

# WORKPLACE MICROCULTURES: HIDDEN CLIMATES WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** Organizations are often thought of as integrated organizations, with a shared set of objectives, value system, and cultural models. But large organizations — and even mid-sized organizations — are made up of units that are small enough to create small groups (e.g., departments, project groups, cliques) that may develop unique microcultures. These microcultures can be one of three things: they may align with, diverge from, or be in direct opposition to the culture of the organization. This paper will examine how microcultures develop, their psychological and behavioural consequences for their employees, and their influence on communication, motivation, leadership and resolution of conflict as dimensions of Organizational Behaviour (OB).

**KEYWORDS:** Workplace, organizations, behaviour, microcultures.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, organizational culture has been thought of as a monolithic category (a single collection of norms, values, and practices that govern behaviours), which is a rather limited way of looking at phenomena that includes a fine-grained aspect. In fact, these fine-grained aspects can constitute "microcultures," which develop in small units. These microcultures can either reinforce the prevailing culture, or can oppose it. Either way, these created behaviours can also contribute--positively or negatively--to employee engagement, retention, productivity, and relationships with coworkers.

## II. EFFECTS ON ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

### 2.1 Communication

- Microcultures may develop their own language, acronyms, or humour that isolates others.
- Barriers develop between departments preventing cross-functional collaboration.

### 2.2 Motivation

- Employees part of a strong microculture may feel more motivation due to the shared identity and local forms of recognition.
- If the organization ignores the microculture, these employees may become disengaged.

### 2.3 Leadership and Power Relationships

- Microcultures may create informal leaders that will disrupt formal hierarchy.
- Microcultures may create differing leadership styles that lead to disobedience or passive resistance.

### 2.4 Conflict and Resistance

- Lack of alignment between microculture and organization may create cultural conflict that causes stress, gossip, or hostility between departments.

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### 2.5 Retention and Loyalty

- Microculture loyalty may supplant organizational commitment.
- Employees may actively resist transfers and promotions with the new opportunity risking their microculture associations.

### III. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

- Belonging: Microcultures have the potential to enhance team cohesion and psychological safety in the group.
- Identity conflict/identity crisis: Employees can feel stress, ambivalence, or dissatisfaction when their organizational values clash with those of their microculture.
- In-group/out-group bias: Employees can develop favouritism internal to their group, with distrust present for outside groups.
- Cognitive dissonance: If the values of the individual contradict either the microculture or organizational culture, it can increase burnout or lead to intentions to exit.

### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERS

- Conduct culture audits in departments.
- Provide training for managers to develop culturally sensitive leaders and managers to help transact and align cultures.
- Build shared values and rituals that incorporate all microcultures.
- Do that have to create homogeneity—utilize microcultures to be a source of innovation and variety .

### V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Microcultures in the work environment are not only unavoidable, but can also be tremendously beneficial. When leaders understand and manage microcultures, this can create diversity in perspectives, increase team cohesion, and assist with fast-tracking innovations. When leaders do not acknowledge microcultures, misalignment, miscommunication, or internal conflict could hamper work outcomes. Leaders must strive to retain the uniqueness of the microcultures while also upholding the hierarchy of the organization.

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