

149 Lesley Sears 9 Dimensions of Culture

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By Lesley Sears

Lisa Hochgraf 00:04

You're listening to the CUES Podcast, episode 149.

Lisa Hochgraf 00:09

Welcome to the CUES Podcast, where leaders and experts discuss the top topics in credit unions today. I'm Lisa Hochgraf, senior editor at CUES. In this episode we explore in rapid-fire fashion, the nine dimensions of culture, what they are and how they can help to build a successful organization.

Lisa Hochgraf 00:29

Returning to the show as our guest is CUES' own VP of consulting, Lesley Sears, who heads up our CUES Consulting offerings. Lesley kicks us off by talking a bit about the difference between climate and culture, and why they're so important to your team's high performance.

Lisa Hochgraf 00:45

Then we go into two-minute mode. I name the cultural dimension, set my stopwatch and tell Lesley "go." I think you'll be impressed with how much great information Lesley conveys in each short segment.

Lisa Hochgraf 01:00

Lesley's not only an expert on culture, but also one of the most approachable talent development experts around. Her expertise is cutting-edge stuff from the world of talent development that can help credit unions become ever more agile. If you have a question after listening, feel free to reach out to her at lesley@cues.org. That's lesley@cues.org.

Lisa Hochgraf 01:23

So let's get started.

Lisa Hochgraf 01:27

Glad to have you back on the show, Lesley.

Lesley Sears 01:30

Awesome. Thank you, Lisa. I'm excited to be here. This is gonna be a fun one. I'm excited to start talking culture a little bit.

Lisa Hochgraf 01:36

Yeah, I think this will be a fun one to today. We're going to do a special rapid-fire round about the nine dimensions of culture. But before we do that, would you kick us off by talking about culture more generally? What is it anyway? And why is it so very important?

Lesley Sears 01:54

So culture, the way we look at it, and actually what we call it is climate, right? So there's culture, which is the deep stuff. So it's what's what the founders set up with, regardless of what of what organization you're talking about. Culture is truly the deep stuff. Climate is what everybody experiences every day. So it really truly is the interactions between people. It's the feeling you get in the credit union. So it's, it's easier to repair in a couple years, if you have good focus and understand what you need to focus on, you can really shift the climate in amazing ways.

Lisa Hochgraf 02:32

So are we talking about climate or culture today, just?

Lesley Sears 02:35

We're gonna talk about climate because it's the dimensions everybody knows that by culture. So when you say climate, people don't really know necessarily. They're thinking winter or summer. But so we're talking about climate. But really, it's what people would think of as culture. It's what they experience every day when they walk into the office.

Lisa Hochgraf 02:53

So climate is what we experienced at work every day and culture goes even deeper. Can you give me a hint about what going even deeper mean?

Lesley Sears 03:00

Think of what the founders set up, right. So if somebody founded an organization, it really gets into their thinking about prioritizing tasks, or prioritizing objectives and goals. So it is truly, and I always think of the founder, because they set some of that kind of that infrastructure within an organization. And it takes a long time to change that, takes a bit, 10 years to change truly change the culture of an organization, because it's just that deep-seated. It's the foundational things in an organization

Lisa Hochgraf 03:35

Includes--all the history, it sounds like.

Lesley Sears 03:37

It sure does.

Lisa Hochgraf 03:38

And so we're going to be talking about the nine dimensions of culture or climate depending on how you're using the terms. How do these nine dimensions of culture really contribute to making it a healthy workplace for people?

Lesley Sears 03:51

So every culture has these nine. And then it's, how strong are they? So it's not a matter of do we have one? Or do we have another? No, you got all nine? There, all nine of them are there. It's just how well, how healthy are the nine within your credit union? How well do you function within each of the nine dimensions? So as you're thinking about as you're hearing it from a credit union perspective, understand you have it, which then allows you to see how strong you are at it, which is kind of how we do the assessment. When we're assessing a climate or a culture in a credit union, we're looking at all nine and really helping to understand is it strong is it weak, which then helps focus development, helps focus what we need to strengthen within a credit union.

