

# 1998 International Conference on Volunteer Administration

## Assessing Organizational Culture and Its Impact on Volunteer Diversity: A Training Design

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### ABSTRACT

*This flexible training design will equip volunteer administrators or consultants to facilitate a group analysis of the culture of the participants' organization and the impact of that culture on volunteer diversity. This understanding is an important tool for recruiting and retaining diverse volunteers. A menu of four tools and activities allow the trainer to adapt to the unique needs of each group. Background information gives the trainer a basic understanding of organizational culture and several approaches to analyzing its influence on volunteering.*

### BACKGROUND

The philosophy and background information for this design are outlined in Appendix A, p. 21.

### GROUP TYPE AND SIZE

Six to ten key leaders from the same organization will benefit most from this activity. Larger groups can be facilitated in circles of small groups. Alternatively a team from the volunteer unit of an organization can benefit. When leaders from different organizations are joined as one group for this activity, they will be limited in applying their understandings until they have an opportunity to work through the process with others within their own organization.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Participants will increase their knowledge of the meaning and influence of organizational culture. They will:

- achieve an understanding of organizational culture and of the culture of their own organization

- deepen their understanding of the effect of organizational culture on volunteer effectiveness
- identify a vision for high impact through diverse volunteer involvement

### TIME REQUIRED

Two hours will allow a group to work through the activities of this design, especially if the group has a history of working together and some facility in group process. The facilitator could shorten the process and attain worthwhile, though limited, progress in 90 minutes. If two and one-half hours are available the optional profile #3 can be used and more extensive discussion may be possible.

### PHYSICAL SETTING:

Comfortable seating around a round table is most effective. Required writing is minimal so circular seating without a table is adequate. If several groups are working through the activities together, each group should have its own circle or circular table. An easel, newsprint pad,

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and marker will be necessary to record group responses. Copies of each of the pages in the appendix are needed for each participant.

## THE PROCESS

### 0 - 10 minutes

Staggered start: Welcome participants and give to each participant a copy of the *Organizational Culture Profile #1*—see appendix. Tell them they can fill this out as they await all to gather. Let them know that you will not be collecting the sheets that they fill out but that they will use them for discussion in the group. Inform them that you will begin discussions in about ten minutes.

### 10 - 20 minutes:

Welcome the group. Introduce the process: "The goal of the session is to help you (us), as a group, understand organizational culture and how organizational culture impacts volunteer diversity and effectiveness. The session will finish with planning that will allow you (us) to consider changes that will maximize the achievement of organizational goals.

"We will discuss, first, this simple profile of organizational culture. Then we will review the concept of organizational culture and go on to other profiles that will help us to delve deeper into the culture of your (our) organization. From there we will look at the effect on volunteerism."

### 20 - 35 minutes

"Let's take a few minutes to think about the profile you just finished. I would like a few of you to mention one of the pairs that gave you an insight into how you (we) 'are' together. Throughout the discussions of this training, you are free to participate in the discussion at the level and depth that you feel comfortable."

Solicit about five or six responses. Interventions do not need to be long. If valuable discussion follows, let it go awhile but give a certain sense that there is more to come and that it is time to move along.

### 35 - 45 minutes

Ask the group to help you describe organizational culture. Tell them that you will write key words on the chart. Take responses for about 5 minutes. Then add some key words from the information on the *Background Information* handout—see appendix. Finally, give each member a copy of the Background Information sheet and tell them it is a resource for later reading after the training.

### 45 - 55 minutes

Ask the group to fill out the *Organizational Culture Profile #2*—See Appendix. Tell them that it focuses on the learning organization aspect of culture.

### 55-75 minutes

Have the group comment on insights that they gained about their organization while doing profile #2. If the discussion is vibrant and focused, other questions may not be necessary. If conversation lags, ask questions such as:

- "In what ways is yours a learning organization?"
- "Which characteristics of a learning organization did you find in yours?"
- "Did you get some ideas for needed growth through the use of this profile?"

Watch the time and move along when necessary. It is important to remind the group that this training exercise is designed to further a dialogue, not to finish it. If additional time is available use the *Organizational Culture Profile #3*—see Appendix. Profile #3 focuses on the globally competitive organization. See VARIATIONS below.

### 75 - 90 minutes

Have the participants fill out the *Volunteer Impact Questionnaire*—see Appendix. Say: "Please take ten minutes to answer the questions on the Volunteer Impact Questionnaire. When you are finished, we will have a discussion about objectives that you might set based on your experience in this workshop."

