

EMPLOYER CULTURE CLUES BEFORE YOU JOIN

NINE LIVES CONSULTING 
Career Navigator



We recently conducted a survey on LinkedIn on the relative importance of Cultural Fit and Skills in achieving success in a role. 96% of respondents stated Cultural fit was equally or more important than capability.

This awareness is very encouraging as it is our observation that Cultural fit is the “make or break” factor in any role. This is an issue when considering a new job offer. The questions then arises...”How does one gauge the suitability of an organisation’s culture, or the degree of fit with your style, if you are not working in it?”

It is undeniable that your success in any role is heavily dependent on how well you fit with the organisation.

Usually, the only time you are impelled to assess this fit is during the often confusing and hectic recruiting process where you are more likely to focus on convincing the employer that you can do the job. Understanding the culture of the new boss and new organisation enables you to choose a more compatible place of employment.

This compatibility provides:

- Greater tolerance and forgiveness.
- More opportunities for development and advancement.
- More attention and support.
- Better communications with your colleagues.
- More satisfying work environment.
- Less stress in the workplace.
- More flexibility in conducting your role and WFH arrangements.
- Greater ability to perform well.
- Longer employment period.

The relative importance of cultural fit depends on the purpose of the next role;

- A job you can endure; at minimum you need a lawful, unabusive culture with clarity about your responsibilities and performance measures.
- A job you enjoy; as above but with people you fit in with and you feel respected by your employer and colleagues.
- A job that enhances your skills; good fit is required.
- A job that is the basis of a career path; good fit is essential to progress.
- A job that is a progress point in your career; excellent fit will facilitate your progress.

The degree of fit is directly related to the likely duration of employment , i.e. good fit results in long term employment, poor fit, employee moves on quickly either through their own initiative or dismissal by the employer, so, “fit” is actually important for success in each type of opportunity.

Understanding the culture enables you to choose the least worst fit , if you cannot find a good fit, and enables you to develop, in advance, some coping tactics for the difficult issues, rather than being ambushed by your emotional response, which is rarely helpful.

How to find out; there are many sources that you can tap into to cross-check viewpoints. It is best to have several sources of information to discern patterns rather than be misled by one source which may have an agenda for its comments.



Use your network, the media, current employees, your impressions during interviews and the internet as sources of information.

- **Media reports** on issues and performance of the organisation and its industry will show good or bad issues and events.
- **Commentary on internet** about the organisation and its industry, always a useful insight.
- **Employees past and present** via your network;
 - **Focus**; what is their impression of the employer, what is its main focus?
 - **Quality of work life**, judge their comments against your assessment of how close they are to your values.
 - **Flexibility on WFH** requirements, how flexible and reasonable are their arrangements, according to your needs.
 - Hours required to perform the role;
 - Reasonable working hours or
 - Permanent crisis indicating an understaffed /under resourced, poorly managed organisation.
- **Company statistics**
 - **Staff turnover**, high turnover can indicate poor or exploitive management and lack of clarity about how it does things.
 - **Reason for current vacancy**, is it due to promotion of incumbent , high turnover, new role...
- **Company behaviour and responses**;
 - **CEO/Founder/Owner**; style and focus will indicate how they manage the organisation and the degree of respect they have for their staff. The CEO and Board set the organisation's tone and behaviour by what they tolerate, admire and reward.
 - **Board members** and their suitability; sinecures and political appointments can indicate poor leadership.
 - **Unsolicited offers to provide a service**, ignored or polite response, indicates attitudes to suppliers.
 - **Supplier relationships**. Are suppliers valued or exploited?
 - **Supplier payment terms**. Reasonable or extended?
 - **Unsolicited enquiries about employment**, ignored or polite response, indicates attitudes to staff.
 - **Client complaint processes**, genuine interest in sorting the issue or the Institution's Defence Department.
 - **Community support programs**. Not a reliable indicator of the internal workplace culture.
 - **Advertisements for its services & products**. Not a reliable indicator of the internal workplace culture.
 - **Annual report**. Not a reliable indicator of the internal workplace culture.
 - **Recruiting processes**, thorough or shambolic, gives an insight into how well the institution is organised, managed and its attitude to its employees.
 - **Flexibility** in meeting your personal needs in the hiring negotiation process, indicates attitudes to staff.

- **Recruiting meetings/interviews.**

Focus on “are these people worthy of my efforts” in addition to convincing the organisation that you are the best choice for the role.

- **Compatibility with the people you meet.**(formally and informally)

- Style,
- Attitudes
- Language

- **Meet the new team before acceptance.**

- Are they your style?
- Can you imagine engaging easily with them?
- Are they a close clique? (Socialising outside work)

- **Personality of your supervisor**

From our observations over many years of major and minor listed companies, private and NFP organisations, Government Departments and entities and Local Municipal organisations, there are a number of indicators that can alert you to the style of an organisation.



