opportunities.

It's hard to understand something until you're part of it

If we consider the new types of economic opportunities that are developing within the area, it might be tempting to assume that you know what it will be like to work in them, and therefore what their workplace cultures might be like.

It can be risky to assume you know how you can best work within a workplace culture until you've experienced it by being involved with it and worked alongside those people who are your colleagues.

Your personal engagement with the workplace culture of your employer will vary from that of your colleagues, and it's important for you to be mindful of how you want to contribute towards the culture where you work. This is where you have an opportunity to discover some of these new opportunities in your own way.

Employers are looking for fit

When you're thinking of working in a particular organisation, and you go through the job application processes, it's not just your skills that the hiring manager is looking for, they are carefully focussing on how you might fit in with the existing workplace culture that's in the workplace you're in.

It's up to you in terms of how you fit in with the culture, but it's important that you find a fit. If the manager has fears that you and someone else might be a source of conflict, they will most likely not be keen on you working in their organisation. If you're able to show the manager the care you take in developing relationships with your colleagues, and that you're able to focus on the common productivity goal you share, this is ideal. If you help that manager see the potential negative personal differences you have with colleagues, this will most likely get noticed just as easily, and might destroy your chances of fitting in, or even getting the job.

What you can do now

If you're applying for jobs in a particular company and are looking for how to can learn more about their work culture, there are several things you can do.

On the company's website, even the tone of the language used on the website can sometimes give clues about culture. On LinkedIn you might find people who work at the organisation and notice the kinds of things they post about. If the organisation is large enough, you can potentially make contact with people who work at this organisation to ask them about the culture.

3 Simple Things

Workplace culture can be hard to understand, and it can be hard to find your place within a culture. With enough attention paid to it, you will start to develop your own feel for how you identify and engage with a workplace culture. This will pay you back over your career significantly.

Here are three things you can use to help yourself understand workplace culture better as you move forward in your career journey and hopefully they will help you define your own personal way about how you engage with this important topic.

- Be curious: aspects of a workplace culture can be hard to identify, a curious and open mind will greatly help you identify the things that are most important and relevant to you.
- Be respectful: just like it's important to be respectful when living and working in multicultural communities, you'll go a lot further within a workplace if you're respectful of its culture.
- Be resourceful: because this whole topic area can be hard to navigate, the more resourceful and creative you can be, the better.