


Cultural Initiatives: A Strategic Priority or Luxury? Leaders Weigh In

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While most executives believe investing in workplace culture can impact the bottom line, some remain uncertain. An environment that fosters open conversation, engagement, and innovation may drive growth, but not everyone is sure that it does—or how to sustain it.



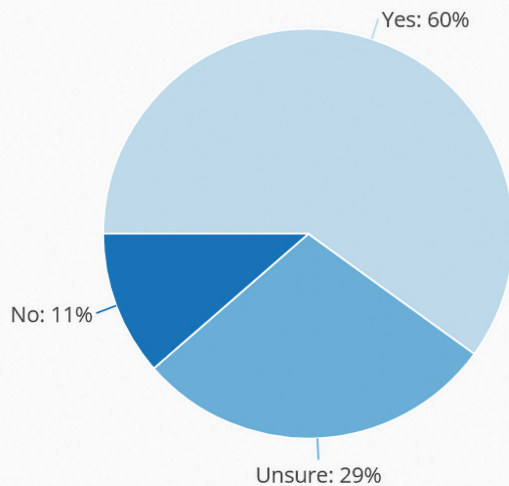




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60%

of association CEOs/Executives polled agree that investing in workplace culture directly **improved their association's bottom line.**



Avenue M Poll | November 19-20 | Has investing in workplace culture directly improved your association's bottom line? | 35 responses | avenuem.org

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Organizational culture isn't a set of static words or plans on paper; it's a dynamic force that shapes an organization's tone, atmosphere, meaning, and purpose. It also directly impacts an organization's potential for success or failure.

That's why culture needs to be measurable and drive real results. "If your investment in workplace culture isn't tied to continuously tracked KPIs like performance, engagement, turnover, and financial outcomes, it's not a strategy—it's spin," said Lakshmi Gopalkrishnan, business culture keynote speaker, leadership strategist, and CEO of The Infinite Group.

Many associations agree, but some are uncertain. When asked if investing in workplace culture boosts the bottom line, more than half of association executives (60 percent) said it does, 29 percent were unsure, and only 11 percent said it doesn't, according to a late-November Avenue M quick poll with 35 executives.

One CEO who said investing in workplace culture affects the bottom line noted that hiring staff who "better embrace process improvement and forward, strategic thinking" is important instead of "those who just want to do things the way they have always been done."

However, one leader was unsure. "Consultant-led training sessions have started to show diminishing returns as the staff is starting to show fatigue, and engagement has declined," they said.

One way to boost engagement is to promote meaningful discussions among leaders that encourage a more expansive and relatable environment. DeDe Halfhill, founder and principal consultant of TAIQH Partners, saw firsthand the transformative power of fostering open, vulnerable conversations within the workplace.

She used online resources from Brené Brown's Dare to Lead, before it was released, to guide monthly discussions with senior Air Force leaders on topics like vulnerability, shame, and empathy—discussions that not only strengthened their support for one another but also sparked a ripple effect throughout the organization.

“It became an investment in our culture that shifted how we showed up for each other, and the results were profound,” Halfhill said. “If I could point to one type of culture investment that had a lasting impact, it was creating space.”

