

# TEAM CULTURE



Greetings to my esteemed readers. My name is Mohammad Deljoo (Coach Mohammad), and I am delighted to share some acquired wisdom about the intricate weavings of team cultures. This study is part of my mentorship program for the American Swimming Coaches Association, which is my last achievement in September 2023 as a Certified Mentor. Understanding the prevailing culture is paramount for cultivating a conducive and harmonious environment in team dynamics. We explore eight distinguished team cultures in this piece, characterized by the equilibrium between the value placed on relationships and the emphasis on productivity and results. As you delve into this exploration, ponder on which culture mirrors the dynamics of your current team and the alterations that can enhance its functionality and harmony.

Best Regards   
Coach Mohammad



COACH MOHAMMAD

## **Abstract:**

In organizational studies, understanding the prevailing culture within a team or program is paramount to fostering optimal functionality and achieving predefined goals. This research article delineates eight general categorizations of program cultures based on the values of relationships and productivity. It aims to give insights into the various cultural dynamics within teams, enabling team leaders and members to introspect and align their cultural practices for enhanced synergy and optimum outcomes.

## **Introduction:**

While acknowledging the uniqueness and intricate differences in every culture, it can be discerned that the cultures within a program can generally be typified into eight predominant categories. These categories are fundamentally characterized by the values placed on productivity, achieving results, and the emphasis on interpersonal relationships and people. By closely examining these cultural archetypes, one can discern their respective teams or programs' inherent culture and strategize on necessary improvements or transformations.

### **1. Corrosive culture**

A corrosive culture is highly toxic and characterized by a lot of conflict, negativity, frustration, cliques, gossiping, distrust, and selfishness. It is not one that is fun to be around, and the turmoil and tension off the pool deck almost surely affect the team during the competition.

From a relationship standpoint, the team is full of cliques that divide, distract, and destroy the team. Rather than battling your opponents, your athletes spend more time fighting each other and the coaching staff because there is little trust. No one is on the same page, working toward the same goal.

From a results standpoint, people become apathetic or even resistant toward the team's stated goals because they lose respect for their coaches or teammates. In corrosive cultures, there is a lot of selfishness. In such a hostile and dysfunctional environment, team members look out for themselves because they don't trust their teammates and coaches.



As the name suggests, corrosive cultures eat away at people's attitudes, commitment, and chemistry, much like caustic acid. Ultimately, people seek to endure and survive in this dysfunctional culture — or escape it whenever possible.

### **Recommendations:**

To counter a corrosive culture, initiating team-building activities that foster trust and collaboration is vital. The emphasis should be on establishing open communication and constructive feedback within the team to dissolve the prevalent negativity and mistrust. Developing and strictly enforcing a code of conduct will be pivotal in addressing and resolving conflicts and fostering a more supportive atmosphere. Also, introducing conflict resolution training will equip team members with essential skills to handle conflicts positively and constructively, mitigating inherent friction and division.

## **2. Country Club Culture**

The country club culture is one of entitlement, appearances, and leisure. This culture's priority is to look good and have a good time rather than win championships. It is a superficial and soft culture that expects little accountability from its members so people can coast. Leadership positions are often not based on merit but on politics, popularity, and payoffs.

A country club culture's currency is more about style than substance. Status in a country club culture is primarily determined by the kind of gear people wear. Results are secondary, and relationships are superficial at best.

### **Recommendations:**

Implementing explicit expectations and goals is crucial in a country club culture, focusing on genuine performance and accountability instead of mere appearances. Incorporating merit-based rewards and recognition systems will promote earnest effort and commitment. Further, introducing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate individual contributions will bolster accountability, ensuring that every member is responsible for their role and contribution to the team's objectives.



### **3. Congenial Culture**

A congenial culture is one where the focus is primarily on getting along and preserving harmonious relationships. The group becomes more of a support group and social club than a high-performance team focused on achieving winning results. It's almost as if the team wants everyone to travel so that someone's feelings aren't hurt.

While most people get along, a congenial culture's primary concern is that it can be too nice and not focused enough on results. Members are very kind to each other but are typically not honest and candid because they worry the truth might hurt feelings or strain relationships. A congenial culture fits well for a fraternity or sorority but not as well for a competitive sports team that wants to win.

#### **Recommendations:**

Teams with a congenial culture should be encouraged to embrace candid and honest feedback and value it over maintaining superficial harmony. A balanced focus on good relationships while achieving high-performance results is pivotal. Introducing clear and consistent performance metrics will be instrumental in objectively assessing individual contributions and fostering a balanced approach to relationships and productivity.

