

The Cooperative CEO is the Chief Culture Officer

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The cooperative CEO wears more hats than a hat rack! One hat that we don't often think about is that of Chief Culture Officer. A cooperative's culture is kind of that magic glue that binds together its history and values, current competencies and commitment to innovation. The board of directors has key impacts on the cooperative's culture of member participation, governance, board and CEO relationship and risk appetite. The CEO also has a major role in creating and maintaining the cooperative's culture. In many ways the CEO is the energy behind the culture.

The CEO also helps create the culture for the board-CEO teamwork. Perhaps that's just another way of saying that every board eventually gets the CEO it deserves and every CEO eventually gets the board that he or she deserves. The CEO also creates the culture of the work place. By their actions and through their example the CEO communicates to employees what behavior and outcomes are valued, what is rewarded and what is discouraged. The work place culture reflects whether employees are rewarded for what they do, how they do it, or both. It reflects how both individual performance and teamwork are measured and rewarded. The extent to which employees are involved in decision making impacts the culture of offering insights and suggestions. The CEO can also impact the culture of learning and continuous improvement. Opportunities for development are created through access to training, mentoring and cross training. A culture of self improvement is created when the CEO takes the time to actually to sit in on or participate in some of those programs and sessions.

As cooperatives grow and become decentralized culture becomes more difficult to manage. When operations are organized along functional lines the agronomy department may develop a culture that differs from that of the grain department. When responsibilities are split geographically the east branch may have a different culture relative to the west branch or the home office. In a decentralized cooperative it is important for the CEO to interact with employees at every location and level. Conducting weekly one-on-one check-ins with employees rather than yearly reviews takes some extra time and energy but keeps the team focused and feeling valued. The CEO should also create opportunities and activities for employees to interact outside of their functional or location group. Cross-pollination helps abate cliques, creates personal bonds, and builds a unified culture. It also allows employees to learn a little bit about the co-workers that they don't interact with in their day-to-day activities...

The cooperative CEO may not attend the opera or take in an art show but they are still the Chief Cultural Officer. They help develop a culture where employees want to go to work in the morning and that's a culture of success!

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