For illustrative purposes we can look at two extremes.

INCLUSIVE

- Appreciates its employees.
- Knows what it is doing and how it does things.
- Encourages improvements and new ideas.
- Offers a career path to those who want it.
- Up-to-date management skills and staff communication.
- Flexibility of WFH requirements.
- Respects the individual's skills and endeavours to maximise the use of each employee's strengths and interests.
- Treats suppliers and clients with respect.
- Encourages staff to develop new skills and experience.
- Encourages staff to be involved in industry, community and welfare initiatives

INDICATORS OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Board membership

- Competent and well regarded Chairman.
- An array of suitable members in terms of qualifications, experience and core skills.

CEO/Founder/Owner

- Appointed for skills and capability
- Leadership is collegiate and team builder.
- Understands the need for procedures and policies.

Company Policy

- Flexibility on Work from Home.
- Polite and helpful response to enquiries about employment opportunities.
- Recruiting processes are thorough and respectful.
- Polite and helpful response to enquiries from potential service or product providers.
- Fair and reasonable expectations on out-of-hours availability of staff.
- Jointly work with suppliers to mutual benefit.
- Payment terms are within 30 days.
- Appropriate and effective onboarding and training process.
- Selection of suppliers based on merit.
- Strives to be a good corporate citizen.

Customer Service & Complaints

- Easily contacted
- Responsive and attentive
- Properly assesses all issues
- Readily rectifies any misdeeds or failures

INDICATORS OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE continued...

Staff

- Low staff turnover.
- Average employment time matches the industry average.
- Management seems to be engaged with staff.
- Low union membership.
- Staff are positive about the work environment.
- Staff understand and support the goals and behaviour of the organisation.
- Staff views are sought ,as appropriate.
- Staff feel appreciated through feedback communication and work conditions.
- Career plans and organised career development processes.
- KPIs are relevant to quality and output.
- Low usage of sick leave.

Human Resources team

- Focussed on full range of HR issues.
- Active role in supporting management with advice and coaching.
- Available readily to all staff .
- Trusted source of advice to all parts of the organisation.

Recruiting processes.

- Advertisements are informative.
- Position Descriptions are thorough and consistent.
- Strong communication through the recruiting process.
- Prompt acknowledgement of application.
- A suitable person available to answer questions prior to or during application process.
- Professional initial assessment by HR.
- Comprehensive prior briefing on meetings.
- Individual interviews.
- Up to date advice on progress and status.

News/Media

- Good news stories and achievements
- Positive commentary on Board or Management
- No major mishaps or dramas.

AUTOCRATIC

- Uses/exploits employees.
- Low or basic or very cynical management skills.
- Authoritarian management structure and style.
- No understanding of properly constructed processes, equity and consistency of procedures and adherence to values.
- Rigid views on WFH.
- No interest in staff development.
- Focussed on making money for the elite members.
- Difficult trading relationships with suppliers and clients

INDICATORS OF AUTOCRATIC CULTURE

Board membership

- Dominated by a single person who is the founder or key donor.
- Members appointed for political reasons.
- Board member selection through “network” and “mates”.
- An array of unsuitable members in terms of qualifications, experience and core skills.

CEO/Founder/Owner

- Authoritarian
- Impetuous
- Self-centred.
- Appointed for political reasons
- Appointed as or for major donor/funder.

Company Policy

- Reluctant to allow flexibility on Work from Home.
- No response to polite enquires about employment opportunities.
- Ignores unsolicited enquires from potential service or product providers.
- Suppliers are bullied.
- Payment terms exceed 30 days.
- Imposes unrealistic and unfair expectations on out-of-hours availability of staff.
- No onboarding and training processes.

Customer service/complaints

- Unresponsive
- Uncontactable
- Defends the organisation against any complaints.

Staff

- High turnover
- Short employment time
- General resentment of management
- High union membership
- Complain about being trapped
- Complain about being ignored, taken for granted.
- No career development or plans.
- Feel intimidated, coerced or bullied.
- Micro-managed on inappropriate indicators such as hours worked instead of output and quality.
- High usage of sick leave.

Human Resources team

- Focussed on transactional matters.
- Focussed on punitive issues.
- Under-resourced
- Uncontactable, disinterested in staff.

Recruiting processes.

- Advertisements are uninformative.
- Position Descriptions are sketchy or non-existent.
- Poor communication through the recruiting process.
- No acknowledgement of application.
- No person available to answer questions prior to or during application process.
- Cursory initial assessment via telephone or use of pre-recorded video.
- No prior briefing on meetings.
- Group interviews of applicants.
- No advice of rejection.

News/Media

- Current difficulties and challenges
- Critical commentary on Board or Management
- Legal issues and environmental infractions
- HR related disputes (bullying, harassment claims....)
- Prolonged Union disputes

The information provided in this article is of a general nature only and not intended to be advice