

DoD Ergonomics Working Group NEWS



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Time to Make a Change: Creating a New Culture in Your Organization

What is an organization's "culture"?

An organization's "culture" is the attitudes and beliefs shared by its workers. Ask yourself these questions about your workplace:

- Do people have a strong work ethic, putting a lot of effort into everything they do?
- Is there pride in the workplace?
- Do people work together as a team?
- Do co-workers care about each other?
- Do workers act or feel in a positive way?
- Do people learn from their mistakes?
- Do workers strive for excellence or improvement?
- Are there employee incentives for a job well done?
- Can individuals ask for help and get it from both co-workers and administrators?
- Do workers share in all decision-making?
- Are workers provided additional training and education when needed?
- Is there an effective flow of communication between all workers and administrators?

How do you know when a culture change is needed in your organization?

- When the environment surrounding your organization is undergoing a fundamental change—such as resource constraints, downsizing, or U.S. political change—your organization needs change.
- When your organization's performance is mediocre or worse, your organization needs change.

What do you need to make change happen?

Successful culture change requires both time and resources., approximately 5-10% of the personnel time for those employees whose behavior will be affected by the change. Specifically, an organization's leadership must:

- **Gain and sustain worker consensus.** Get every employee onboard, willing to make change happen. Rather than resisting change—as individuals often do—they must work together for a successful culture change.
- **Emphasize and build trust.** Be open and honest in all communications during the change process. A foundation of trust, initiated by an organization insider, will determine whether or not the change occurs, how the change occurs, and how quickly it occurs.

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- **Include skill-building and training.** Even if people understand and accept a change, they may not have the required skills and ability to carry out the new plan.
- **Allow enough time for the change to take hold.** It takes time for people to grow accustomed to change.
- **Be flexible to meet the needs of individual workers.** The most successful change is modified and adapted by workers to accommodate their own unique circumstances.
- **Send the right messages through your behavior.** All managers in the organization must give the change as much attention as other high-priority tasks and keep the change at the center of the agenda. The day-to-day behaviors of top managers reflect and communicate their concern and commitment to the change. Remember, actions speak louder than words and the consistency of a pattern of behavior over time is essential for a successful culture change.

What are the keys to successful change?

- **Put a hero in charge.** Identify and promote a hero with vision, tenacity, self-sacrifice, and an unswerving conviction.
- **Identify and articulate a real threat from outside.** Your organization will need a good reason for change because it can be a difficult and threatening process. The greater the outside threat and the better it is communicated, the greater likelihood that the culture change will be successful.
- **Use transition rituals.** Rituals will involve many people in the process of change, allowing people to mourn old ways, re-negotiate new values, and anoint heroes. These rituals help people understand, accept, and believe in the new culture and prevent people from returning to old patterns.
- **Provide transition training in new values and behavior patterns.** Train 100% of the employees.
- **Establish tangible symbols of the new culture,** such as structural changes in the organization.
- **Maintain, communicate, and build trust and confidence in job security during the transition.**