Lisa Hochgraf 04:42

That's terrific, Lesley. So everyone listening, you have all nine of these dimensions in your climate at your credit union, and they're part of your larger culture. So you can't stop listening at any point, but we've kept them all the two minutes right,

Lesley Sears 04:56

You're ready to test me here on two minutes.

Lisa Hochgraf 04:58

Got my stopwatch right here. So I'm going to present each of the nine dimensions. I'm going to I've already got my stopwatch set for the first two minutes, and then I'll say go. And I'm excited to hear your short but pithy insights. I'm sure our listeners are too. Are you ready?

Lesley Sears 05:13

I'm ready. I'm ready. It's gonna be a good test.

Lisa Hochgraf 05:16

Okay, Lesley. Give us your best insights about challenge and involvement. Two minutes or less. Go.

Lesley Sears 05:23

So challenge and involvement is really how well individuals are in teams are given opportunities to get involved in the daily operations, right? It's just what it sounds like. So are we challenged? Are we involved? They have to understand the vision, they have to understand the goals. And to the extent that they do understand those, then how involved are they?

Lesley Sears 05:46

So some behaviors to kind of be looking for within a good challenge, healthy challenge and involvement. People feel motivated, energized, committed to making contributions. The climate is dynamic, electric, inspiring,

Lesley Sears 06:02

Some things to look for on maybe not great, challenge and involvement? Apathetic. They're not interested in professional development. So if you have a team full of people that don't really want professional development, I would question your challenge and involvement dimension to see if that is healthy.

Lesley Sears 06:21

And then quickly, so how can you promote it? So take time to make sure everybody understands the bigger picture. And then once they understand it, how can you cooperatively bring them together? So they have an insight, right, they have a voice in what we're looking at and how we're doing it.

Lisa Hochgraf 06:42

Bravo, great start. All right, Lesley, now, two minutes or less, but no less insightful? On freedom. Go.

Lesley Sears 06:52

So freedom refers to the degree to which and all of these again are how well do you do it? Right. So how can people take initiative? What freedom do they have to act on their own? So within their position, are they being micromanaged? Or can they make decisions on how things are accomplished? So there again, being they understand the objectives, they understand the goal, but they're given the freedom to do it in a way that feels good to them, that feels natural to them, they're not being forced to do it a particular way.

Lesley Sears 07:29

So some of the things to look at as far as healthy behaviors: They are independent in behavior, given the autonomy and the resources to define much of their work.

Lesley Sears 07:29

Some of the things to look at are some of the things you can see for behavior when it is not a good healthy freedom environment? They're going to have little initiative; they're not going to be excited about accomplishing their tasks; they're going to spend a great deal of time and energy obtaining permission. So they're following around behind their manager trying to get permission to do things versus doing it themselves. And they're looking at how to do things by the book. And I'm a process person. So I think there needs to be process often in a credit union. But taking it over the top and not giving people their freedom to make their choices can be problematic.

Lisa Hochgraf 08:20

Well said. Next up, trust and openness.

Lesley Sears 08:28

Again, just like you would think, how much do people trust each other in the climate? And that looks I mean, you're looking at peers, and you're looking at managers. So when you're thinking of engagement, and some of those, if you have hybrid work or remote workers, this is huge to be able to do this well to be able to trust each other. And it's to the degree to which you have emotional safety. So trust often comes from emotional safety. And how well do you do that? They count on each other for professional and personal support. So people count on each other. Not that not even that they just trust each other, but they count on each other to be there when they need them. They have a sincere respect for one another. That really is some of the healthy behaviors.

