

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 440

CE 081 864

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TITLE A Model for Linking Organizational Culture and Performance. Innovative Session 6. [AHRD Conference, 2001].
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 10p.; In: Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Conference Proceedings (Tulsa, Oklahoma, February 28-March 4, 2001). Volumes 1 and 2; see CE 081 829.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Agents; *Change Strategies; Employer Employee Relationship; Entrepreneurship; *Evaluation Utilization; Human Resources; Innovation; *Job Performance; Labor Force Development; Linking Agents; Models; *Organizational Change; *Organizational Climate; Organizational Development; Organizational Objectives; Performance Factors; Postsecondary Education; Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS High Performance Work Organizations; Performance Indicators

ABSTRACT

An innovative session was conducted to introduce session participants to a concept and researched model for linking organizational culture and performance. The session goals were as follows: (1) give participants a working knowledge of the link between business culture and key business performance indicators; (2) give participants a hands-on understanding of the implications of an organization's specific culture profile; and (3) help participants understand the pathways for accelerated change in high performing organizations through targeted culture change strategies based on the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS). The DOCS, which is based on the premise that people's behaviors are a reflection of the culture of the organization where they work, was presented as a model to utilize for applied research. Session participants were introduced to the DOCS and given an opportunity to learn to use it to determine where an organization needs to focus its energies and to educate leaders, managers, and employees relative to issues of alignment, organizational direction, employee involvement, and sense of validation. Participants were facilitated through an open discussion of case studies, best practices, and success/failure stories. The discussion was guided by implications, applications, future research, questions, and points of interest. (Contains 30 references.) (MN)

A Model for Linking Organizational
Culture and Performance.
Innovative Session 6

Cathy Bolton McCullough

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A Model for Linking Organizational Culture and Performance

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The Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) is a model to utilize as applied research. The premise of the DOCS is that people's behaviors are a reflection of the organizational culture in which they work. By measuring these behaviors we can define an organization's culture. The DOCS, therefore, serves as a diagnostic and planning tool that is comprehensive in its analysis, and assists in defining why an organization is or is not achieving its desired outcomes.

Keywords: Organizational Development, Culture, Systems

Session Description

This session focuses on the entrepreneurial DNA of successful organizations. How to do good work fast is imperative for successful organizations to compete in a global economy of the 21st Century. The entrepreneurial spirit that ignites innovation and the quick use of existing knowledge seems to be lacking in most organizations. This session focuses on a concept and researched model for the formation of active and integrative feedback loops that may catapult organizations into successfully realizing their strategic missions and visions.

The audience will be led by the facilitator in the direction of discovery and insight into the many challenges of organizational design and development, and conclude with a suggested model for framing organizational culture in such a way as to incorporate more successful change strategies.

Presenter

The facilitator for this innovative session is Cathy Bolton McCullough. Cathy is Management Training and Development Specialist with the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education. In this position, she works with organizational consultants across the State of Oklahoma to provide them with cutting edge resources and information on organizational design and improvement mechanisms. Previously, she worked with Meridian Technology Center as Business Management Specialist for eight years. In this capacity, she consulted with individual entrepreneurs in building successful companies, and she consulted directly with larger organizations in the areas of human resources, strategic planning, and organizational development issues and strategies. Cathy is a seasoned facilitator who has worked with executive and supervisory groups one-on-one, as well as in the context of CEO networks. In addition, she has made numerous presentations on business development and management to such organizations as the Academy of Human Resource Development (1995), the Oklahoma Municipal League's Annual Conference (1995), Texas A & M's Regional Conference on Business (1994), and national conferences of the American Business Women's Association (1991, 1992). In addition, she has been an invited guest lecturer for graduate level classes at Oklahoma State University (1998), and panel chair for the annual conference of the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women (1999). She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in Human Resource Development from Oklahoma State University. She is currently co-authoring (January 2001 publication date) an academic textbook entitled *Business Savvy for Today's NEW Entrepreneur*.

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to present a model and supportive research for turning the esoteric nature of culture into a tangible and applicable arena. According to Denison (1996), beliefs drive behaviors. In turn, behaviors drive results. Therefore, it is practical to approach culture via its most direct dimension: how people act.

