Creating a Customer Focus
Chartered Management Institute Open Learning Programme

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CREATING A CUSTOMER FOCUS

Second edition

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Series Editor: Kate Williams
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Series overview

The Chartered Management Institute Flexible Learning Programme is a series of workbooks prepared by the Chartered Management Institute and Elsevier for managers seeking to develop themselves.

Comprising ten open learning workbooks, the programme covers the best of modern management theory and practice. Each workbook provides a range of frameworks and techniques to improve your effectiveness as a manager, thus helping you acquire the knowledge and skill to make you fully competent in your role.

Each workbook is written by an experienced management writer and covers an important management topic or theme. The activities both reinforce learning and help to relate the generic ideas to your individual work context. While coverage of each topic is fully comprehensive, additional reading suggestions and reference sources are given for those who wish to study to a greater depth.

Designed to be practical, stimulating and challenging, the aim of the workbooks is to improve performance at work by benefiting you and your organization. This practical focus is at the heart of the competence based approach that has been adopted by the programme.

Introduction

These days most organization’s recognize that they won’t exist without satisfied customers. They have to shape their products and services to their customers needs. Customers are increasingly demanding, sophisticated and notoriously fickle as suppliers compete and clamour for their business. Your organization is not likely to be the only one offering the product or service your customers need. Winning business is hard work and it takes so little to lose it. Unless you keep in touch with your customers, you may lose their business and never know why it happened.

Research by the White House Office of Consumer Affairs in the USA discovered that 96 per cent of dissatisfied customers did not complain about poor service, but simply took their business elsewhere.
Frederick Harmon and Gary Jacobs’ study into the profitability of companies in their industrial groupings in the Fortune 500 list of companies showed that companies who had customer satisfaction as a priority issue in their mission statement were more profitable over a 5-year period than companies who placed profitability at the top of their list.

Your aim and the aim of your organization should be to give your customers what they want in the first place and, if that fails, to get them to tell you and not their friends about it so that you can put it right. This is true of every interaction in business. Organizations not only have to say that they are working to meet customer needs, they have to demonstrate it. Being customer-driven is an attitude and an approach to working which has to permeate the whole organization. Taking a ‘customer focus’ onto the same old way of working is not enough. The whole process may need to change.

Organizations also recognize the cost-benefits of being able to retain existing customers through providing good customer service, rather than solely focusing on activities which will bring in new customers. As described in ‘Relationship Marketing’ by Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne1.

‘By placing too much focus on marketing activities directed at new customers, companies often experience the ‘leaking bucket’ effect, where customers are being lost because insufficient marketing activity generally and customer service specifically, is being directed to them.’

This workbook explores how organizations put customers at the heart of their thinking and their organizational planning and procedures. As a manager you need to understand the requirements of customers and the, often conflicting, demands of relevant stakeholders as well as the environments in which the organization is operating. Understanding the ‘bigger picture’ will enable you to make better informed decisions when planning the day-to-day operations of your part of the business.

**Objectives**

By the end of the workbook you will be better able to:

- Understand the internal environment of your organization by:
  - understanding its mission and values, structure,
  - recognising its stakeholders, structure and culture.
- Recognize what shapes your customer expectations.
- Recognize the root causes of customer dissatisfaction.
- Identify your customers and their requirements.
Identify strengths and weaknesses in your organization.
Identify opportunities and threats in the wider environment.
Recognize the components of a marketing plan.
Implement an improvement plan to improve customer service.
Encourage feedback from customers.
Use feedback received from customers.

Reference

Introduction

Organizations exist to serve their customers. If customers aren’t satisfied then the organization will cease to exist.

As shown in Figure 1.1, the relationship between customer satisfaction and survival in the private sector is obvious; if customers aren’t happy they’ll go elsewhere. In the public sector and not-for-profit sector organizations the relationship between customers and the organization’s existence is less direct, but equally strong in days when taxpayers or funders demand proof of the quality of services of provided, and customers protest loudly if their needs are not met.