Lesley Sears 09:16

Some of the unhealthy behaviors that you can see with low trust, everybody's suspicious of each other. Right? They don't trust each other. They don't trust that they're going to do what they say they they're going to do in the daily routine. They closely guard themselves, both themselves and their ideas or their plans. So they're not going to contribute because they're so busy worrying about somebody stealing their plans or their ideas that they can't share.

Lesley Sears 09:43

So how can you promote good healthy openness and trust, establish and reinforce agreed upon guidelines? Right? So having some housekeeping stuff internally, so when you're working on a project together, what are some of the things that you collectively agree to do? In your climate, to make sure that that's how we build up trust, and also give people a voice. If they have a voice, they will be much more committed to anything in the credit union

Lisa Hochgraf 10:12

Spot on, two minutes exactly. And now two minutes an idea time.

Lesley Sears 10:20

So, one of the biggest challenges that I see in many of the credit unions I work with is time. Nobody has time to do anything. So idea time and ideas support, which we'll talk about in a few minutes, go very closely together. I say they're two sides of the same coin. Idea time is, yes, you've been innovative. Yes, you've been able to come up with different ideas and looked at different tasks that you do and use, you know, better ways to do it shorter, more efficient ways of doing it. You just don't have the time to be able to implement, right, which so many credit unions really want that innovative culture, that innovative climate. If you don't give people the time, you're wasting your time. Like don't focus on innovation if you're not going to give time to really bring those ideas to life and bring them to fruition. So that's idea time.

Lesley Sears 11:13

How you can really lean in on some of the good behaviors is have flexible times that people are permitted to work on ideas, to really initiate some of the ideas, pull ideas from them, and then give them time to be able to implement. If it's too tight, and there's expectations with no time, then it's the pressure is going to be too much. And you're gonna have retention issues. You're gonna have an expectation that is not doable.

Lesley Sears 11:42

So some of the quick ways of kind of promoting idea time is look at the schedules and see where the junk is. Right? Are there meetings that don't need to be taking place? Are they too long? Are you having a 30-minute meeting, that could be a 15-minute meeting. You'd be amazed at how much time a week, you can pull out just by redoing the meeting structure.

Lisa Hochgraf 12:07

I imagine people love that when people shore up the meetings and make sure they really count.

Lesley Sears 12:11

Yep.

Lisa Hochgraf 12:12

All right. Next up two minutes on playfulness and humor.

Lesley Sears 12:18

So this is one of those things that I think is a one of the most obvious byproducts of a healthy culture. Right? If people are able to be playful and humorous within a climate within a place of business, then chances are the culture is pretty healthy. Like there's not going to be the humor and the playfulness if it's not showing up as a byproduct, right? So we a great way for someone to kind of take the pulse of their climate is walk into the space. Are people laughing with each other? Are people able to have relationships that are strong enough that they can be humorous with one another, and not have fallout from it? So I love this as just a quick test.

Lesley Sears 13:02

How good are you doing? It's easygoing, light-hearted. You can feel it when you walk in. And remember, it's not just your employees that are feeling it. It's the members too, right? So if a member walks in to a unhealthy climate, they're going to feel it. And if they walk into a healthy climate, they're going to feel that as well. And they're going to feel the difference between the two. And I mean, obviously keeping jokes and laughter and stuff proper and professional, but just having it makes a huge difference.

Lesley Sears 13:34

So if you don't, what are some of the things you can try to do to promote playfulness and humor? Have designated places for sharing jokes, funny stories, and encourage silly times, right? So have a cadence in your credit union that there are times that you can be silly and have fun together.

Lisa Hochgraf 13:54

Bring on the beanies. Bring on the pom-poms. Something fun, something unexpected?

Lesley Sears 13:59

Yes, exactly. All right.

Lisa Hochgraf 14:01

Two minutes on something very different. This is conflict. Go.