### **4. Comfortable Culture**

A comfortable culture is one where results and relationships are of moderate importance. The team sets reasonable standards and is interested in doing well, but not if it pushes it out of its comfort zone. Swimmers will train to a certain level, but once it gets challenging or uncomfortable, they tend to back off and not push through the natural hard work and fatigue of training.

Similarly, the team generally gets along with relationships, but there are few deep, enduring relationships, and there is no collective sense of mission between the teammates. Comfortable cultures usually produce mediocre results, and teammates and coaches become acquaintances rather than close friends and mentors when it's all said and done.



## **Recommendations:**

Infusing a sense of urgency and a clear mission will challenge teams with a comfortable culture to stretch beyond their comfort zones. Deepening relationships among team members and elevating standards by introducing stretch goals are essential to transitioning the team from mediocrity to excellence, ensuring that comfort does not lead to complacency.

### **5. Competitive culture**

In competitive cultures, there is a strong focus on results and a moderate to minimal focus on relationships. The competitiveness is demonstrated both externally with opponents and internally with teammates. Team members spend a lot of time competing with each other for coaches' attention and leadership roles.

While competition is necessary and can spur outstanding achievement, if taken overboard, competitiveness can also inhibit or destroy relationships within the team itself. You do want a highly competitive team, but you also want them to bond, collaborate, and positively push each other.

## **Recommendations:**

In competitive cultures, fostering collaboration and emphasizing mutual support is crucial. Activities that balance healthy competition with team bonding and mutual respect should be integrated to maintain competitiveness without undermining internal relationships. A strengthened sense of unity and mutual respect will be vital in preventing the detrimental effects of excessive internal competition.

### **6. Cut-throat culture**

In a cut-throat culture, results reign supreme. Talent and performance are the sole criteria of success in this ruthless and unforgiving culture, whereas character and people skills are often neglected. Winning is all that matters. If you can get the job done, we'll overlook your selfishness, extreme character flaws, out-of-the-pool antics, and acerbic attitude. The ends justify the means. If you can't produce due to ineptitude or injury, you are quickly cast aside or cut off from the program.



Relationships are not valued because they are seen as irrelevant and sometimes even a hindrance to achieving results. Because of the business nature of professional sports, where millions of dollars are at stake, some professional teams and even some big-time college programs are prone to developing a cutthroat culture.

### **Recommendations:**

Balancing the emphasis on character and interpersonal skills with performance and results is fundamental for teams with a cut-throat culture. Providing training in people skills and emotional intelligence, coupled with the cultivation of empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives, will usher in a more holistic and supportive environment. Recognizing the value of supportive relationships and mutual respect is essential in this transformation.

## **7. Constructive culture**

A constructive culture has a substantial focus on results and a satisfying focus on relationships. Team members are committed to being successful and are usually willing to put in the hard work necessary to achieve higher levels.

From a relationship standpoint, teammates strive to get along and develop a solid bond with each other. Although the constructive culture is positive, productive, and often successful on and off the playing field, it falls short of the highly intense levels of commitment, chemistry, and accountability you see in a championship culture.

### **Recommendations:**

Teams with a constructive culture should emphasize commitment through shared goals and values and reinforce accountability mechanisms. Building resilient and strong relationships will be crucial in supporting higher levels of achievement and sustaining a positive and productive environment. Fostering a sense of collective responsibility and contribution will be pivotal in achieving optimal functionality.

## **8. Championship Culture**

A championship culture places a premium on results and relationships. From a results standpoint, championship cultures have a strong sense of mission and purpose.



They defined what they wanted to achieve and had a burning desire to achieve it. They are fully designed and aligned to achieve their goals and are focused on success like a laser beam. They have very high standards for the team members and provide them with candid and frequent feedback on how they are doing. They are galvanized for greatness.

In addition to results, championship cultures highly value relationships. Team members treat each other with respect and value the contributions people make to the team, whether large or small. Teammates take pride in their roles because they realize their value to the team and feel appreciated for playing them. Leaders are intentional about building strong relationships within the team to help people feel respected and perform to their potential.

Because they feel appreciated and cared for, team members selflessly subvert their individual goals if they know it will benefit the entire team. They take pride in being a part of something that is so much bigger than themselves. They also tend to enjoy each other's company and forge a strong bond that often lasts a lifetime.

### **Recommendations:**

To maintain a championship culture, it is essential to uphold and continuously elevate high standards of performance and relationships. Focusing on continuous improvement, coupled with the regular celebration of successes and milestones, will keep the team motivated and reinforce the individual value of each team member. Ensuring a sustained emphasis on results and relationships is crucial in maintaining this high-performance culture.

***After learning about the eight types of team cultures, consider which one best describes the current status of your team and what you can do to improve it.***

