

Workplace Cultures

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll continue our discussion of culture by looking at how culture manifests in the workplace. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Organizational Culture
2. Cross-Subcultural Conflict
3. Conflict Resolution in the Workplace

1. Organizational Culture

As you've learned in previous lessons, a **culture** is a group of people who share the same rules, norms, traditions, and worldview.

Different cultures have different views and beliefs, and there can sometimes be misunderstandings when cultures clash over their differences. Likewise, workplaces also have their own cultures.

Culture within a workplace is called **organizational culture** because over a certain period of time, any organization or company is going to develop specific rules, norms, and ways of behaving that are considered appropriate within that organization.

Some of these norms may be more formal rules, such as travel policy, dress code, or channels of communication.

Other norms may be more informal, such as the way people interact with one another, or how the organization celebrates holidays or birthdays.



TERMS TO KNOW

Culture

A form of human social organization in which people identify themselves as members of a group sharing symbol systems, norms, traditions, and viewpoints towards the world.

Organizational Culture

The rules and norms governing behavior in a given organization or type of organization.

2. Cross-Subcultural Conflict

A workplace can be considered a **subculture** because the workplace culture is not as extensive as the main culture around it; rather, it is a smaller culture embedded in a larger one.

Just like there can be conflicts between larger cultures, there can be cross-subcultural conflicts, or conflicts between different subcultures, as well.

IN CONTEXT

You have been working in the marketing department of an IT company, which has a casual environment. You come to work dressed in jeans and t-shirts and attend meetings in a big open room. During these meetings, everybody in the room talks; there's a free flow of information.

You then leave this company because you've been hired to do marketing at an investment firm, and you see this as a promotion. You go to the investment firm dressed as you were used to doing at your old company. However, at the investment firm, everyone else is wearing jackets and formal business clothes—in wearing jeans, you have unknowingly violated an organizational norm.

Similarly, you may also find that the communication patterns differ. You are used to a culture of open and direct communication; whereas in this new company, the channels of communication are more hierarchical. You send a message to somebody on your team about how you're going to progress with a new marketing idea for a project. Your boss is then annoyed that he was not included in that message. You didn't realize that this was something you needed to formally announce to your boss. In this new culture, you need to get approval from higher up before you can move forward with something.

This workplace subculture does things differently; some things that were perfectly fine in your old workplace are considered inappropriate behavior here. This can lead to a little bit of a clash, or misperceptions about you by other people that work in this culture.



TERM TO KNOW

Sub-Culture

A culture embedded within another, larger culture.

3. Conflict Resolution in the Workplace

Just as conflict resolution can occur within a community, the process can happen effectively in the workplace.

However, some organizations are going to be a little bit more open or receptive to conflict resolution techniques than others because of differences in workplace subcultures.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** If you're in a company that is a more formal, hierarchical organization, this culture might not be quite as receptive to bringing people together to talk because the channels of communication don't typically work that way. Whereas in a company with less hierarchy and more open communication, people may be more receptive to the idea of mediation and conflict resolution. Likewise, some cultures may be more collaborative, while others are more competitive.



BIG IDEA

Workplace cultures vary, so as a conflict-resolver, you may find that you need to adapt the process depending on the culture of the organization, as well as understand that some organizations will be more receptive to the process than others.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that workplaces also have their own cultures. Workplace culture is usually referred to as **organizational culture** because over time, organizations develop their own rules, norms, and views about the correct or appropriate ways of doing things.

You now understand that because they are smaller than the main cultures in which they function, workplaces can be considered subcultures. Just as cross-cultural conflict can occur between different cultures, **cross-subcultural conflict** can arise between different organizations that have different rules and norms. **Conflict resolution in the workplace** can be effective, but it's important to remember that depending on the culture, some organizations may be more receptive to the process than others. As a conflict resolver, you might have to adapt the process accordingly. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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