Models for measuring culture have been abstract, difficult to apply, and extremely slow. Over fifteen years of research involving over 2,000 organizations has produced a model that companies can use to efficiently diagnose cultural strengths and weaknesses, create shared understanding of cultural and business implications for stakeholders

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at all levels, and implement specific, dynamic change pathways for achieving accelerated business results.

Goals

At the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to utilize the following: (1) A working knowledge of the link between business culture and key business performance indicators, including the culture factors behind mission (vision, strategic direction and intent, and goals and objectives), involvement (empowerment, team orientation, and capability development), adaptability (creating change, customer focus, and organizational learning), and consistency (values, agreement, and coordination and integration). (2) A hands-on understanding of the implications of an organization's specific culture profile. The participants will gain clarity on the concept of organizational culture, from data to patterns. In addition, the participants will see the relationship between the culture/business performance paradox and the balancing complexities. A discussion of implications for business leaders, consultants, and academicians will also broaden the scope and objectives for this session. (3) The participants will understand the pathways for accelerated change in high performing organizations through targeted culture change strategies, based on the model presented. Specifically, the model will prepare human resource specialists to turn data into dynamics for change, to see the connection between leveraging culture strengths and addressing culture weaknesses for accelerating change, and to embrace the culture/performance paradox.

Content of Session

Historically, it appears that individuals have been enthralled with the concept of business culture (Clark, 1972; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Pettigrew, 1973; Sathe, 1983, 1985; Schein, 1985, 1989, 1990); however, academia has yet to deliver a clear picture of what constitutes culture and/or the impact of cultural components on business performance. In fact, there have been hundreds of definitions of culture which all proved interesting, but proved of no value to the everyday business manager or CEO.

This session focuses on the Denison Organizational Culture Survey as a model for academia to utilize as applied research. The business applications are intriguing, as the intangible aspects of culture become tangible. Denison's view is that people's behaviors are a reflection of the organizational culture in which they work, and that by measuring behaviors we can measure and define an organization's culture (Denison, 1996).

In addition, Fisher (in *Leader to Leader*, 2000) draws on Denison's connection between culture and business performance and helps leaders develop strategies to support their performance goals.

This session will introduce Denison's research and model for discussion. The findings of his research are compelling and will enable the participants to understand why organizations are or are not achieving the results they want. The model's four basic business culture traits will be presented graphically (on a circumplex). It is this circumplex that provides a diagnostic and planning tool that is both comprehensive and accessible (Denison & Neale, 1996).

Participants will also view Denison's (1996) matrix which exhibits the basic business culture traits (dimensions) relative to their greatest impact at the organizational performance level (see Table 1).

In addition, Fisher's (1997) research that drew on a wealth of data available through the application of Denison's model will extend the group's understanding of the linkages between business culture and business performance (Juechter, Fisher, & Alford, 1998).

Description of Format

The format for this session will begin with an *informative* section using a graphically based front of the room presentation. The goal of this portion of the session is to provide the participants with a knowledge base for understanding the link between organizational culture and human beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. The theoretical framework will be discussed during this portion of the session, and the participants will be introduced to the DOCS.

The second phase of the session is a heavily *interactive* portion that directly engages participants and provides examples of their personal/organizational beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. This portion of the session will emphasize the impact of culture on behavior, and will reinforce the direct link between behaviors and an organization's way of going about its work.

The third portion of the session will focus on application. This is a *creative* portion that calls on the participants to examine specific case studies, map their own individual or organizational beliefs and their impact on

culture, and consider various human performance methodologies to support change in their own organization. This portion allows participants to experience the model presented within a framework that is familiar to each of them.

