

ALED 342 Learning Organizations
LEARNING APPLICATION: MENTAL MODELS Case Studies

Directions: Read the 2 short cases included in this Learning Application. Answer the questions for each case and bring your prepared responses to the assigned class.

CASE #1: What Might Happen

You are a member of an internal team created by the New Aggie T-Shirt Company to handle a situation regarding flextime hours. Two months ago, the New Aggie T-Shirt Company offered their 100 full-time employees the opportunity to have flexible schedules through a flextime program.

The guide lines set for the onset of the program are:

- All full-time employees are eligible
- Employees must work 8 hours/day
- Employees must take a 45-minute lunch break
- The organization must be staffed between their office hours of 7:00AM – 6:00PM

Unfortunately, 90% of the employees opted to work from 7:00AM to 3:45PM. This situation is impossible to accommodate because of insufficient personnel to provide services from 3:45PM to 6:00PM.

1. What are 3 examples of mental models that you believe your employees may believe?

2. What are 3 new mental models of work hours that you can present to the employees?

3. Using the techniques you have learned about change, how would you present these new mental models to your employees?

4. What deeply held beliefs led you to your solutions?

CASE #2 What Really Happens

Directions: Read the article following the questions. The title of the article is “Cracking Your Next Company's Culture How to make sure that new job is a good fit,” *Fast Company*, [Issue 99](#), October 2005, Page 85, Danielle Sacks. After you have read the article, bring your responses to the assigned class.

1. What are the mental models that are listed as mistakes in seeking a job?
2. List 2 of the ways you can assure you fit the mental model of the company you are considering for your post-college position?
3. What is a question you can use to gauge the company culture (mental models held within the company)?
4. What are the mental models you are seeking for your post-college position?

Cracking Your Next Company's Culture How to make sure that new job is a good fit.

From: [Issue 99](#) | October 2005 | Page 85 By: Danielle Sacks

Here's what not to do: Dress up like the FedEx dude and eavesdrop on a prospective employer's meetings. Or spike your potential coworkers' coffee to get them dishing on the boss.

We understand the temptation. We've all said yes to what we thought would be our dream job, only to discover that by the time we have our security-card photo taken that it looks very different on the inside. But unless you'd like the cops involved, such covert tactics are hardly the way to complete the picture.

Sure, any smart job hunter does the standard detective work: Dissect a company's annual reports, track down former employees, and Google the new boss to make sure there aren't hate sites devoted to his name. But there are other stealth (and very legal) ways to get beyond the glossy surface and make sure any potential employer's sales pitch matches up with reality. "When you're interviewing for a job, you're typically thinking about your new title, the big-name company, and the money it will bring you," says Billie G. Blair, a Los Angeles-based organizational psychologist and management consultant. "What you really should be doing is stepping back from that and paying attention to all the small things." So rev up those five senses. You'll need them to weed out the nightmare jobs and find the one that's the perfect fit for you.

1. The office is your fishbowl

In 2001, Mary Dondiego walked into Connect Public Relations, a firm in Provo, Utah, for an interview, and was immediately startled by the office's overwhelming silence. "There was basically one large room where I couldn't see anyone's head over the cubicles," she recalls. "I thought that was weird initially, but I shrugged it off." Her hunch proved right. Coworkers who sat right next to her emailed instead of talking, and she found the culture stifling and compartmentalized. (Connect's founder and president, Neil Myers, says the firm has a "hard-working, heads-down" culture that's not right for everyone.).

Dondiego, now a PR manager at a consulting company, should have paid heed to the cultural cues she spotted during that first visit. "You're looking for the tone of the people, how they're dressed, how they interact with one another," says Liz Ryan, founder of WorldWIT, a networking community for women. "The lobby is a wonderful fishbowl into the culture." In fact, Ryan recommends intentionally arriving for an interview 20 minutes early to eavesdrop on everything from what employees say to the receptionist to the gossip in the restrooms.

While you're there, be sure to get the grand tour, taking a few mental snapshots of your new boss's office, says Don Townsend, a recruiter whose clients include Cisco and AT&T. "If you don't give a hoot about politics and you've gone through three interviews and everyone has pictures of politicians in their office, you might question whether it's a good fit for you."