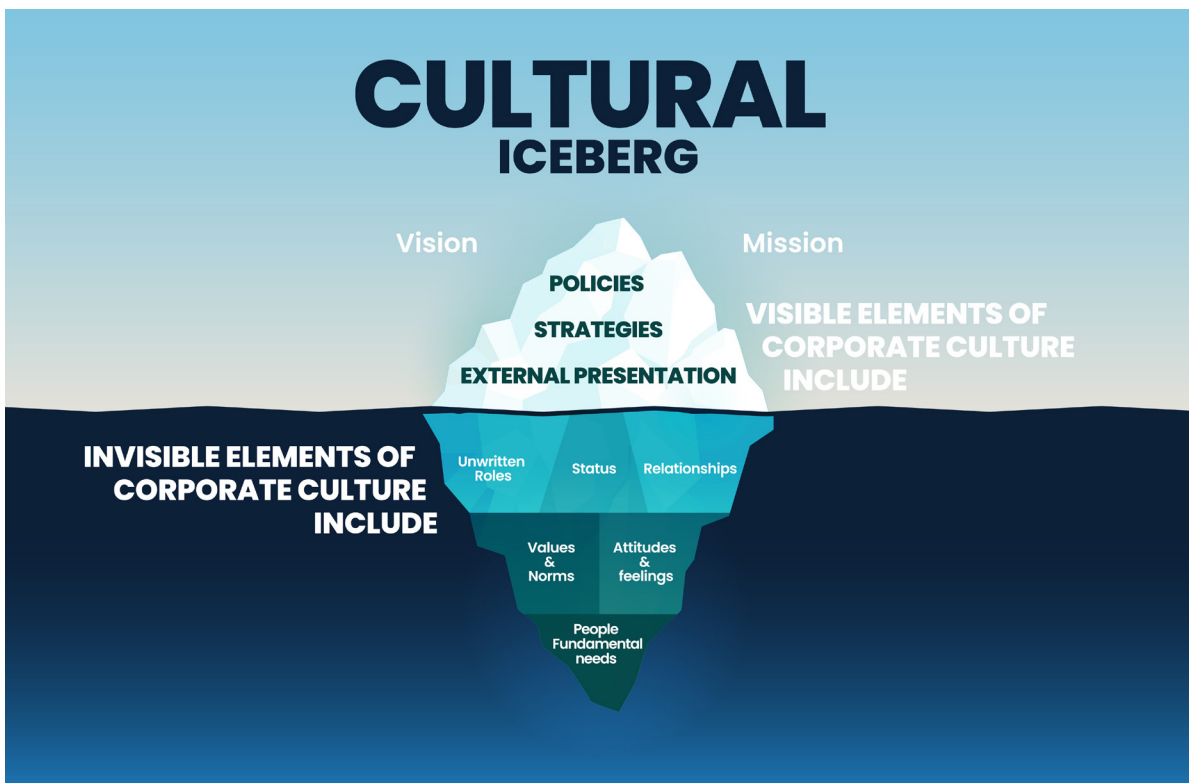
Ultimately, organizational culture is a vital, constantly evolving element that plays a key role in determining what makes an organization tick. Evaluating it doesn't have to be complicated. Simple metrics like employee retention and satis-

faction can help track progress, showing the impact of efforts to create a more inclusive, welcoming culture—one that encourages risk-taking, embraces failure, and drives innovation.

Three Ways To Invest In Company Culture

Investing in company culture isn't about spending big money—it's about leaders leading by example and committing their time and energy. A strong culture goes beyond HR and involves everyone. When done right, it can boost performance, attract top talent, and drive higher revenue. For instance, a well-aligned recruitment campaign can make a big difference, with 97 percent of applicants accepting offers.

But culture isn't just about talking the talk; it's about walking the walk. Too often, what's said about culture doesn't match the employee experience. Leaders need to live the culture daily, engage with teams, and create trust through actions, not just words. Building a culture of excellence takes effort and teamwork, but it's always worth the investment.



Culture Wins By Getting the Most Out of People

Attracting top talent is just the start—creating a culture, where individuals can thrive, is what drives success. A culture with high engagement, roles that match natural strengths and growth opportunities can boost performance and revenue. Gallup found that engaged employees are more productive and focusing on strengths can increase revenue by 8 percent.

To build this culture, leaders need to meet employees' deeper needs for feedback, recognition, and growth. Offering both personal development and career advancement keeps people engaged and committed. Organizations that prioritize engagement, strengths, and growth can see up to 59 percent higher revenue per employee, creating a unique, impactful culture that benefits both employees and customers.

How to Create a Strong Culture

When Italian pasta giant Barilla acquired Catelli (a smaller Canadian pasta manufacturer with 178 employees), they made it a priority to integrate the new employees into their culture by addressing concerns early on with town halls and announcing fair initiatives, like equal pay analysis and plant investments. This proactive approach helped maintain high retention and low turnover during the merger, demonstrating Barilla's commitment to transparency and respect for its workforce.

Organizational culture is more than just perks; it directly impacts business outcomes, such as employee engagement, retention, and productivity. As organizations face increased turnover and a competitive job market, it's critical to build a culture that aligns with the organization's core values and supports employee growth. Leaders must ensure their actions match their cultural values, as consistency is key to creating a workplace that attracts and retains talent.

Would you like to learn more about Avenue M's work or participate in their executive polling? Email Sheri at jacobs@avenuemgroup.com.



Meet Sheri

As the founder of Avenue M Group, **SHERI JACOBS, FASAE; CAE**, is a leader, innovator and visionary who has helped more than 300 associations, small and large, tackle their most challenging issues. She is the 30th recipient of the Academy of Leaders Award. It is ASAE's highest honor given to industry partners who have demonstrated exemplary support of ASAE and the entire association community.

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