90 - 115 minutes

Offer to record comments as the participants respond to the questions you pose: "You have considered organizational culture. Have you identified any cultural barriers to attracting and effectively utilizing the diverse array of volunteers that would make your organization most effective? Are there organizational shifts that might help you to better attain your goals?"

"I'll chart the key concepts that you identify under one of two categories: 'cultural barriers' and 'potential organizational changes'."

Assist the participants through this activity.

115 - 120 minutes

Wrap up the session and help the group plan the next step if their discussion has led them toward any changes.

## VARIATIONS

The *Organizational Culture Profile #3* (see appendix) may be substituted for either of the other two profiles or added after profile #2. It can deepen and enrich the conversation and the participants' understanding of the impact of organizational culture on volunteer effectiveness and diversity.

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## REFERENCES

- Hampden-Turner, C. (1990). *Creating Corporate Culture, From Discord to Harmony*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Fernandez, J.P. (1993). *The Diversity Agenda, How American Businesses can out-perform Japanese and European Companies in the Global Marketplace*. New York: Lexington Books, Macmillan.
- Tobin, D. R. (1993) *Re-educating the Corporation; Foundations for the Learning Organization*. Essex Junction, VT, Oliver Wight Publishing.

## APPENDIX A

### **Organizational Culture Background Information**

Organizational culture is the context in which members of an organization relate to one another. Organizational culture includes spoken and unspoken conventions and customs that encourage certain behaviors and discourage other behaviors. Culture governs the way that an organization communicates and relates internally.

Organizational culture rewards those members of the organization that “fit in” to the customary ways of behaving. Those whose behavior is different find themselves feeling uncomfortable or even unaccepted in the context of the organization.

Both employees and volunteers, and especially supervisors and volunteer managers, will benefit from an understanding of the organizational culture in which they exist.

Organizational culture is both conscious and unconscious. Mission and vision statements are designed to influence the culture of the organization. Less overtly the history of the organization and the personalities of its leaders and members also impact the organization’s culture. We often speak of the characteristics of certain geographical regions ( the Northeast, the Northwest, the South, etc.). Popular parlance invests rural, suburban, and urban settings with different cultural characteristics.

Hampden-Turner defines organizational culture in this way: “Culture comes from within people and is put together by them to reward the capabilities that they have in common. Culture gives continuity and identity to a group. It balances contrasting contributions and operates as a self-steering system that learns from feedback. It works as a pattern of information and can greatly facilitate the exchange of understanding. The values within a culture are more or less harmonious.

Hampden-Turner identifies several characteristics of corporate (organizational) culture:

- individuals make a culture
- cultures can reward excellence
- culture is a set of affirmations
- cultural affirmations tend to fulfill themselves
- cultures make sense and have coherent points of view
- cultures provide their members with continuity and identity
- a culture is a state of balance between reciprocal values
- corporate culture is a cybernetic system
- cultures are patterns
- cultures are about communication
- cultures are more or less synergistic
- cultures can learn-and organizations must learn

Developed by Joseph H. Konen. Based on: Hampden-Turner, C. (1990) *Creating Corporate Culture, from Discord to Harmony*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley. May be reproduced with proper credit.

APPENDIX B

Organizational Culture  
Profile #1

Instructions: Indicate where your organization falls on the following scales by circling a star and number that shows your choice.

Dress-up	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Dress Down
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Arrive early	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Arrive Late
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Quiet	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Noisy
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Intense	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Relaxed
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Fun loving	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Serious
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Laid Back	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Goal Driven
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Collegial	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Competitive
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Sensitive	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Rough and Tumble
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Detailed	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Creative
	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	

Konen, J.H. (1999). Assessing Organizational Culture and Its Impact on Volunteer Diversity: A Training Design, *Journal of Volunteer Administration*. May be reproduced with proper credit.

APPENDIX C

**Organizational Culture  
Profile #2**

**Part I.** Rate your organization on the following five principles of the learning organization as outlined by Tobin — circle the appropriate number:

In our organization	most true					least true
<b>-Everyone is a learner</b>	5	4	3	2	1	0
<b>-People learn from each other</b>	5	4	3	2	1	0
<b>-Learning enables change</b>	5	4	3	2	1	0
<b>-Learning is continuous</b>	5	4	3	2	1	0
<b>-Learning is an investment, not an expense</b>	5	4	3	2	1	0

**Part II.** Tobin compares the culture of learning organizations to conventional organization practice. Rate your organization by putting a circle around the “c” (conventional) or the “l” (learning) or one of the intermediate stars to profile your organization.

