UGRs® World Survey

Opening a Window Into Corporate Cultures, Worldwide

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Summary Report

Introduction

In July/August 2003 we set out to conduct the largest ever survey of UGRs[®] (Unwritten Ground Rules) in organisations across the world.

The concept of UGRs, created by Steve Simpson from Keystone Management Services, refers to people's perceptions of 'the way we do things around here'. They constitute an organisation's culture as they dictate what is acceptable and therefore, they dictate people's behaviour.

US based JoAnna Brandi and Company (www.CustomerCareCoach.com) teamed up with Australian based Keystone Management Services (www.keystone-management.com) to design, promote and interpret the results of the survey.

We offered the opportunity to participate to those on the email distribution lists of both companies. A total of 380 responses were received from 19 countries, most of which were from Australia, the US, and the UK.

To gain an insight into the workplace culture in organisations, we invited people to complete the sentence to seven lead-in sentences, by thinking about their own organisation in terms of 'the way we do things around here'.

The lead-in sentences were as follows:

- Around here, customers are…
- Around here, if you've got a problem, the bosses…
- Around here, initiative is…
- Around here, loyalty is…
- Around here, you are valued when…
- Around here, if you are stressed at work
- Around here, excellence is…

Each of the responses was placed into one of three categories, being:

- Positive – the response clearly indicated a positive aspect about the organisation. A response of 'Around here, customers are our top priority' is an example of a positive response
- Neutral – the response was unable to be classified as positive or negative
- Negative – the response indicated a negative aspect about the organisation. An example of a negative response would be 'Around here, if you've got a problem, the bosses don't want to know about it'.

In the summary report that follows, we detail the percentage of responses that were positive, neutral and negative along with sample responses from each of these. In addition, a demographic profile of respondents is provided.

Respondent Demographics

Position in Organisation

Around three quarters of respondents were in management-related positions.

Position	Total	Percentage
Management	289	76.1%
Non-Management	91	23.9%
Grand Total	380	100.0%

Size of Organisation

There was a fairly even spread of respondents with regard to the total number of staff. The largest number of respondents (33.7%) came from smaller organisations (less than 50 staff) while almost 15% were from organisations with more than 1000 staff.

Organisation Size	Total	Percentage
Less than 50 staff	128	33.7%
51 to 250 staff	95	25.0%
251 to 1000 staff	101	26.6%
More than 1000 staff	56	14.7%
Grand Total	380	100.0%

Country

The survey acquired responses from 19 countries, the main three being Australia (59.7%), the US (27.6%) and the UK (6.6%).

Country	Total	Percentage
Australia	227	59.7%
US	105	27.6%
Great Britain	25	6.6%
Canada	6	1.6%
New Zealand	3	0.8%
Argentina	1	0.3%
Switzerland	1	0.3%
China	1	0.3%
Ireland	1	0.3%
India	1	0.3%
Jamaica	1	0.3%

Namibia	1	0.3%
Nigeria	1	0.3%
Norway	1	0.3%
Philippines	1	0.3%
Qatar	1	0.3%
Singapore	1	0.3%
Tanzania	1	0.3%
South Africa	1	0.3%
Grand Total	380	100.0%

Responses

Around here, customers are…

Around here, customers are...	Total
Positive	60.3%
Neutral	14.7%
Negative	24.7%
(blank)	0.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- The archetypal prime importance.
- Great asset
- The people that we satisfy and delight!
- Number one.
- Our top priority!
- Both external and internal. Co-workers are just as important as the outside customer. We do a lot of business over the phones, so it is very important to address calls with a positive and up beat voice/attitude.

Sample Neutral Responses

- Generally easy to deal with but we have our share of upset & frustrated customers
- Considered very important, and most people talk about the internal and external customer. As much as we know the importance of all of our customers, we don't necessarily treat them equally, nor should we. Yet, I believe we could do a better job with them
- Not always right
- Important. Sometimes, feedback is solicited, but many times, the company comes first.
- Usually happy with our service but there are some that can't be helped

Sample Negative Responses

- Lip service is that they are number 1, actual service is not. Patients should be our number one focus, but they are not.
- Supposed to be number one but often times take a backseat to internal models of efficiency
- DEMANDING!
- Seen as money, not relationships.
- Largely ignored.
- Said to come first, but........

