

The Value of a Champions Network in Changing the Culture of Our Organizations

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1. Organizational change is often sought through leadership directives, the implementation of new policies, or the advice of outside experts. However, over 100 years of sociological and psychological research tell us that significant and sustainable change within organizations doesn't come from the top down, nor from the outside. Company culture isn't impacted by "tone from the top" or well-written corporate policies. Employees are influenced to adopt new ideas, programs, values, and best practices by advocates at the local level, who in turn spread such ideas throughout the entire organization and impact overall company culture.
2. One recent case example of this is Boeing. Boeing has been making news recently for issues pertaining to serious safety concerns, allegations of fraud, and export violations. Boeing is one of the most highly regulated companies in the U.S. with a team of in-house attorneys. Boeing has precisely written corporate policies in place pertaining to compliance, ethics, and safety. Boeing leadership says all the right things when it comes to their company's values and ideals. Yet a recent FAA report called Boeing's corporate culture "inadequate and confusing." Why? Because Boeing and other companies like it have come to depend on corporate mission statements and policies to drive their culture.
3. A change in culture isn't achieved by a mandate, but through a movement. The problem is that organizations buy into the idea of culture change but fail in its implementation. A change in culture begins at the local and regional level through "champions" (also called ambassadors or advocates) of a new idea, program, policy, way of working, or best practice. By building a network of champions within an organization, almost any idea or behavior can be effectively spread throughout an organization and sustained in the long term.
4. Building a network of champions requires the following six steps: (1) gain leadership commitment and support; (2) create an organized and efficient network structure; (3) recruit the right champions for your network; (4) train your champions on their roles and their responsibilities; (5) implement the network and adjust along the way; and (6) develop metrics that demonstrate network success. Whether focused on compliance, ethics, safety,

hospitality, customer satisfaction, health and wellness, or DEI, a champions network is an effective and valuable model to change the culture of our organizations.