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# Book review: Shaping corporate culture for sustainable business success

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by Josef Herget

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Corporate/organisational culture is the backbone of a company. The invisible yet powerful web of shared values, beliefs and behaviours defines how things get done within an organisation. Its significance can be classified as its impact on employees and business. In this respect, a positive culture attracts talented individuals who resonate with its values and find the work environment engaging, leading to better employee retention. It also nurtures a sense of belonging and purpose, driving employee motivation and engagement, as employees feel valued for their contributions and are more likely to do extra. In terms of its impact on business, for example, the culture of an organisation can significantly impact its brand image, as a positive and ethical culture attracts customers and investors, strengthening brand reputation and trust. It also increases customer satisfaction. This is because it translates to better customer service when employees are happy and engaged. Thus, as studies have shown, companies with strong cultures outperform those with weak ones. The following quote by Henry Mintzberg highlights its importance: “*Culture eats strategy for breakfast*” (Herget, 2023, p. 3).

Thus, since “*there is no such thing as a company without its own corporate culture,*” we need to understand what it is properly. This is mentioned in Chapter 1. In addition to introducing “Levels of corporate culture” (Figure 1.1), which helps to define corporate culture (Herget, 2023, p. 5), this chapter also underlines the significance of corporate culture and how an effective culture can be a financial booster, which in turn points to the critical role of corporate culture management (Herget, 2023, p. 19). Chapter 2 posits that corporate culture is a dynamic phenomenon, so it can be shaped. This discussion reminds us that leaders are not passive recipients because they have a significant degree of agency over corporate cultures. In fact, Schein argues that leaders create organisational cultures.

How to shape corporate culture is given in Chapter 3, where three levels are discussed: *strategic level*, *action level* and *selective level*. The Culture Excellence Process is also presented in this chapter, as it serves as a central management tool at all management levels and keeps the process running (please note that this concept is identified in detail in Chapter 10). Chapter 4 seeks to answer the following questions, “Which corporate culture is the best?” And the answer is “none”. This is because “*each company has its own specific corporate culture and this fact is taken into account by individualization.*” Hence, the argument indicates the superiority of the individual model (Herget, 2023, p. 47).

Chapter 5 is about auditing the existing corporate culture to analyse its characteristics. Auditing is key because it is the starting point for shaping the corporate culture.



The maturity process, like auditing, tries to analyse the corporate culture of the company, albeit with some differences, and Chapter 6 argues for it. This chapter also points out that this model is a suitable communication tool to demonstrate the status, strengths and weaknesses and possible development strategies.

After analysing and diagnosing the culture, the book explains strategy generation in Chapter 7 to clarify the importance of a clear idea of the development path. Whilst generic strategies primarily represent incremental improvements, specific strategies are often overarching strategies that can have an impact on several cultural factors, and they are often implemented through the introduction of new methods.

Chapters 8 and 9 are about cultural change. Whilst the former elaborates on some methods that enable cultural change, Chapter 9 seeks to understand how change can be implemented, as no change runs by itself, so it defines the change process. Additionally, Chapter 8 introduces different methods for different levels, such as in daily rituals, the practiced behaviours, structures, processes, norms and value systems and attitudes because of the main discussion in the literature, i.e., “*what is it desired?*” (Herget, 2023, pp. 95–96). Culture change is not an easy and straightforward process. This is why the author, in Chapter 11, suggests some *do’s* and *don’ts* for successful change.

As the initiative to shape the corporate culture comes from management, Chapter 12 highlights the critical role that leadership plays. Chapter 13 is a reminder that culture is a living mechanism and requires time, as habits need time to develop, as well as reflection, openness, constructiveness, perseverance and discipline. And it should not be forgotten that it is a challenging process. The final chapter defines some challenges to corporate culture, including digital leadership, digital transformation, globalisation and diversity, Generation Z and so on.

With its insightful, real-world application exercises and in-depth exploration of a cutting-edge concept, this book bridges the gap between theory and practice. Practitioners will be equipped with actionable strategies about how to create a positive and productive corporate culture, academics will find new avenues for research, and students will be inspired to delve deeper. It is an unequivocal recommendation.

Whilst insightful, the book is not without its flaws. Notably, it paints an overly rosy picture of organisational culture, framing it solely as a force for good. This overlooks the potential for corporate cultures to breed exclusion, toxicity and other harmful dynamics. Furthermore, its focus on Western business culture limits its generalisability. Whilst the principles may be adaptable to smaller businesses, the book’s practical examples remain firmly rooted in corporate giants. This narrow scope is further accentuated by the author’s reliance on certain perspectives as the primary lens for understanding cultural change, neglecting alternative perspectives and approaches such as organisational psychology.

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## References

Herget, J. (2023), *Shaping Corporate Culture for Sustainable Business Success*, Springer, Berlin.