2. Give the cab-driver test

No matter how closely you scrutinize your boss's office walls, scrutinizing her is another game entirely. She'll be on her best behavior, making it all the more important to get her

out from behind her mahogany desk. "Try and establish a situation that's informal," such as lunch or coffee, says Townsend. Not only do your chances of more personal conversations increase, he says, but seeing her interact with others will give you insight into her character. "If the person you're going to work for treats waiters and cab drivers badly, you can pretty much figure that at some point he or she is going to treat you the same way."

Sophie Wade, now a senior vice president at media agency NTM, reaped the benefits of meeting a former boss for the first time in a restaurant. "I sat down, he looked at my resume and goes, 'Is Interpol after you?' " laughs Wade, who had worked in cities spanning from Hong Kong to Paris. "It started off on a lighter foot, showing a very quirky, amusing side to his personality." Wade believes the relaxed ambience enabled her to see she'd have a worldly, challenging boss. Her gut was right. She still keeps in touch with him four years after leaving the company.

3. Tell me a story

Lunch may seem like time for pleasantries, but most of us are far too polite when asking about values, says Ginger Grant, a Vancouver-based employee-engagement consultant. She believes the closest thing to having your own crystal ball is asking a company to illustrate how it lives and breathes its values statements. "My favorite is, 'Our greatest asset is our people,' " she says. "I'll ask, 'Can you give me a specific example of how you invest in people?' If you sense irritation, that's a red flag. You're self-selecting out of an environment that's put off by your question."

Similarly, says Townsend, you can also use storytelling to gauge the level of bureaucracy. Ask the interviewer to walk you through a recent initiative. How was the idea sold across the organization? How long did it take to get approved? Those stories will help you determine whether the company is filled with careful, analytical types or shoot-from-the-hip risk takers.

4. Ask for the moon

Even if you're regaled with stories that make the gig sound like a perfect match, don't be shy about demanding a deeper look. Grant urges candidates to request dropping in on a brainstorming session or shadowing an employee for a day. If your experience in those few hours doesn't sit well with you, it's likely a sign you won't like sitting there the next few years, either.

Organizational psychologist Blair says it's also crucial to meet every person who will be in your reporting line, both above and below you. If anyone happens to be out, do not be pressured into accepting the job until you've met him or her. "You don't want any surprises," says Blair. Plus, be sure you ask each person in that reporting line separately to describe the role you're considering. Don't hear the same thing? That's an alarm signaling their expectations are all over the map.

5. Wear your spy cap

The best spies look where others forget. The same can be said for sniffing out a company. WorldWIT's Ryan says checking out the online photos and bios of a company's management team is all you need to cut through the veneer of an

organization's culture. "Are they all 50-year-old white men? Did they all come from the same set of companies?" says Ryan. If so, chances are their culture and values are going to reflect that.

Besides scouring the Web--obviously, don't forget employee blogs, company-related message boards, or networking sites such as LinkedIn--you can do other detective work, too. Hang out in the office's parking lot, Ryan suggests, to see if you're inheriting a crew of clock-watchers who disband at 5:01 or workaholics held captive until midnight. One final idea: It's worth tracking down any discrimination or wrongful termination suits the company won't be so eager to showcase.

6. Ditch those rose-colored glasses

When Andy McKeon was offered the top creative-director job at a boutique ad agency's New York office, he couldn't say no. The gig would put McKeon, who'd been working at the same company's Amsterdam headquarters the previous two years, in charge of overseeing the office's creative work and hiring new people. Or so he thought. "My job was as far away from an executive creative director as possible," he says.

In retrospect, McKeon doesn't blame just the agency. "I stupidly ignored my own criteria," he says. "I thought a good salary would compensate for other shortcomings." He had already worked with the company's founder, and although he knew their values and styles didn't mesh, he thought he could make it work.

"We easily ignore our instincts, even when they're yelling at us," says Blair. Ambitious people optimistically believe they can go into any situation and change it for the better. Blair suggests a helpful way to ground those expectations. After leaving an interview, sit down and make a list of everything you learned, from the concrete to the esoteric, and flag anything that is of concern to you. "It's a very tangible way to get a more holistic picture of the place," she says. "Remember, an organization has no obligation to make things work for you. You have to make things work for you."

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