Figure 1.1  Funding in the different sectors (figure adapted from Managing without profit, Mike Hudson, page 35, Penguin 1995)
However, before you can understand your customers, and ensure their satisfaction, you need to understand your organization and your place in it. Inevitably it forms the foundation for how you and the rest of the organization interact with customers. Understanding the ‘bigger picture’ will enable you to make better informed decisions when planning day-to-day operations in your part of the business. It will also enable you to see your customers more clearly and interact with them more effectively.

This section looks at:

- **What business are you in?**
- **What are its mission and values?**
- **Who are its stakeholders?**
- **What type of organizational structure do you have?**
- **How would you define its culture?**

### What business are you in?

Traditionally the answer to this question may have been *business-specific*, e.g. ‘the transport business’ or ‘food production’. Nowadays successful organizations are in the business of satisfying customers; anything else contributes to that overall aim.

So, what does your organization offer to customers? All organizations take a series of resources (e.g. people, raw materials, equipment, knowledge about customers) and, through a series of processes, transform them into services and products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs (i.e. resources)</th>
<th>Processes (all the activities which go on inside the organization)</th>
<th>Outputs (services or products)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Outputs should always be defined as what is offered to the customer as a result of the process. Take, for example, a call centre responding to enquiries. The inputs would include the building, equipment and people. The processes would include training, systems and procedures for making and responding to calls, personnel processes; in fact anything that contributes towards the output of responding to customer queries effectively and efficiently.

This input/output model can be applied to any level of activity within an organization. However, the outputs should always contribute towards customer satisfaction. For some processes this might be an ‘internal customer’
i.e. someone within the organization who directly receives the products and services from you or your department. For example, if you are responsible for providing certain information to another department then the other department has become your customer.

**ACTIVITY 1**

Define your organization generally in terms of inputs and outputs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>➔</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>➔</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
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</table>

Now define your part of the organization/department in terms of inputs and outputs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>➔</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>➔</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
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**FEEDBACK**

The idea of the ‘internal customer’ is not new and you may already be aware of the principles that lie behind the concept of quality management where ‘everybody has a customer, everybody is a customer’. Both external and internal customers are of equal importance and the same principles of ensuring customer satisfaction apply to both groups. Your primary focus should also be on the next group in the value chain – those who directly receive the products and services from you.
What are its mission and values?

Every organization needs a clear sense of purpose or direction. It needs to look into the future and ask itself what it wants to achieve. The answer results in a statement which summarizes the organization’s long-term goal, purpose or mission. For example:

**OXFAM’S PURPOSE**

‘Oxfam works with others to overcome poverty and suffering’

www.oxfam.org.uk

**GLAXOSMITHKLINE, MISSION STATEMENT**

‘To improve quality of human life by enabling people to do more, feel better and live longer’

www.gsk.com

The mission statement should be broad, general and long term. As Gordon Oliver⁴ (1986) puts it:

‘At the highest level the organization’s purpose is defined by its mission. This gives very broad guidelines about what the organization wants to be in the future’

Many organizations also have a set of values or beliefs which are used as guiding principles when making decisions. Michael Armstrong² (1990) links mission and values as follows:

‘The mission of an organization expresses its sense of purpose – the business the enterprise is in and the broad direction in which it is going.

A value system expresses basic beliefs in the behaviour which is believed to be good for the organization and in what the organization considers to be important. It is expressed in a value statement.

The purpose of a value system is to help to develop a value-driven and committed organization which conducts its business successfully by reference to shared beliefs and an understanding of what is best for the enterprise. Value statements are closely associated with mission statements and like them can be used as levers for change, getting people to act differently in ways which will support the attainment of the organization’s objectives.’
Thomas J. Watson, chief executive of IBM distilled the company’s values into just three instructions:

- Give full consideration to the individual employee.
- Spend a lot of time making customers happy.
- Go the last mile to do things right.

