

How to Determine Workplace Culture

Workplace culture is what makes an organization unique. The work environment includes the values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviors & attitudes. It is the common and collective viewpoint of the people that work at the organization. Many organizations promote workplace culture but often what is said on a website does not match the everyday work experience. Although it seems like a daunting task to determine culture, it is an easy endeavor when you follow these three steps: 1) Determine what workplace characteristics are most important to you, 2) Conduct secondary research to find out which of those characteristics match the culture at your prospective employer, 3) Conduct primary research to confirm your findings and evaluate your options.

1. Determine what workplace characteristics are most important to you.

The first step is to determine to what degree the following characteristics will play a role in identifying a good job and workplace for you. Combined, these characteristics all play a role in determining culture; however, some will affect your job choice more than others.

Start by filling out Column 2 for each of the *Job and Workplace Characteristics* below. Then assign a value for each, from 1 to 5 (5 being the most important for *your* job satisfaction). There are many more aspects of a job and workplace you may want to consider. This is only a short-list to start you thinking. Feel free to add more!

1. Job and Workplace Characteristics:	2. What you are looking for in these characteristics	3. Importance to You:
<i>Example: Workspace design</i>	<i>I need space for teamwork as well as solo work</i>	<i>4</i>
Workspace design		
Teamwork		
Professional development		
Defined career pathways		
Employee interaction		
Balance of work & social expectations		
Intellectual challenge		
Decision-making process		
Employee recognition		
Departmental collaboration		
Supervision style		
Diversity		
Inclusion		

2. Conduct Secondary Research

Many schools and organizations promote their culture on their website. Although a good starting point, on its own, the website may not be enough to fully reflect the culture. Combining a website review with other secondary research can be valuable—and is recommended. Some good secondary sources include the following. Consider reviewing these and taking notes:

1. The career section of the organization's website for indication of those culture aspects & characteristics that are important to you.
2. Recent press releases & news articles on the organization.
3. LinkedIn profiles of those in positions you are seeking.
4. Comments on sites like Glassdoor.

3. Conduct Primary Research

Using LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media and networking sites, try to connect with people familiar with the organization you are targeting to confirm your research. Reach out for informational interviews with both current and past employees, if possible, and frame your questions in a behavioral context ("what is an example of...", "when was the last time you...", etc.) to get the most honest and helpful answers.

Job and Workplace Characteristics by Importance to You:	Research You Did:	Questions You Might Ask:
e.g., Professional Development	e.g., KIPP features continuous learning on their website & has a model for excellent teaching but not specifics on how the continuous learning is supported.	e.g., What was the last professional development session focused on the KIPP model of Excellent Teaching? How has this experience helped you develop?