Table 1. The Link Between Cultural Dimensions and Business Performance Indicators

Profitability	Revenue Growth	Market Share	Innovation	Quality	Employee Satisfaction
...is supported by					
Mission	Mission	Mission			
Involvement			Involvement	Involvement	Involvement
Adaptability	Adaptability	Adaptability	Adaptability		
Consistency				Consistency	Consistency

This innovative session will flow as follows:

5 minutes	Opening activity relevant to beliefs and assumptions
35 minutes	What is culture & why is it important? History of the model The circumplex Elements of the model The four quadrants External vs. internal focus Stability vs. flexibility Center of the circumplex The paradox of leadership, culture, and results Linking culture with business results (i.e., profitability, revenue/sales growth, market share, innovation, quality, and employee satisfaction) Putting it all together: what the research shows (i.e., sample circumplexes)
5 minutes	Audience participation: All participants will complete a circumplex based on their own current work environments. This will provide a framework for active discussion geared around circumplexes that are meaningful to each participant.
25 minutes	Participants will be facilitated through an open discussion of case studies, best practices, and success/failure stories that will be related to the Denison model. Implications, applications, future research, questions, and points of interest will all guide this discussion.
20 minutes	Impact of the model on HRD initiatives General business applications Reference to original activity (at beginning of session) to further internalize the information provided Conclusions, final comments, recap of observations, implications Summation

Theoretical Framework

The corporate world has spent trillions of dollars on change initiatives over the last fifteen years. Customers and employees rate the effectiveness of these change programs at 10% - 20% at best (Ashkenas, 1995). The apparent fact that companies continue to fail in their strategic initiatives (Boyett, 1995) indicates that success variables have yet to be explicitly defined and/or internalized.

Alongside this already unfortunate lack of success in adapting to new strategies come the new rules of business for the 21st Century organization. As technology opens a whole new world for business operations, and completely redefines the foundations of what we know as basic business management practices, how will organizations adapt? As stated earlier, the success rates for new initiatives is already very low. But for the

successful 21st Century corporation, new rules will mean the need for changing the way organizations operate. To change the way organizations operate will require that people within those organizations change their way of doing things. New ways of going about the same work will need to be created. Day-to-day routines may begin to look different. And add to this complex picture the fact that college graduates are beginning to ask for work on their *own* terms. In essence, organizations are on the verge of needing a massive culture change—a change in the way they go about their work and in the way they strive to recruit and retain valuable employees.

The Expectations of Tomorrow's Work Force

Another 21st Century survival issue facing businesses is future workers. Who are they and how do they play a role in redefining business operations?

Labich (1995) noted the changing attitudes of business graduates. He surveyed the 1993 graduate class of Harvard Business School and discovered that the graduates wanted to carve their own niches in the business world rather than slip into opportunities provided by corporations. Further, they ranked salary seventh among the reasons for career choices. Instead, they ranked job satisfaction and level of responsibility as primary concerns, followed by *company culture* and caliber of colleagues. Labich concluded that these graduates feared being pigeonholed into endless jobs with little flexibility in terms of schedules or routines. Labich's article also pointed out that the expectations of future workers were high because they desired positions where they were not required to relinquish their personal lives to business demands. In addition, Labich noted that women entering the work force were the most adamant in demanding workplace flexibility. He quoted a university student who had worked for several years as an auditor for a major firm as stating, "There is a way people are supposed to behave at work...and it's based on a male model that is hundreds of years old" (Labich, 1995, p. 50).

In essence, Labich (1995) concluded that employees want growth, variety, challenge, and careers that involve a high level of social responsibility. He also noted that these future employees expected the companies they worked for to care about them personally and professionally. Their beliefs and assumptions of what constitutes a motivating work environment may differ from the beliefs and assumptions currently held by 'upper management.'

These insights into employee expectations will need to be addressed by future workplaces. These expectations are one more piece of the 21st Century organizational puzzle, and they are pieces that directly impact the way an organization goes about doing its work (i.e., the accepted culture within any given company). Understanding the expectations of tomorrow's work force, and the relevance of these expectations to new organizational paradigms, will help us see the need for change.

The New Paradigms vs. The Old Paradigms

Godfrey (1992, p. 53) compared new and old business paradigms (see Table 2). She pointed out that for these new business considerations to take hold and become the way business is routinely done may mean an upheaval in the way organizations function. Her views are complimented by Lee and Zemke (1993), who said that the shift is from looking at skills and process behavior to examining values, attitudes and beliefs of the organization and its employees. Lee and Zemke pointed out that for change to occur within an organization, it was conceivable that the change must begin with the organization's greatest asset: its people. Hence, they concluded that the gateway from the old paradigm to the new paradigm would be leaders willing to adapt to new ways of doing things, and employees that felt secure enough in the new culture to go about their work differently.