Around here, if you've got a problem, the bosses…

If you've got a problem, the bosses…	Total
Positive	54.2%
Neutral	17.1%
Negative	28.7%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- Empower you to sort it out yourself
- Is there to help you work through it and/or give guidance.
- Are available and willing to listen.
- More than willing to work with you to solve it or work with it.
- Want to hear it and talk about the open door policy. They don't like whiners. If the problem concerns customers, the managers band together to solve problems and communicate to all impacted customers.
- Try to help you the best way they know how!
- Want and need to know about it; they are open, receptive, and supportive.
- Are very understanding and helpful

Sample Neutral Responses

- Seemingly very amiable, though I've not yet had a problem.
- Will help you solve them, except for a particular department that can do no wrong.
- Usually want to know about it.
- Would like to be available. We are a small office with less than 40 employees. It's more like a family atmosphere, but since there are few employees, the few bosses are very busy.
- Listen and act or not, depending on their personal agendas
- Will usually address it in my area. It depends a bit on your manager.
- Will usually help
- Will either empathise with you or tell you they don't have time to deal with it right now - depending on who your boss it.
- Sort of help

Sample Negative Responses

- You play the politics
- Will listen but don't always take action.
- If you have a problem, you had better keep it to your self. A boss doesn't want to take the effort to change anything. If you bring it to the larger organisation, it will be turned against you for bringing it up.

- Since the changes began, everyone feels as if they are just a little fish in a huge ocean and are no longer important as individuals
- Tend to agree yet do very little to solve it especially if they would be treading on favourite staff toes
- Forget anything being done about it. Administration doesn't care.
- Don't want to hear about it.
- Mostly focus on proving "blame" rather that looking for a solution

Around here, initiative is…

Around here, initiative is…	Total
Positive	49.7%
Neutral	19.2%
Negative	31.1%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- A rewarded and encouraged attribute.
- Encouraged. New ideas and suggestions are directly solicited by management from all employees.
- Encouraged
- Often listened to.
- Rewarded, praised and encouraged
- Appreciated.
- Encouraged
- Very important. You are expected to take your own initiative if you have a problem or want to make a change.
- Extremely important in order to be noticed and looked upon as a good worker.
- Rewarded.

Sample Neutral Responses

- Usually rewarded, but sometimes there are hurdles/mindsets to overcome.
- Sell, meet the quota (numbers), growth and unification of partner companies.
- Encouraged, flexible, and open-ended; rules concerning initiative are unwritten, but it is up to the individual to take and "mine" opportunities as their initiative.
- Implemented in it's own various ways (depending on the unit which you work in)
- Encouraged and respected by most
- Your own business
- Rewarded with praise, but nothing else.
- Not being afraid to speak up and put own ideas forward
- Used by most staff.
- Usually praised. It depends on your manager.
- Sometimes applauded

Sample Negative Responses

- Initiative is never appreciated because it is always seen as part of your daily work and nothing special to encourage employees to show more initiative. So employees take on an attitude of 'why care and walk the extra mile if nobody appreciates what you
- Being a 'busy-body'.
- Talked about but if you try to show any ....
- Promoted but in politically correct terms. When it comes to implement it, it always depends on people who don't understand your business in New York.
- Not taken as seriously as it could be. Occasionally recognised but not always rewarded.
- Demanded but not rewarded or resourced.
- Neglected
- Accidental rather than deliberately encouraged
- Appreciated but seldom recognized.
- Espoused as a virtue but treated like a violation of conventional wisdom.
- Non-existent in the lower ranks. Upper ranks such as management are never recognized as taking initiative as it is assumed, "part of the job".

Around here, loyalty is…

Around here, loyalty is …	Grand Total
Positive	48.2%
Neutral	24.2%
Negative	27.4%
(blank)	0.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- 110%!
- Fantastic
- Good
- Appreciated
- Expected
- Not as strong as in the past but is still strong.
- Commendable
- Expected
- Fierce.
- Very important to management. Current loyalty is pretty strong but not as strong as I've seen it before.
- Good
- Generally high and viewed as desirable.
- Good but vulnerable to day to day impacts of business frustrations
- Present and palpable

Sample Neutral Responses

- Average. As in most companies, there has been downsizing in our organisation. Loyalty among non-management personnel is not as high as when the company was "in the pink"
- Strong towards the institution, not always to the specific working group.
- In existence but you can always get another job.
- Common, but reducing over the years.
- Is mixed. If you have a caring boss, it's usually fairly loyal. If an insensitive boss, loyalty is not the order!
- Pretty good, but probably not where it should be. Without changes it will never be great.
- Expected.
- 50/50
- A little out of balance, I think the management has more loyalty to the staff than vice versa

Sample Negative Responses

- Low
- Staff loyalty is to keeping the silence because they are all too scared to speak up.
- Not as high as it used to be. Everyone is concerned about covering themselves and not as a group
- Is to their self. Administration has grown this type of attitude, as administration and management only take care of themselves, not their employees or customers (patients).
- Non existent
- Stuck in the mud.
- Declining
- Not recognised as tool
- Not valued at all.