The Starbucks mission statement

The Starbucks mission statement is more than words on a piece of paper – it’s the philosophy that guides how we do business every day.

Establish as the premier purveyor of the finest coffee in the world while maintaining our uncompromising principles while we grow.

The following six guiding principles will help us measure the appropriateness of our decisions:

- Provide a great working environment and treat each other with respect and dignity.
- Embrace diversity as an essential component in the way we do business.
- Apply the highest standards of excellence to the purchasing and fresh delivery of our coffee.
- Develop enthusiastically satisfied customers all of the time.
- Contribute positively to our communities and our environment.
- Recognize that profitability is essential to our future success.

www.starbucks.co.uk

ACTIVITY 2

What is the mission statement of the organization you work for? (If you do not have one use/find one from another organization.)

- Is it short enough to be memorable.
- Is it fully communicated and understood throughout the organization.
- Does it provide focus and direction.
- Does it engender a sense of purpose, pride and commitment.
- Does it enable people to make their own decisions with the confidence that they know what is right for the organization?
It should be useful to refer to your organization’s mission or values when a decision has to be made. Asking, ‘Will this really contribute towards what we are trying to achieve?’ can give a helpful focus in the decision-making process. An effective mission should motivate and inspire as well as provide guidance and direction.

Once the direction for an organization is set, everything that the organization does should contribute towards the achievement of that goal. For example, if an organization’s mission statement refers to it being committed to ethically sound investments, it is not going to diversify into the tobacco industry.

ACTIVITY 3

What practical examples do you have of:

- Daily practices of your organization aligning with the values it aspires to?
- Daily practices of your organization contradicting the values it aspires to?

It takes very strong leadership within an organization to ensure that values act as guiding principles in practice. If senior managers and directors ensure that the principles guide their actions then it is likely to filter down through the organization.

Who are its stakeholders?

There are usually a range of stakeholders within any organization – people who have a vested interest in the organization and who also place demands on it.

Stakeholders include employees, suppliers and customers. Customers include any end-user of the products or services, e.g. people who buy goods and services from commercial concerns, pupils in schools, patients in hospitals or...
those who benefit from charities. Equally most organizations have an impact on their local communities – as a source of employment (a positive impact) or as a source of noise, congestion and pollution (a negative impact).

Stakeholders can be divided into two main groups, contractual stakeholders and other interested parties.

**ACTIVITY 4**

Consider the stakeholders listed below. Tick the appropriate box if they are relevant to your organization. See if you can summarize what their vested interest is. For example, if shareholders are involved their vested interest might be for the share price and dividends to increase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contractual stakeholders:</th>
<th>Vested interest:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☑ Shareholders (for the private sector)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Employees/volunteers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Members (if a membership organization)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Customers/clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Suppliers</td>
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<tr>
<td>☑ Lenders</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other stakeholders:</th>
<th>Vested interest:</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>☑ Government</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☑ Regulators</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☑ Electorate</td>
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<td>☑ Public</td>
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<td>☑ Pressure groups</td>
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<td>☑ Media</td>
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</table>
Your responses may highlight conflicting interests, or at least tensions, between different stakeholders. For example:

- Customers may have a vested interest to maintain a service; an organization may decide that it needs to reduce costs by closing the service to focus on areas which are more consistent with its mission or more profitable.
- Regulators may want an organization to implement procedures or achieve set standards; employees may feel constrained or frustrated by these external demands.

**ACTIVITY 5**

Now consider your area of operation. Identify the stakeholders who have a vested interest in what your department does. Are there any conflicts of interest which impact on the work you do?

Conflicts can gradually erode the motivation of your team members. It’s essential that they are confronted and resolved wherever possible.

**What type of organizational structure is there?**

Organizational structure is defined by Wilson and Rosenfield (1990) as being:

> ‘the established pattern of relationships between the component parts of an organization, outlining both communication, control and authority patterns. Structure distinguishes the parts of an organization and delineates the relationship between them.’

