



# Central Veterinary Clinic

A CASE STUDY FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Organizational culture and climate play a large role in employee satisfaction and behavior (Schilling and Schyns, 2014). Pilch and Turska (2014) posited that workplace bullying is not only a serious social stressor, but has important consequences for the victim, co-workers, and organization as a whole. From the case study, it is clear that organizational culture at Central Veterinary Clinic (CVC) has grown quite toxic over the past few years. This paper will provide a definition of organizational culture and discuss the necessity for a positive culture and contrast an unhealthy organizational culture and its impact on employees; identify the apparent stressors within the case study and discuss their impact; and finally, propose specific approaches to reducing or eliminating stress in order to counterbalance the effects of the toxic organizational culture.

### Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to the values and beliefs that structure the expected behaviors of employees within the workplace (Springer, Clark, Strohfus, & Belcheir, 2012; Hogan & Coote, 2013). Related, but distinct, is organizational *climate*, which Springer et al. (2012) referred to as the visible aspects of the organization, such as working conditions, supervision, and interpersonal relationships. The author believes it is important to draw a distinction between the climate and the culture, because one may not be noticeable from an observational position, but it can influence the other (Springer et al., 2012; Hogan & Coote, 2013). Importantly, Schein (2010, as cited in Lyle, 2012) defined the organizational culture as a tool used by employees to teach new employees the expected behaviors within the organization. A healthy organizational culture, then, promotes a good work-life balance (Lyle, 2012), effective communication between subordinates and managers (Mansour, 2011), and a meeting of needs such as the need to belong (Lyle, 2012). Mansour (2011) posited that organizational climate and culture are a type of brand management for the organization; if they are negative, it will have a negative impact on the brand or image. When there is a healthy organizational culture, employees report a higher job satisfaction level, which promotes higher productivity (Springer et al., 2012).

Conversely, an unhealthy organizational culture can cause undue stress on employees, which can cause them anxiety and apprehension, reducing their productivity (Pilch & Turska, 2015). An aspect of an unhealthy organizational culture is that of workplace bullying, defined in Pilch and Turska (2015) as the deliberate or subconscious repetition of behaviors against one or more workers which cause distress or offense, and can interfere with job performance by creating a hostile working environment. Pilch and Turska (2015) further state that *bullying* is not necessarily physical and that most of the abuse is actually verbal and can be indirect, direct, passive, or active. Cortina et al. (2013) considered selective incivility as an area of concern within organizational culture. Workplace incivility, as defined in Cortina et al. (2013), is rude or discourteous behavior that displays a disregard for others and possesses an ambiguous intent to harm. This type of behavior constitutes *psychological aggression*, which, naturally, causes a great deal of stress to the victim of such behaviors (Cortina et al., 2013). Just as a positive organizational culture promotes productivity and creativity, a toxic organizational culture promotes stress and a lack of productivity and creativity (Cortina et al., 2013; Pilch & Turska, 2015).

Mansour (2011) described the healthy organizational culture observed at Umpqua bank, which indicated friendly and cheerful interactions between employees and between employees and customers. Extrapolating, a toxic organizational culture would not have the same pleasantness of interaction and, quite possibly, a dearth of communication, in general. If an employee does not feel part of the organization, his or her need to belong becomes compromised and the employee becomes stressed (Cortina et al., 2013).

## Organizational Culture at CVC

Understanding how organizational culture and climate can effect employees in their daily lives provides a basis for analysis of the Central Veterinary Clinic's organizational culture. When Dr. Silverstein took on the managerial role two years prior, her lack of managerial ability led to a dismantling of the organizational culture. Schilling and Schyns (2014) discussed destructive leadership behaviors, including a laissez-faire style of leadership. In their review of Skogstad et al. (2014, as cited in Schilling and Schyns, 2014), laissez-faire leadership was the sole predictor of job satisfaction after two years. The prediction of job satisfaction and laissez-faire leadership is of note because Dr. Silverstein was in the managerial role for two years and seemed to have a hands-off leadership approach. Schilling and Schyns (2014) further asserted that destructive leadership can be reinforced by the leader's perception of the followers' coping mechanisms. If the leader perceives the coping mechanisms as aggressive or retaliatory, or if they view the behaviors as submissive, the leader is inclined to continue his or her destructive style (Schilling & Schyns, 2014).