Around here, you are valued when…

Around here, you are valued when…	Total
Positive	71.1%
Neutral	5.8%
Negative	23.2%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- Walk in the door, respected when you act as part of the team.
- Have an individual approach or talent

- You portray a positive attitude, loyalty and do a good job.
- Take the initiative to solve problems and further yourself
- Work as a team member, take initiative, and find creative solutions to improve customer satisfaction and team member happiness.
- Think positively, keep a good attitude and adjust to change openly.
- Know the right people, say the right things to the right people
- Go above and beyond in a major way.
- Show interest in what's going on and try to be involved
- Are a team player
- Show up for work everyday and when you go the extra mile.
- Perform

Sample Neutral Responses

- Please your boss
- They need your help.
- When you do the work assigned to you and stay within those boundaries.
- Save/make money.
- Meet and exceed expectations
- When you comply with the rules
- Come up with a solution to problems or work out how to improve things without rocking the boat too much
- Attract positive media attention
- Are useful. Sad but true.

Sample Negative Responses

- You play the politics
- You're valued if you help keep those in power in power, are usually a man and of course if you make the organisation look good (more difficult to be valued regardless as a woman).
- When you keep your mouth shut, and make the organisation money.
- Only if your a salesperson
- Talk up to the boss or have followed their rules to the letter and haven't stepped outside the playing field.
- Take the initiative to point out your accomplishments....value is not shown enough by upper management and employees don't always feel it.
- Are one of the Executive's favourites. It's mostly not conveyed to the employees.
- Get on with either XXX or XXX. If they don't like you, you're made out to be irresponsible, slack etc
- Keep your mouth shut and do what you\'re told.
- You aren't.

Around here, if you are stressed at work…

If you are stressed at work…	Total
Positive	43.4%
Neutral	13.4%
Negative	43.2%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- There are people to talk to and programs to deal with it.
- You go to lunch, a walk, or talk to a co-worker. Sometimes you talk to your manager if the problem causing the stress is too big to handle on your own.
- There are people who are willing to listen and find ways to improve the situation.
- Thank heaven, you can still get up and walk away from your desk. If professional assistance is needed that is available as well.
- You can get a 15 minute massage!
- Your manager might have a masseuse come in and provide chair massages or you may be coached by a team leader to help you through the stress if you are not whining.
- The management does something special to let you know that you're appreciated!
- People care, take notice, and volunteer to help or offer solutions to minimize actual or perceived difficulties.
- Talk about it. Communicate the bad along with the good.
- You can ask for help and you will get it
- Staff ask if they can help you out.
- Every body is willing to help out.

Sample Neutral Responses

- Co-workers may or may not notice
- I take a break.
- Other people are impacted by it and you may not know it. Stress levels increase and then time off is needed.
- You either don't whinge about it or take a day off
- I go for a short walk or grab a drink and sit away from my desk for a few minutes (normally does the trick!)
- You keep it to yourself, take a walk around the block to think, or confide in a trusted colleague and talk about it.
- You're working in the wrong place!
- .... You can go to your supervisor for help or call on colleagues --- again, the level of support depends on the team you are working in and the level of support from your immediate supervisor.

Sample Negative Responses

- They will try and get rid of you.
- It's the norm
- If you are stressed at work you keep it to yourself and deal with it. We all do two or three jobs due to lack of staff and funding and if you go for any type of counselling or help you are looked at as weak.
- No one in administration or management cares. A few of your fellow workers maybe close enough to give you some support.
- You are expected to deal with it and not take it out on anyone else.
- You "can't handle it"
- Join the club
- No one cares - that's your job and the work piles on with fewer helpers.
- You deal with it on your own. There's not anyone to turn to for help and to discuss the situation with....everyone is too busy to listen.
- Nobody really takes any interest and makes you aware of its impact on others
- Not much is done to help. XXX is quite stressful with all its bitchiness.