Boyett (1995) summed up the basic business principles of the 21st Century (see Table 3). Businesses in the U. S. may need to adapt to these new business management paradigms in order to viably compete in the future. Yet, Boyett also pointed out that businesses in the U. S. continue to lag in their willingness to change their existing business paradigms. He studied a group of U. S. companies who had reengineered their businesses. Boyett found that 90% of these companies wanted to reduce expenses; less than one-half were successful. He also found that three-fourths of these companies desired production improvement; only 22% succeeded. In addition, Boyett recognized that more than one-half of these companies wanted to improve cash flow; less than 25% succeeded. Significantly, more than one-half of the companies surveyed expected to reduce bureaucracy or speed up the decision-making process; only 15% reported success. Many of the companies also sought improvements in customer service, product quality, innovation, and implementation of new technology; less than 10% succeeded.

Boyett (1995) noted that moving from single centered leadership to multiple centered leadership, from total use of internal sources to outsourcing for expertise, from independent actions to interdependent actions, from vertical directives to horizontal directives, from a uniform structure to a diverse structure, and from an emphasis on efficiency to an emphasis on efficiency with flexibility required a well-versed approach with multiple dimensions

represented and explored. Morrison and Schmid (1994) added to Boyett's findings by noting that actual application is another dimension that requires education, people skills, clear communication, and incentives. Related to this application is the study of organizational culture and its relevance.

Table 2. New Business Paradigms vs. Old Business Paradigms

New Considerations	Old Considerations
Work, live, love, learn	Work, work, work
Seek meaning and money	Seek money—alone
Communication with all	Communication with a few
Responsibility to all	No responsibility
Sustain it	Use it or lose it
Grow naturally	Grow fast
Work <i>and</i> family	Work <i>or</i> family

The Relevance of Culture

According to Fisher and Alford (2000), academic disagreements regarding the issue of organizational culture and its impact on overall company performance are confusing at best. Debates ensue on definitions, as well as how to measure culture, how to develop it, and how to change it. And even if change initiatives could be defined relative to culture, what would this change mean for an organization's business results?

Table 3. Basic Business Principles for the 21st Century

Principle	Definition
The strongest structure is one without walls	Need fewer 'walls' between people, businesses, and customers
Balance of tensions	Remain disciplined, lean, focused; enhance creativity
Creation of new webs	The open corporation is really a school for entrepreneurs
In many cases, the best structure is a temporary one	With outsourcing becoming prevalent, the 'organizational chart' may change from project-to-project
Big is out—small is in	Internal interactions between divisions; no formal hierarchy; spider-web structure

The numerous definitions that have been given to the term *culture* (i.e., Ouchi, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982) over the years perpetuate the continued confusion. And where does this thing called culture come from? Many scholars state that culture simply happens. Others insist that culture is a manifestation of the CEO's leadership style (Petty, Beadles, Chapman, Lowery, & Connell, 1995). Hence, clarity is needed with regard to organizational culture, its relevance to organizational success, and its place in the world of business application.

Fisher and Alford (2000) insist that culture might be the most important variable with regard to creating and supporting sustainable bottom-line results. In addition, Denison (1996) noted that moving the concept of culture from intangible perceptions into the realm of quantitative assessment has, in the past, been met with considerable resistance. Denison insisted, however, that culture affects organizations in basic business dimensions (such as profitability, market share, sales growth, innovation, etc.), and that the question of *how* culture affects these dimensions is the key to understanding an organization's impact, both internally within the organization, as well as externally.

In the early 1980's, research began to quantify and measure organizational culture. A direct aspect of this research was to draw linkages between various cultural dimensions to bottom-line performance (Denison, 1984, 1990, 1996). As a part of this research, Denison began with the view that culture has its roots in deep-seeded assumptions and beliefs held by the given organization in such areas as customer service, competition, employees, etc. Denison believes that these assumptions and beliefs are not transparent, but are manifested in expressed

behaviors. Since they are expressed as behaviors, they are quantifiable. In addition, Denison simplified the definition of 'culture' by bringing it into its most apparent dimension: how people act.