Lesley Sears 14:06

So all of the other dimensions we're going to talk about today, you want high numbers; you want good high numbers. Conflict you don't. Conflict is the only kind of negative dimension that you want to keep it low. Conflict is one of those things that the better you are at managing it, understanding how to have those conversations, the healthier your climate can be. And we'll talk about debate here in a little bit. Debate is different than conflict. Debate is healthy conversation. Conflict is not healthy. So it's the sniping. It happens when people genuinely don't like each other. Right? There's a dislike in the climate.

So again, as much as playfulness and humor, I think, can be a good representation of a healthy climate, conflict can often be a very good representation of a not-very-healthy climate.

Lesley Sears 14:59

So again, If you're kind of doing just the pulse and getting a feel for how healthy we are in two minutes, how much conflict do you have in your credit union? What does that look like? Are you having to manage that conflict more than you feel as you should have to? Then you probably have a conflict issue somewhere in there. It can boil down to gossip, slander, I mean, it can present itself a lot of different ways. But it genuinely is a byproduct, right? So it's a lot of the things that we're talking about today are showing up unhealthy and the conflict kind of comes out of that.

Lesley Sears 15:36

What are some things you can do to promote low conflict? identify common goals, so distract the attention from the conflict itself and focus on the healthy stuff. How are we all moving toward the same goals? How are we doing that? What dimensions around conflict can we do better at?

Lisa Hochgraf 15:56

Awesome. It's kind of cool that the next one up may tie in with a previous one. So we talked recently about idea time, and now the topic is idea support. You're on.

Lesley Sears 16:09

Awesome. So this is how ideas are considered right? Do you have a strong method for supporting those ideas you want them, right? I mean, innovation will mean the difference between succeeding or failing in any organization. If you don't have continuous innovation, and continually looking at your tasks that you're doing and seeing how you can do them better, then it's gonna be hard to make it in the future. And the more you can support not only the idea presentation, so giving people a great way of presenting ideas, but then also supporting them, meaning allowing them to be brought into existence, right? Because having an idea means nothing. And maybe you do want to test it. Maybe you do some more preliminary things, but make sure you have a method for that. Make sure you define a way you can do that well. If everybody thinks that the answer to an idea is going to be no, that's a problem. That's a huge problem in your credit union. And it'll either present itself today or it will present itself tomorrow. But eventually it's going to present itself. And you're going to have lost out on a lot of potential innovation within your credit union.

Lesley Sears 17:25

So I've kind of spilled the beans a little bit on some of the how to promote it. But I believe it really truly is having a deliberate procedure for ideas by presenting them, celebrating them. How can we take it into the first stage? I mean, how are we phasing it out? But you have a very specific, deliberate plan for how to do that.

Lisa Hochgraf 17:47

Super, we have two to go. And I am excited for two minutes of insight on debate. Go ahead.

Lesley Sears 17:56

So that's the healthy part of a conflict, right? You want debate? If you have strong ideas, and you have idea people, often they're going to have different ideas of what coming to fruition looks like. That's debate. That's having a healthy conversation about how can we do it this way? Or can we do it that way? Or what did it what would it look like if we did this? That's debate. What viewpoints Do you have? What other ideas that are differing? What knowledge are you bringing? We've talked a lot about skills recently. Bringing different experiences into those debate conversations I think is so healthy and so beneficial to an innovative credit union.

Lesley Sears 18:37

So giving room for that, you have to have trust because people aren't bringing forward their ideas and their plans unless they feel like they're going to be accepted. Right. And they have that emotional security in the credit union. Feel like that's good. And part of that we just talked about what kind of support do you have? Debate's a part of that, right? Being able to have a space that we talk through ideas and figure out what works and what does not work? And no judgment, right? There can't be any judgment as we're talking and debating different ideas.

Lesley Sears 19:11

So what are some of the things you can do to promote healthy debate, actively encourage people to take and share their ideas? So take ideas from other people, and then share their ideas and bring their opinion to it right, bring their perspective, bring their knowledge and experience to the idea, and not only experience of in the credit union, but previous experience. And this is again, part of that idea support methodology.