Structures are about the way people are grouped together into departments, divisions, operating areas. Although many organizations are ‘delayered’ and have become flatter in recent years they are still typically hierarchical with
lines of authority running down the layers. In these types of organizations there will be a small number of directors and senior managers with responsibility for leading the organization and developing its strategy to evolve into the future. Underneath this layer will be the middle managers responsible for strategy implementation through the layer of junior managers below. It is the junior managers or supervisors who interface with the front-line staff and, having detailed knowledge of operations, can substitute with operational staff as required.

Usually individual directors will have responsibility for different functions within the organization, e.g. sales, production, marketing, finance, etc. In larger organizations separate operating companies may be formed under the overall organization (Figure 1.2).

Satisfying customers is likely to be easier in smaller organizations than in larger ones. In March 1994, 800 managers took part in a survey of managers’ attitudes to customer care. It was clear from the results that managers in general rate emphasis on customer care very highly, although the extent to which their organizations shared this view was not so clear. Interestingly, the same report shows that managers from large organizations had noticed this change in emphasis in their work, while those from small companies (fifty staff or fewer) did not share that perception. The report suggests that:

‘… these smaller concerns have improved customer care over the past three years and will continue to improve it, but are doing so instinctively. They may not have a formal care programme in place, but they do care – it is perhaps natural rather than forced. The smaller the business, in terms of staff numbers, the easier it is likely to be able to manage it from the perspective of customer care …’
In a smaller organization, staff members are more likely to have fewer customers and therefore to know their contacts personally. This key fact makes it easier to keep their requirements in mind while working on a project for them. Larger organizations have lately made an effort to personalize their project teams and to educate their staff to ‘think customer’, but it cannot work if the practices are not customer-focused and if the team members do not know who their customers are.

Many organizations are moving away from this type of traditional structure. In his book *The Age of Unreason* Charles Handy describes a ‘shamrock’ organization. The three leaves of the stem of a shamrock (a small clover-like plant) represent the following three groups of people enabling many modern organizations to succeed:

- The highly committed, mainly professional ‘hard core’ employee of the organization. In return for high rewards the organization demands total commitment and long hours.
- Groups to which work, traditionally done in-house, is contracted out to small organizations or free lance workers, e.g. IT function, training function, production.
- Part-time, short contract workers employed by the organizations but on a purely flexible basis to meet demand when it’s needed.

**ACTIVITY 6**

Describe briefly the structure of your organization. To what degree is it hierarchical? Does it resemble Handy’s ‘shamrock’ organization?

**FEEDBACK**

Organizational structures are changing. The description in Handy’s book of the shamrock organization, first published in 1989, is becoming a reality for more and more people. Along with new structures come different issues and different challenges for management. The need to be flexible and accept change as the norm is a basic requirement for most managers.
What about culture?

We can define culture as:

*A set of behavioural or attitudinal norms, to which most or all members of an organization subscribe, either consciously or unconsciously, and which exert a strong influence on the way people resolve problems, make decisions and carry out their everyday tasks.*

*Clutterbuck and Grainer*[^6]

Or more simply:

*The underpinning values which determine the way we do things around here.*

There are six factors which are commonly influence culture:

**History and ownership**  Long-established organizations will demonstrate a culture accrued over time and based on what has been successful historically. They will tend to have a more formal culture than newer organizations. Family firms are likely to be more centrally controlled, public companies more bureaucratic or formal.

**Size**   Larger organizations tend to be more formalized, specialized and systematically co-ordinated. Many large organizations are currently trying to avoid the influences of size through decentralization.

**Nature of work**   Routine tasks are likely to result in a formalized culture. Non-routine activities are better supported in a relaxed and empowering environment.

**Goals and objectives**   An emphasis on productivity and profitability is likely to lead to a formal culture with rules and procedures to standardize and control and a multilevel ‘pyramid of authority’. Emphasis on innovation will more probably lead to greater delegation.