The Denison Organizational Culture Model

Denison's model has been applied to approximately 2000 companies ranging in size from 10 people to more than 300,000 and representing all ages, industries, and business sectors. The model measures four organizational culture traits and plots them graphically on a 'circumplex' (Figure 1). It is this circumplex that allows the model to be utilized as both a diagnostic tool as well as a planning tool (Denison & Neale, 1996).

The four culture traits of Mission, Involvement, Adaptability, and Consistency are defined by Denison as follows:

- **Mission*: the degree to which the company knows why it exists and what its direction is
- **Involvement*: the degree to which individuals at all levels are engaged in the same direction and internalize that direction as their own
- **Adaptability*: the ability of the company to know what customers want and the degree to which it can respond to external forces and demands
- **Consistency*: the ability of the organization's system and processes to support efficiency and effectiveness in reaching goals.

The paradoxes that embrace effective organizational operations are represented within Denison's circumplex. Companies must attend to forces that affect their businesses from the *inside* and the *outside*, to the *short term* and to the *long term* aspects, to things that provide focus and to things that offer flexibility. Denison's model reflects this organizational reality and serves as a starting point to help organizations strategically recognize their strengths as well as their weaknesses (Fisher & Alford, 2000). According to Ray Marshall, former Secretary of Labor, and Marshall Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, "The successful firm is the firm that organizes itself as a learning system in which every part is designed to promote and accelerate both individual learning and collective learning—and to put that learning to productive use" (Gordon, Morgan & Ponticell, 1994, p. 195). The Denison model provides the feedback to do just that.

Organizational leaders frequently face overwhelming challenges. When faced with these challenges, these leaders usually create a new system or process in an attempt to gain control. Champy (1995) reported his interest in management was to assist businesses in improving performance. His premise centered on reengineering functions through leaders by teaching them new paradigms for *operational* processes. According to Champy, reengineering proved to be successful, yet companies still fell far short of their potential. Champy concluded that his revolutionary work omitted an ever-important variable: the people. Reengineering 'work' or operational processes without reengineering the way people work together (leaders, managers, and employees) within a given organization led to less than satisfactory results. Champy concluded that reengineering is the simple realization that the old ways of management (with charts, company schemes and traditional hierarchies) no longer apply. The picture is much more complex than charts and schematics. When change is attempted without an accompanying emphasis on more contextual and systemic changes (such as Denison's mission and involvement dimensions), organizations may well miss the mark (Fisher & Alford, 2000). People, and how they do their work and how they are allowed to do their work, make a difference to an organization's bottom-line performance. In other words, culture matters.

The HRD Link

The Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) provides a direct link between where an organization is and what an organization desires to accomplish. It reveals gaps in perceptions while also providing insight into what an organization is doing well. It highlights where an organization needs to focus its energies, and educates leaders, managers and employees relative to issues of alignment, organizational direction, employee involvement and sense of validation, etc. What leaders and employees at all levels learn about how they are currently getting their overall job done is relevant to the overall success of the organization.

According to Drucker (1992), business organizations need to become contemporary thinkers and realize that it matters whether or not people learn. It matters whether or not people learn the 'why' behind their organization's successes and challenges. It matters whether or not people are provided with continuing education and professional development that are in alignment with the organization's successful functioning. In the words of Lester Thurow (1992), "Competition revolves around the following questions: Who can make the best products?...Who has the best-educated and best-skilled work force in the world?...Without a much better trained

