

# LUNCH & LEARN

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topics  
to keep  
DDC HQ  
employees  
informed



## Climate and Culture – what is the difference?

*By Stacy L. Umstead, DDC Command Affairs Office*

It has become common at the Defense Distribution Center (DDC) to identify the DLA survey as the “Climate Culture survey,” but did you know there was a difference between climate and culture and the surveys that measure them?

At a recent Lunch & Learn session, DDC Headquarters employees found out there was a difference when Kevin Cummings, Transformation Office Chief, provided an insightful brief.

“There is a distinct difference in an organization’s climate and its culture,” said Cummings. “The intent of the DLA climate survey is to assess the working environment, job satisfaction, capture demographics, identify diversity issues, and assess effectiveness of various programs within an organization.”

“The culture portion of the survey is to assess the set of behaviors and beliefs that guide the organization, provide direction for future organizational improvements, and focus on elements that drive performance,” said Cummings.

So why is culture so important to an organization? According to Cummings, “Organizational effectiveness is fundamentally founded on its culture.”

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Professor Edgar Schein defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”

Therefore, when we talk about culture we are really referring to an organization’s ability to effectively solve its own problems. In order for an organization to be effective it must be able to solve the problems it faces from both the external and internal environments.

Cummings further explained the Denison Culture Model and the key questions the organization has to ask itself. “The culture survey is divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant is represented by three traits and



*Kevin Cummings, DDC Transformation Office, briefs Climate/Culture at a recent Lunch & Learn session.*

each trait is ultimately defined by five survey questions. Therefore, as a whole, the sixty questions represent an organization’s culture.”

The four quadrants and the questions an organization needs to ask itself to assess whether it is effective are: Adaptability: Are we listening to our customer? Mission: Do we know where we are going? Involvement: Are our people aligned and engaged? Consistency: Does our organization act as one?”

DLA adopted the Denison Culture model and survey to reinforce the customer focus found in DLA’s Strategic Plan and DDC’s Balanced Scorecard. The model provides tools to assess how well DLA’s culture and leaders support its transformation to a customer-focused organization with the objective of creating and maintaining a culture that promotes trust, teamwork, and workplace excellence.

Cummings reflected on DDC’s climate and culture history and where it is headed. “The results of the last survey conducted in the fall of 2004 showed that DDC needed to focus on leadership, teamwork and communication. Since then, DDC has worked very hard to improve its culture with initiatives such as the establishment of the Transformation Office, the Executive Leadership Program, Leadership Academy, the new supervisory selection process, executive coaching, focus groups, mini surveys, screen savers, and Lean.”

DDC employees completed this year’s survey in March. “Initial indicators reflect that DDC had a high participation rate for this latest survey. We’re looking forward to seeing if the results reflect the progress we have made toward becoming a superior organization,” said Cummings.

Once the results are received this summer, supervisors will share them with their workforce.