Around here, excellence is…

Around here, excellence is…	Total
Positive	51.1%
Neutral	25.0%
Negative	23.7%
(blank)	0.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Sample Positive Responses

- An advocated and practised part of work.
- Rewarded with words of thanks (sometimes, again it depends on the manager). Wage increases are also based on merit.
- Something we always aim to achieve
- Seen everyday. It is how we approach our jobs, our customers, and each other.
- Something highly regarded
- The desired end result.
- The rule, not the exception.
- Rewarded quarterly via a company-wide, employee nominated award for approximately 10% of the company. Dept managers also initiate other dept specific accolades as well.
- Still something to strive for. I don't think we have reached it yet.
- When someone outside the organisation notices you're doing something excellent!
- Encouraged, highlighted and emphasized each and every week.
- Appreciated & acknowledged by all.

Sample Neutral Responses

- Expected, but top management does not always provide a unified priority of resources to pursue excellence. Also, "excellence" is defined differently for different parts of the institution.
- Going above and beyond.
- Stepping outside the box. Coming up with a conclusion that someone else may not have thought about.
- A requirement of survival.
- Patient satisfaction.
- Keeping current customers and getting new ones in the door.
- Knowing the right people
- Helping out co-workers to achieve goals!
- An ideal not a reality.

Sample Negative Responses

- Excellence is a word rarely used in the company.
- Not valued.
- Expected but impossible to accomplish with the roadblocks that pervade our culture and approval processes
- Always sought but seldom recognised
- Talked about a lot but not always demonstrated.
- A concept not really understood....a level of performance delegated to others
- Not the standard by which employees are judged. There are many excellent workers around here but there is still very much a buddy system or rewards and other perks. Keeping out of trouble and occasionally showing positive results
- Rarely existent

Key Points

Most middle and senior managers know that their future rests on the one thing upon which they can truly differentiate themselves – their culture. While products and services can be copied, culture cannot.

The UGRs within an organisation constitute its culture. And the findings from this survey reveal some disturbing features of many organisations worldwide. It has uncovered for example that almost one quarter of people regard customers in a negative way – 'around here, customers are seen as money, not relationships', 'around here, customers are said to come first, but….'

This large proportion of negatively oriented UGRs is real cause for concern. When a sufficiently large proportion of people within a firm are negatively oriented, this can easily spread to those with a more positive outlook.

This issue is further compounded when the 'neutral' responses are considered. Importantly, a neutral response does not indicate a positive aspect of the culture. The table below lists the percentage of negative responses and the percentage of neutral responses which combine to give a percentage of non-positive responses.

Importantly the percentage of non-positive responses is over 50% with regard to cultural issues pertaining to:

- Being stressed at work
- Loyalty at work
- Initiative at work

Lead-in sentence	% of Negative Responses	% of Neutral Responses	Total Non-Positive
Around here, customers are	24.7	14.7	39.4
Around here, if you've got a problem, the bosses…	28.7	17.1	45.8
Around here, initiative is…	31.1	19.2	50.3
Around here, loyalty is…	27.4	24.2	51.6
Around here, you are valued when…	23.2	5.8	29.0
Around here, if you are stressed at work	43.2	13.4	56.6
Around here, excellence is…	23.7	25.0	48.7

These results however should not be overshadowed in those organisations where there is a predominance of positive UGRs – achieved through a consistent focus on quality leadership and the culture itself. Some of the positive responses show evidence of work sites that are not only efficient and productive, but are a joy in which to work.

Lead-in sentence	Percentage of Positive Responses
Around here, customers are	60.3
Around here, if you've got a problem, the bosses…	54.2
Around here, initiative is…	49.7
Around here, loyalty is…	48.2
Around here, you are valued when…	71.1
Around here, if you are stressed at work	43.4
Around here, excellence is…	51.1

These outcomes show that there are some very real opportunities to improve cultures, and to enjoy the multiple benefits that flow from such improvement.

Full Report of the World Survey

This powerful report provides complete, detailed analysis of the largest ever survey of UGRs. You are guided through overall results and then the findings are compared across different demographic groups.

Do managers perceive cultures differently than non-managers? Are there cultural differences based on the size of the organisation? Are there different corporate cultures in different countries?

Importantly, the report then provides strategies you can use to improve your culture using UGRs.

The full report is available at $39 from either of the authors below:

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