Lisa Hochgraf 19:42

This has been so much fun. I think we'll have to find other topics we can do this on Lesley.

Lesley Sears 19:47

I agree.

Lisa Hochgraf 19:48

We've reached the final dimension of culture: risk-taking. And go when you're ready.

Lesley Sears 19:54

It's funny because lately, credit unions have been more interested in In establishing a strong risk-taking practices, and there's been several credit unions that have had pretty low scores on risk-taking. I think there's been more micromanaging going on then leadership necessarily would like for there to be. So the risk-taking is just what it sounds like: Are you able to make decisions in your function right within the tasks that you do every day? That you're making decisions without having to ask for management approval, that it's an individual risk-taking. And I mean, I'm a firm believer in making sure that you put guardrails around risk-taking, and let's pick the ones that are the least volatile, right? So having different levels of risk, I think is important. But giving people that ability is very, very important. I don't think he I hate to say about taking a gamble, because I think you have to take a carefully thought out gamble. But giving people the ability now again, trust, right, a lot of the same conversations come up throughout many of these dimensions, that and you can see how they tie together, for sure. But risk-

taking is one of those difficult sometimes, especially within a credit union, to let loose of the reins. But it can be super important for people on the team.

Lesley Sears 21:21

So how can you promote this? Reinforce the importance of learning from your mistakes, right, knowing that you don't fail, you just you learn something and move forward or fail forward. And I think too, having a good plan for risk-taking is a great idea. Do a green, yellow and red flag type of risk-taking approach.

Lisa Hochgraf 21:44

This has been amazing. As an editor, I love it when information is dense, meaning either a short time and a lot of it or a small space and a lot of it. And this has been a lot of really good information in a short period of time. Thank you so much for sharing these insights.

Lesley Sears 21:59

It's been so much fun. I love how a climate is made up. And I love that behavioral psychologists have really been able to bring these dimensions together. So I'm passionate about them. I think they are truly a way of measuring who you are as a credit union. And again, focusing, I'm all about focusing, you know that, like we've got X number of resources, how can we get the most that we possibly can out of those resources? And I think these dimensions help us really do that well.

Lisa Hochgraf 22:30

Indeed, do you have some suggestions for people that want to look at their nine dimensions and sort of bring them together? We can see easily that they're related, but how do you start? How do you work on them?

Lesley Sears 22:41

I think listening, so kind of going through these and maybe writing jotting down the what the different nine dimensions are. And then looking around, right, many of these play off of each other. So if you're seeing weakness, you're probably going to see it across the board, right? That you're going to see many dimensions that have weaknesses in them. And the same thing with strengths. So in the nine, maybe you have strength in six of them. And then if you can begin to identify some of those places that you're just struggling, these are the places to look for sure. This gives you a place to start. So you're not just trying to like put your finger up in the wind to figure out where where we are with our climate. This gives you a place to start and a really good way of beginning to look around look internally within the credit union to see where you are. And if you need an assessment, you know where to find me, right? We can do this. We can do to make sure scientific way

Lisa Hochgraf 23:37

For sure. I know you're very steeped in all the latest research, and it's so useful, so telling. Thank you so much for being on the show, Lesley.

Lesley Sears 23:45

Thank you for having me again. This is fun; we have to do it again.

Lisa Hochgraf 23:48

See you the next time.

Lisa Hochgraf 23:50

I would like to thank you our listeners for taking time out of your busy schedules to listen to today's episode of the CUES Podcast.

Lisa Hochgraf 23:58

And many thanks to Lesley for once again sharing her deep experience and insights. Learn more about CUES Consulting which Lesley champions at cues.org/CUESconsulting.

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Find a full transcript of this episode at CUmanagement.com/podcast 149.

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You can also find more great credit union-specific content at CUmanagement.com.

Lisa Hochgraf 24:23

Thanks again for listening today.

Lisa Hochgraf 24:26

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