

WORK POLITICS

CULTURE ASSESSMENT FOR LEADERS

Includes:

- Checklist
- Recognizing Political Operators
- Improving Behavior

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Checklist for Leaders to Assess Political Culture

1. Understanding the Organizational Landscape

- Are there clear communication channels within the organization?
- Is decision-making centralized or decentralized?
- Do employees feel comfortable voicing concerns or ideas?

2. Power Dynamics and Influence

- Are there clear guidelines on how decisions are made and by whom?
- Are promotions and recognitions merit-based and transparent?
- Is there favoritism or evidence of cliques influencing decisions?

3. Collaboration vs. Competition

- Do departments work collaboratively toward shared goals?
- Is competition between teams or individuals fostering productivity or tension?
- Are resources distributed fairly across teams?

4. Ethics and Accountability

- Are ethical guidelines communicated and enforced consistently?
- Are leaders held accountable for their actions?
- Are employees encouraged to report unethical behavior without fear of retaliation?

5. Cultural Health Check

- Do employees feel valued and respected regardless of rank or role?
- Is there a shared understanding of the organization's mission and values?
- Does the organization celebrate diversity and inclusion?

Identifying a Political Environment Using the Checklist

A political environment in an organization often involves power dynamics, favoritism, silos, and competition overshadowing collaboration, ethics, and transparency. Leaders can identify whether their organization has a political culture by systematically using the checklist provided. Here's how each section highlights the signs:

1. Understanding the Organizational Landscape

- ✓ **Clear communication channels:** A lack of open and transparent communication can indicate hidden agendas and unclear expectations.
 - ✓ **Decision-making processes:** Centralized decisions without input from others often suggest control by a few, typical in political environments.
 - ✓ **Comfort in voicing concerns:** If employees are hesitant to speak up, it might indicate fear of retaliation or mistrust in leadership.
- Political Sign:** Limited transparency, controlled decision-making, and employees feeling unheard.
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2. Power Dynamics and Influence

- ✓ **Guidelines for decision-making:** Ambiguity around decision-making creates opportunities for informal power players to emerge.
 - ✓ **Merit-based promotions:** If promotions seem arbitrary or based on favoritism, the organization may have cliques or power struggles.
 - ✓ **Evidence of favoritism or cliques:** Visible alliances influencing decisions or resource allocation highlight a political culture.
- Political Sign:** Decision-making that is opaque, favoritism undermining meritocracy, and evident cliques.
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3. Collaboration vs. Competition

- ✓ **Shared goals:** When departments or teams prioritize their own interests over organizational objectives, silos develop.
 - ✓ **Competition fostering tension:** Healthy competition improves performance, but excessive competition creates resentment.
 - ✓ **Resource distribution:** Unfair allocation of resources can indicate power plays or favoritism.
- Political Sign:** Competition and silos preventing collaboration, and inequity in resources creating division.

4. Ethics and Accountability

✓ **Ethical guideline enforcement:** Inconsistent enforcement suggests selective accountability, often used to protect those with influence.

✓ **Leader accountability:** Leaders who are not held accountable for unethical behavior foster mistrust and resentment.

✓ **Reporting unethical behavior:** If employees fear reporting issues, it reflects a culture where retaliation or inaction is common.

Political Sign: Ethical double standards, lack of accountability, and fear of raising concerns.

5. Cultural Health Check

✓ **Employee value and respect:** A culture where respect is tied to rank or role undermines inclusivity.

✓ **Shared mission and values:** When employees lack alignment with the organization's mission, factions often form.

✓ **Diversity and inclusion:** A lack of meaningful diversity or inclusion efforts can signal tokenism or systemic biases.

Political Signs: *Disparity in respect, unclear organizational mission, and superficial diversity efforts. A high occurrence of political signs across the checklist (e.g., favoritism, fear of speaking up, silos, or inequitable practices) indicates a political culture.*

Recognizing Toxic Behaviors

→ Pay Attention to Communication

- ◆ Notice passive-aggressive remarks, gossip, or public criticism.
- ◆ Identify patterns where team members interrupt or dismiss others.

→ Evaluate Decision-Making Practices

- ◆ Look for secretive decision-making or exclusion of key stakeholders.
- ◆ Be aware of favoritism or uneven treatment among employees.

→ Examine Team Interactions

- ◆ Identify instances where departments or individuals avoid collaboration.
- ◆ Observe if competition between colleagues creates tension or withholding of information.

→ Check Employee Sentiment

- ◆ High turnover, frequent absenteeism, or visible stress may indicate deeper problems.
- ◆ Notice if employees seem disengaged or withdrawn.

→ Assess Leadership Behavior

- ◆ Watch for leaders who micromanage, show favoritism, or avoid responsibility.
- ◆ Look for inconsistent application of policies or standards.

Improving Workplace Behavior

- **Establish Clear Standards**
 - ◆ Communicate expectations for respectful and ethical behavior across all levels of the organization.
 - ◆ Ensure these standards are easy to understand and accessible to everyone.
- **Lead by Example**
 - ◆ Leaders should act with transparency, empathy, and fairness.
 - ◆ Acknowledge mistakes openly and encourage accountability.
- **Encourage Open Dialogue**
 - ◆ Provide channels for employees to share concerns safely, such as anonymous surveys or feedback sessions.
 - ◆ Actively listen and address feedback thoughtfully.
- **Provide Training Opportunities**
 - ◆ Offer workshops on topics like conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, and creating inclusive environments.
 - ◆ Equip managers with tools to address toxic behavior effectively.
- **Address Problems Quickly**
 - ◆ Confront unproductive behavior with specific, private, and constructive feedback.
 - ◆ Focus on solutions that guide the individual toward improvement.
- **Promote Teamwork and Collaboration**
 - ◆ Encourage projects that involve multiple departments to create connections and mutual respect.
 - ◆ Celebrate shared achievements to reinforce cooperation.
- **Ensure Accountability at All Levels**
 - ◆ Apply policies consistently to everyone, including leadership.
 - ◆ Develop a process for addressing repeated harmful behaviors, with consequences if necessary.
- **Highlight Positive Contributions**
 - ◆ Recognize and celebrate actions that align with the organization's values.
 - ◆ Acknowledge teamwork, ethical decision-making, and professional milestones in a meaningful way.