**Conventional Practice “c”** **“l” Learning Organization**

**I. Basic Organizational Environment**

Stable	c	*	*	*	l	Rapid, unpredictable change
Local, regional, national	c	*	*	*	l	Global
Rigid culture	c	*	*	*	l	Flexible Culture
Competition only	c	*	*	*	l	Competition, collaboration, co-creation

**II. Practices of the Organization**

Based on past experience	c	*	*	*	l	Based on what is happening today
Procedure Driven	c	*	*	*	l	Market driven

APPENDIX C

**Organizational Culture  
Profile #2 (continued)**

**III. Strategic Advantage of the Organization**

Low cost based on standardization	c	*	*	*	1	Tailored to customer needs
Efficiency	c	*	*	*	1	Creativity

**IV. Personnel Expectations**

Follow routine	c	*	*	*	1	Deal with exceptions
Follow orders	c	*	*	*	1	Solve problems
Avoid risks	c	*	*	*	1	Take risks
Be consistent	c	*	*	*	1	Be creative
Follow procedures	c	*	*	*	1	Collaborate with others
Avoid conflict	c	*	*	*	1	Learn from conflict

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. To what extent is your organization a learning organization?
2. What is the effect of this organizational profile on members of the organization?
3. What is the effect of this organizational culture position on recruitment and retention of volunteers?

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Based on: Daniel R. Tobin, D. R. (1993) *Re-educating the Corporation; Foundations for the Learning Organization*. Essex Junction, VT, Oliver Wight Publishing. May be reproduced with proper credit.

## APPENDIX D

### Organizational Culture Profile #3

Fernandez outlines the following key prerequisites of diverse, quality teams for globally competitive organizations. Directions: Rate your organization according to this profile of its diversity by putting a circle around one of the numbers for each trait given:

	<b>most true</b>					<b>least true</b>
1. Trust. There is a high degree of trust and confidence among all team members	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Respect. As a result of trust and confidence, team members have a great deal of respect for one another	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Clear, positive values, norms, and behaviors	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Employees are valued	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Acceptance and value of different people	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. While individuals are rewarded, teams are the center of reward and recognition.	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Team members understand the linkage between team diversity and quality	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Team members are committed to quality	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Team members are committed to pleasing the customer	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. The team and the organization has a clear purpose, goal, and task	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Teams and team members are not turf-oriented	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. There are clear, fairly distributed responsibilities and expectations	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Specific action plans are developed	5	4	3	2	1	0



APPENDIX D

**Organizational Culture  
Profile #3 (continued)**

	<b>most true</b>					<b>least true</b>	
14. The climate supports risk taking	5	4	3	2	1	0	
15. There is a lot of discussion and everyone is encouraged to participate	5	4	3	2	1	0	
16. Members use effective listening techniques	5	4	3	2	1	0	
17. Conflict is not avoided — conflicts are productively resolved without suppressing	5	4	3	2	1	0	
18. Consensus decisions are made	5	4	3	2	1	0	
19. Cooperation is practiced among team members	5	4	3	2	1	0	
20. Compromises are valued when they do not reduce quality	5	4	3	2	1	0	
21. Open proactive communication	5	4	3	2	1	0	
22. Shared leadership	5	4	3	2	1	0	
23. Teams develop key outside relationships	5	4	3	2	1	0	
24. The team has diversity of styles and talents	5	4	3	2	1	0	
25. Personal self-assessment is a norm	5	4	3	2	1	0	
26. Team self-assessment is likewise valued	5	4	3	2	1	0	

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. What is the effect of this organizational profile on members of the organization?
2. What is the effect of this organizational culture position on recruitment and retention of volunteers?

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## APPENDIX D

### VOLUNTEER IMPACT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Does the organization seek to fit a volunteer into a ready-made slot or is there an effort to ask the volunteer for a creative idea for his/her involvement?
  
2. How well are volunteers able to be heard in the decision making process of the organization?
  
3. Do volunteers take leadership roles in the organization?
  
4. Are volunteers asked to create new programs or approaches—or are volunteers expected to carry out existing patterns?
  
5. Would limited-resource and diverse volunteers be able to fit into the culture of your organization?
  
6. What plans/processes could you initiate that would assist your organization to become aware of its culture?
  
7. What process would assist your organization to modify its culture to make more effective use of volunteers?

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