

# JEAN ROBERTS UPDATE

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## The basics of 'Organisational Culture'

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Link to details of current and coming publications are listed, with all 2017 issues of *Jean Roberts Update*:  
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### Understanding Organisational Culture

Two valuable references to nonprofit and commercial organisations interested in learning about the nature and importance of 'Organisational Culture' – these are among my most useful references in my work as consultant, trainer, business writer and mentor:

#### The first reference:

**The Character of a Corporation (Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, 1998)  
- a 'HarperCollinsBusiness' publication**

Goffee and Jones introduce organisational culture with the challenging byline "The Social Architecture of Success – or Failure". Their model places and ensures equal value and importance for *relationships/process* and *task/outcomes*, and has the potential to:

1. avoid duplication of effort,
2. maximise the use of resources,
3. ensure quality of services,
4. increase morale and stakeholder satisfaction,
5. enhance the organisation's reputation, credibility, brand recognition and value, and
6. contribute to the principles and practices of access, equity and participation.

In their book, Goffee & Jones offer four tests to assess the 'character' of your organization:

1. Observation Checklist covers:
  - a) the use of physical space,
  - b) how people prefer to exchange ideas and information, ie communication,
  - c) how people manage their time, and
  - d) how people express their personal identities,
2. Questionnaire - responses are ranked according to sociability (relationships) and solidarity (tasks),
3. Determining whether the Culture displays mainly positive or negative features, and
4. Critical Incident analysis – the way the organisation handles success, failure, innovation and change.

They offer this unscientific process to identify positives or negatives in relation to your organisation's culture ... simply pose this question to small groups of current staff members:

*Suppose a good friend of yours has just been hired by this organisation:  
s/he's starting Monday morning. What do you tell her/him are the rules of survival?*

#### The second reference:

**The fifth Discipline – The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization (Peter M Senge, 1992) - a Random House Australia publication**

Senge presents five learning disciplines that promote intrinsic motivation for learning rather than extrinsic punishments and rewards, with people continually enhancing their capacity to create what they want to create:

1. personal mastery - individual learning, a personal vision,
2. mental models - individual styles of seeing, thinking, feeling,
3. building a shared vision - individuals committed to the shared organisational vision: encourages and builds on personal mastery,
4. team learning - team dialogue and genuine thinking, etc., together, and
5. systems thinking - the whole and parts of the whole: causes and consequences.

These five learning disciplines will:

1. foster an environment that is conducive to learning,
2. open up boundaries and stimulate exchange of ideas, and
3. create learning forums with explicit learning goals.

#### **Senge presents -**

Three requirements of a learning organisation:

1. Meaning - well-grounded definition, actionable and easy to apply,
2. Management - clear guidelines for practice, with operational advice, and
3. Measurement - tools for assessing an organisation's rate and level of learning to ensure gains are being made.

and 5 Building blocks:

1. Systematic problem solving,
2. Experimentation with new approaches,
3. Learning from own experience and past history,
4. Learning from experiences and best practices of others, and
5. Transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organisation - the objective is moving from superficial knowledge to a deep understanding.

with three overlapping stages:

1. Cognitive - individuals exposed to new ideas, expand their knowledge and begin to think differently,
2. Behavioural - individuals begin to internalise new insights and alter their behaviour,
3. Performance - measurable improvements in results.

and recommends integration of the principles of adult learning, which assume that adults want to:

- master necessary tasks,
- learn from each other, and
- control their own learning.

The five basic assumptions that distinguish adult learners from children:

- self-concept *ie a need to be self-directing,*
- experience *ie relate their learning to their experiences,*
- readiness to learn *ie relate to their role/s in the workplace and society,*
- orientation to learning *ie problem-centred orientation to learning,*
- most effective instruction depends on the situation.

**The only universal characteristic of adult learners is the quality and quantity of their own experience.**

First steps to embrace the principles of a learning organisation:

1. set the climate, ie create a physical and psychological environment that is conducive to learning
2. involve the learners:
  - a) in planning the learning activities
  - b) in diagnosing their learning needs (reflecting both the individual and organisational needs; and allow people to see the gap between the skills they possess and the skills they need)
  - c) in formulating their learning objectives,
  - d) in designing their learning plans, and
  - e) in evaluating their learning.
3. focus on discovery learning rather than didactic information dissemination

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