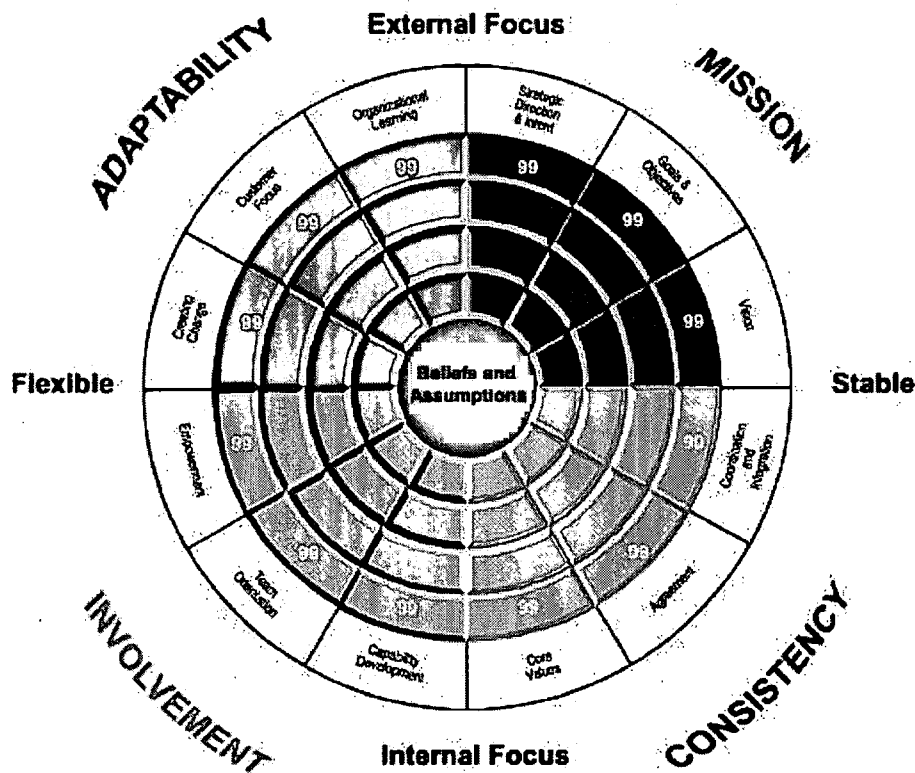


Figure 1. The Denison Organizational Culture Model: The Circumplex

work force, they will not be competitive” (Gordon, Morgan & Ponticell, 1994, p. 194). But knowing what training to provide is what confuses most organizations. Training merely gets shoved into the hands of the Human Resources Department, with no clear sense of *what* training needs to be provided. The DOCS provides insights into training needs that will begin to directly benefit the overall organization in an organized, orchestrated manner that is, therefore, programmed for success.

In addition, Naisbitt (1990) stated that capital is becoming a global commodity. The valuable business component, then, becomes human resources and how well they work together in meeting organizational goals and objectives. Naisbitt concluded, then, that an organization’s competitive edge will be in how human resources are deployed, utilized, retained, valued, nurtured, provided autonomy, a sense of direction, etc. The DOCS provides a roadmap to success and emphasizes the areas human resource professionals need to emphasize in order to strengthen the overall organization and bring all forces into alignment.

The DOCS also plays a direct role in the continuous learning phases of an organization. Human resource professionals are frequently asked to magically employ just the right training mix to fix (almost immediately) all of the organization’s problems. But what if, for instance, innovation is not encouraged within a given organization? What good will training do to teach people innovation if the organizational culture does not respect it? Defining innovation, and what it means to an organization, and how an organization intends to value that quality, will allow for use of vastly untapped human resources. According to Senge (1990) any discipline requires a continuous effort for improvement. He further stated that excellence is never permanent, but that the corporation is always in the state of rehearsing the disciplines of learning and of growing to become better or worse. Hence, the DOCS becomes a tool that can set current reality against the backdrop of what the organization desires to become. And it is a tool that can provide benchmarking data for tracking an organization’s progress over time.

Human resource professionals should require benchmarking, and the benchmarking becomes even more valid if the individual training initiatives can be linked directly to overall organizational performance. The DOCS is a mirror that reflects an organization's soul—the very essence of its nature. Human resource professionals, therefore, don't have to take as much of the blame for all of the organization's problems. The DOCS provides the catalyst for moving forward via the very vehicle that has always moved organizations—its people.

As Fisher and Alford (2000, p. 10) said, "Are you ready for some *culture*?"

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