

Dealing with mistakes: Learn or blame?

Does your business offer a learning culture or blaming culture?



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To answer this question, it's important to first understand what is meant by the term organizational culture. Organizational culture can be defined as beliefs and ideas about what goals members of an organization should pursue and establishes norms about the appropriate kinds or standards of behavior organizational members should exhibit to meet these goals. The culture also sets the expectations of how employees should behave individually and with others.

Now, ask yourself this question: How do people in my organization respond when something goes wrong? Do they immediately look for someone to blame? Do they need to know who's at fault? Do people lack accountability?

If this sounds familiar, then you've experienced elements of a blaming culture. In a blaming culture, goals become more like a witch hunt than an attempt to solve and eliminate problems. When people begin to blame one another, they miss an opportunity to learn what led to the problem in the first place.

If timely, candid information from pertinent people is encouraged and then disseminated, a learning culture can

be cultivated. A learning culture supports debates that promote learning and helps identify new sources of changes and how to cope.

To foster a learning culture in your organization, start by asking yourself what led to this problem rather than who's at fault. When things go wrong, seize the opportunity to learn more about how things did or didn't work. Try to see old things in new ways.

Engage pertinent employees from all levels of the organization in sharing information. Be sure to follow up and provide feedback.

Encourage accountability in an error-friendly environment. Ensure you have a safe environment for employees to admit mistakes.

Although it's not possible to single-handedly change an organizational culture, the questions you ask and the things you do can move the culture in the direction of greater awareness and learning.

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