Florence Meyers, as well, exhibits a destructive leadership style that appears to lean toward narcissism and tyranny (Schilling & Schyns, 2014). Tyrannical leadership results in abusive behaviors (Schilling & Schyns, 2014) and in the case of CVC, Ms. Meyers behaviors can be aligned with Pilch and Turska's (2015) definitions of workplace bullying and Cortina et al's. (2013) definitions of selective incivility. The aggressions towards staff members she deems as *trouble makers*, fall under Cortina et al's. (2013) *psychological aggression* definition. Her harsher treatment of non-Christian staff members can be identified as *neoracism* (Cortina et al., 2013). Importantly, the concept of *neoracism* revolves around the core belief that racism no longer exists in the United States, and that minorities are being given *favors*; and a *neoracist* holds these beliefs as empirical fact, not ideological opinion (Cortina et al., 2013). These beliefs, then, translate into micro-aggressions that can be completely rationalized and not seen as racist because the behavior can be attributed to other situations or causes (Cortina et al., 2013).

The elimination of the holiday party for staff and family appears to be a point of contention for many of the employees. The *neoracist* behaviors of Ms. Meyers reinforces the negative culture of *neoracism* among the employees (Cortina et al., 2013; Schilling & Schyns, 2014). Because, at this point, there is a lack of healthy communication among employees and leadership, the culture reflects the underlying attitudes of each individual. The workplace incivility is further reinforced by a seeming disrespect for organizational property, as seen in the theft of medical supplies and the assertion that *everyone does it*. The overall atmosphere seems to state that there is a lack of trust among employees for each other and for leadership; a lack of respect of fellow human beings; a lack of a true *belongingness* of individuals to the organization, and disregard for the well-being of clients, as evidenced by the client reporting an incident he witnessed in front of the building. The brand management and image management for the company does not seem to correspond with the

original intent and foundation, which, in turn, has caused a great deal of psychological aggression, stress, and a decrease in productivity and efficiency.

## Stress Reduction and Transformation

That a senior veterinary technician resigned, citing Florence Meyers' leadership style as the reason indicates the company has been made aware of the situation. That Dr. Silverstein resigned from her position as manager and addressed the theft of medical supplies as *just another perk*, indicates that leadership has not performed appropriately to make sure the culture matched their desired internal image. Because the problems within the organization began and cultivated over two years, there is no *quick fix*, nor is there an *overnight change* that should be expected.

In order to begin to relieve some of the stress within the company, the first recommendation is to reinstate the end of the year party as an inclusive Holiday Party, and invite the family of staff, just as before. It should happen between Christmas and New Years in order to avoid any religious connotations. Another idea would be to have a month-long celebration that involves the clients, as well. A holiday food drive, in which canned goods for humans and pets can be donated at the clinic. Those food items can then be donated to the local food bank for the holidays. By including all employees in an event that has the potential to effect the local community, the employees can feel a sense of purpose and belonging (Mansour, 2011; Lyle, 2012; Springer et al., 2012; & Hogan & Coote, 2013).

When an organization takes an active interest in the employees, clients, and surrounding communities, the organization can empower the employees to be the best they can be (Mansour, 2011). When employees feel empowered, they are more creative, more innovative, and more productive in their work and home lives (Mansour, 2011). In order for CVC to take a demonstrable interest in its employees, they must address their leadership. Having a manager who routinely practices micro-aggressions against those of differing faiths, ethnicities, or races can open the company up to potential law suits (Cortina et al., 2013). In the case of CVC, there are two managers who seem to be a cause of stress for the employees: Florence Meyers and Dr. Silverstein. Even though Dr. Silverstein resigned her position, her continued presence serves as a divisive point, potentially reinforcing the lack of attention or the lack of care regarding employees' voiced concerns, or even lack of care to the theft of medical supplies (Schillings & Schnys, 2014). The author recommends negotiating early retirement or some other type of severance negotiation for the two women in question. Because the attitudes are so divisive and the micro-aggressions seem to be growing in frequency, it would be better to remove them from the organization to allow time to heal. The author also recommends the implementation of a leadership training program to train future leaders how negotiate conflicts, and create an atmosphere of inclusivity, rather than incivility.

## Conclusion

Despite having recommendations for improvements at CVC, the author wishes to reinforce the fact that the changes needed to foster and grow a positive and healthy organizational culture will take time. Change, in and of itself, is a stressor and should not be disregarded as the

recommendations occur. Understanding how deeply rooted the toxic culture of CVC is, and recognizing how culture affects employees' psyches, productivity, and emotional well-being will help in creating the changes necessary to heal the employees and organization. Organizational culture and climate are interconnected and when one becomes toxic, the other is sure to be toxic, as well. A healthy organization has healthy and happy employees. Happy employees are empowered by the organization to be better than they are, today.

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