**The environment**   This heading includes the economic, market and competitive environments and the geographical and social environment. Rapidly changing environments demand a culture that encourages flexibility. Differences in national culture will determine aspects of organizational culture such as the importance of the individual, the distribution of decision-making power between levels of authority, national approaches to uncertainty and the level of emphasis on task achievement on one hand and interpersonal relationships on the other.
The people  Many organizations have found that cultural change can often be frustrated by the attitudes and expectations of the workforce. Consequently, unless an organization is in the improbable situation of being able to recruit a brand new workforce, its culture will need to reflect the tolerance for ambiguity, security needs, expectations of personal identity and individual skills and talents of its existing workforce.

The culture of an organization is difficult to define. It’s something you instinctively become aware of by working. For example:

- What type of clothes are worn?
- Are car parking spaces reserved for senior management?
- Are there set times for coffee breaks?
- How are people rewarded?

In his book *Understanding Organizations*, Charles Handy identified four types of organizational structures leading to four distinct cultures. These were:

- **Power culture** – This culture is typical of small entrepreneurial organizations. There is a central power source, with rays of power and influence spreading out from a central figure. In a power culture relationships are very important, communication is direct, there are few rules or procedures and the atmosphere is highly political. They respond rapidly and positively to change because they have the ability to move quickly and can react well to threat or danger, because the person at the centre will take decisive action, give orders and make things happen. Handy pictured the structure of a power culture as a web.

![](image)

- **Role culture** – in a role culture it is people’s job roles that drive the organization – roles become more important than individuals. A role culture is based on logic and reason. Handy saw the structure of a role culture being like a Greek Temple with the organization’s functions being represented by the pillars. Its strength lies in the pillars of the temple – the organization’s functions, finance, purchasing, production, legal. The work of the pillars and the interactions between them are controlled by rules and procedures – job descriptions, limits of authority, operations manuals and so on. Role cultures offer security and predictability to the individual. They offer a predictable
pattern and rate of advancement up a pillar, but they are slow to change even if a need is seen.

- **Task culture** – getting a job done is a priority in a task culture. Often organizations set up project teams to work together. Handy portrays the structure of a task culture as a net.

  ![Task culture diagram]

A task culture succeeds by bringing together small groups of people, with the right expertise and leaving them to get on with things. It is a team culture, highly adaptable, in which individuals have a high degree of control over their work, performance is judged on results and respect depends on ability rather than seniority or status. Project teams put together to work on specific tasks often work in this way.

- **People culture** – This is where individuals are the central focus and bind together for their own self interest. For example in a consultancy or partnership. Although this culture, by definition, won’t exist in organizations, Handy points out that there may be people working in organizations who may prefer the autonomy that a person orientation brings, e.g. a professor at a university, or a doctor in a hospital may be reluctant to be managed through the organizational hierarchy. Handy represented this type of culture by a ‘cluster’ of people, not linked but bound by a circle.

  ![People culture diagram]
ACTIVITY 7

How would you describe the culture of your organization? Include reference to:

- Structures
- Authority
- Power
- Routines and rituals
- Symbols.

FEEDBACK

It’s important to be able to recognize when issues or problems are down to cultural factors. You can’t fight the culture of an organization but you can recognize and acknowledge its influence and also seek to operate differently within your team, if necessary.

A marketing culture

This involves putting customers at the heart of an organization’s thinking. Many organizations are striving to introduce a marketing culture but it can be difficult.

Difficulties in managing the introduction of a customer-orientated culture:

- Managers fail to realize or understand the true concept.
- The structure of the organization may require changing and this can lead to other managers’ resistance and costs.
- People are frightened and reluctant to change.
- The power struggle between the different departments within an organization can hinder the process, e.g. the production department.
- In some organizations the responsibility for marketing strategy and implementation are separated, and this may offer many problems.

There is a lot of confusion about the term ‘marketing’ with many people equating it with ‘selling’ or ‘promoting’. Put simply, a marketing culture focuses on customers. An organization that adopts a marketing culture puts the customer at the centre of all business decision-making and planning, and not just marketing department decision-making and planning. A company with this culture is said to be ‘marketing-oriented’ or ‘customer-centred’. In order to understand the meaning and implications of being marketing-oriented we need to briefly examine the background to the development of the marketing concept and the distinction between a marketing- versus a production-oriented, product-oriented, or sales-oriented company.

**ACTIVITY 8**

A company can be:

- Production-oriented
- Product-oriented
- Sales-oriented
- Marketing-oriented

Using the following statements, can you identify which of these four possible orientations for a company best fits the organization described below by each statement. Read each of the descriptions and then place a number to indicate the following:

1. This company is marketing-oriented
2. This company is sales-oriented
3. This company is production-oriented
4. This company is product-oriented.

**Company A**

‘We believe that our products are the most innovative on the market. Our quality is second to none and we’ve gone all out to develop the best design team in the business.’

Number ____

**Company B**

‘Our salespeople understand how to get the customer to sign on the dotted line. Most customers really want to purchase our product when they see it; they just need a little push to make up their mind.’

Number ____
Company C
‘Customers can be very fickle sometimes. We’ve just had to change a specification because the customer wanted something else at the last minute. This also affected our production schedules and our delivery department, and everything had to be recosted. Still at least everyone pulled together on this one.’

Number _____

Company D
‘The customer can have any colour so long as it’s black.’

Number _____

FEEDBACK

Company A is product-oriented; the attitude is that a good product will sell itself. The attitude in company B is that aggressive hard selling is all that is required – it is sales-orientated. Company C is marketing-oriented; the attitude is that even though it is sometimes difficult, everyone in the company must try to satisfy the customer. Company D is production-oriented. The attitude is characterized by an almost exclusive focus on production efficiency and effectiveness.

Of course some of you will have recognized in Company D our old friend Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company. Allegedly Henry Ford was said to have uttered this much quoted phrase about the world’s first mass-produced motorcar. At the time, the 1920s, Ford’s major concern was with the problems of producing cars in sufficient volume and at a price the huge latent mass market, which he rightly perceived to exist, could afford. The colour of his cars therefore mattered little to Henry Ford other than the fact that only producing one colour enabled both output to be greater and prices to be lower. Interestingly, at the time, Ford’s focus on production rather than the colour preferences of his customers was right. Customers at the time were less interested in colour than in availability and affordability. Henry Ford’s approach was right for the time.

This is an important lesson to learn. The need to be customer-centred (Company C in our example) is a function of competitive conditions now faced by companies. Put another way, needing a marketing orientation is the result of a gradual process of evolution that many, if not all, companies have passed through as societies, manufacturing economies, and customers themselves have evolved.
ACTIVITY 9

To what degree do you think your organization is successful in the process of putting customers at the heart of its thinking?

To what extent do stakeholders help or hinder this process?

To what extent does the organizational structure help or hinder this process?

To what extent do the mission and values help or hinder this process?

FEEDBACK

The philosophy behind a marketing orientation is relevant to organizations in all sectors and to providers of services as well as products. Putting the customer at the heart of what is done applies equally to a hospital, provider of social housing or a charity providing any form of service or product.
Learning summary

- Managers need to understand the internal environment of their organization.
- All organizations are in the business of satisfying customers.
- Every organization needs a clear sense of purpose or direction.
- Any organization has a number of different stakeholders, often placing conflicting demands on the organization.
- Structures are about the way people are grouped together into departments, divisions, operating areas. They affect how the organization operates and impact on the culture.
- Culture is about how things are done in an organization.
- A marketing culture puts customers at the heart of organization’s thinking.

Into the workplace

You need to:

- Understand the internal environment of your organization by:
  - understanding its mission and values, structure,
  - recognizing its stakeholders, structure and culture.

References