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Article

Developing and maintaining a strong corporate culture, while coping with a workforce growing significantly: A qualitative analysis on corporate culture development of fast-growing start-ups

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Online-Appendix

„Developing and Maintaining a Strong
Corporate Culture, While Coping With a
Workforce Growing Significantly:
A Qualitative Analysis on Corporate Culture
Development of Fast-Growing Start-Ups“

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Appendix

A: Short Questionnaire and Interview Guide

Short Questionnaire

Wie lautet Dein Name?	
Wann wurde Euer Start-up gegründet?	
In welcher Branche und Art der Geschäftsbeziehung (B2X) ist Euer Start-up tätig?	
Wie viele Mitarbeiter zählt das Start-up aktuell?	
In welcher Finanzierungs-Stage befindet Ihr Euch aktuell?	
Welche Rolle/Funktion hast Du im Unternehmen inne?	
Seit wann arbeitest Du im Start-up?	
Wie viele Mitarbeiter hatte das Start-up, als Du dort begonnen hast, zu arbeiten?	
Was ist Eure Unternehmenssprache?	
Ich stimme einer Aufnahme des Interviews zu.	

Interview Guide

A) Einführung

- a. Dank und Zielsetzung der Masterarbeit
- b. Struktur und Dauer des Interviews
- c. Vertraulichkeit der Inhalte, Anonymität

B) Allgemeines Unternehmenskulturverständnis

- a. Wie definierst du Unternehmenskultur (ganz allgemein) für Dich?
- b. Welche Aspekte fallen für Dich darunter?

C) Unternehmenskultur des Start-ups

- a. Wenn Du an Eure eigene Unternehmenskultur denkst, wie würdest Du sie beschreiben?
 - i. Wie wird sie für Eure Mitarbeiter erlebbar?
 - ii. Welche Unternehmenswerte kennzeichnen Euer Start-up?
 - iii. Wie werden die Unternehmenswerte im Business Alltag integriert?
 - iv. Wie werden Eure grundlegenden Annahmen, die die Art und Weise bestimmen, wie Ihr als Unternehmen funktionieren wollt, vermittelt?
- b. Gibt es in Deinen Augen Merkmale Eurer Unternehmenskultur, die Euch im Vergleich zu anderen Unternehmen besonders auszeichnen?
- c. Wo ist das Thema Unternehmenskultur intern verankert?
- d. Inwieweit können Mitarbeiter bei der aktiven Gestaltung der Unternehmenskultur mitwirken?
- e. Versucht Ihr auf eine Art und Weise Eure Unternehmenskultur zu messen?

D) Unternehmenskultur in der Anfangsphase

„...wenn Du dich in die Anfangsphase Eures Start-ups zurückversetzt...“

- a. Wie seid Ihr damals an das Thema Unternehmenskultur herangegangen?
 - i. Gab es einen bestimmten Zeitpunkt, an dem das Thema besonders an Bedeutung gewonnen hat?
 - ii. Wann wurden Eure Unternehmenswerte formuliert?
 - iii. Was waren in Deinen Augen die wichtigsten Bausteine, um eine Richtung für die angestrebte Art von Unternehmenskultur vorzugeben?

E) Unternehmenskultur in der Wachstumsphase

„...nun seid Ihr mittlerweile auf über X Mitarbeiter gewachsen...“

- a. Wie schafft ihr es eine starke und positive Unternehmenskultur auch bei Expansion und steigender Mitarbeiterzahl beizubehalten?
 - i. Gibt es Instrumente oder Maßnahmen, denen Ihr Euch hierfür bedient (habt)?
- b. Welchen Einfluss hat die Unternehmensgröße auf die Unternehmenskultur?

- i. Gab es eine bestimmte Unternehmensgröße, ab der Du Veränderungen in der Unternehmenskultur wahrgenommen hast?
 - ii. Gibt es Instrumente oder Maßnahmen, die erst aufgrund des Wachstums eingeführt wurden?
 - iii. Welche Herausforderungen hast Du durch das schnelle Wachstum wahrgenommen?
- c. Gibt es Aspekte der Unternehmenskultur, die Ihr als essenziell betrachtet und unbedingt im Kern bewahren wollt?
- d. Der Mensch ist ein Gewohnheitstier – Gibt/Gab es von Seiten der Mitarbeiter*innen Bedenken hinsichtlich Eurer Unternehmenskultur und Eurem schnellen personellen Wachstum?
 - i. Wenn ja, inwiefern?
 - ii. Wie begegnet Ihr diesen Bedenken?

F) Abschluss

- a. Rückfragen oder Ergänzungen
- b. Weitere Kontakte
- c. Kontaktaufnahme bei weiteren Rückfragen

B: Category System

Category	Definition	Anchor Example
Basic Entrepreneurial Orientation and Founders' Behavior		
Mission	“The fundamental reason why an organization exists” (Pearce & David, 1987, p. 109), which implies a value system.	<i>“(…) I think these basic assumptions - so a lot of them that are explicit, are all around our mission - and the SDGs and I think there's such a general basic connection and it's definitely not questioned (…).” (E9)</i>
Vision	The vision represents the overarching and long-term goal of the start-ups and sets the direction in which the company should develop in the future and implies a value system.	<i>“But also very strongly vision-driven. So that we actually all know why we are here and that this is actually the unifying factor, that we actually all know very clearly [from day 1] what our goal actually is (…).” (F12)</i>
Values	Espoused company values, captured by verbal expressions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Core values - Guiding principles - Fundamentals - Maxims for action - Etc. - Mission and Vision are stated separately 	<i>“We have of course also defined values.” (F12)</i>
Role Model	The founders take on the function of a cultural role model through their own visible behavior and actions.	<i>“What you're exemplifying [as a founder] right now, the way you're behaving, that's going to be instrumental in the way the company behaves. [...] you always have to be aware that this behavior will shape the company for many years to come.” (F7)</i>
Personnel Decisions and Onboarding		
Recruiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruiting and the underlying process is used to validate the cultural fit of an applicant, e.g., resembling present members in style, 	<i>“We also check these values in the recruiting process. We work with these situational questions (...). And so we just look at okay, does the person work or behave in some situations in a way that we would see in line with our organizational</i>

	<p>assumptions, values and beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It includes the following process steps: attracting, and interviewing. - It does not include the criteria leading to a hire of a candidate (see Selecting) 	<p><i>culture in our corporate values?" (E11)</i></p>
Selecting	<p>Selection of (first) employees based on specific (personnel) criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of person - Characteristics - Mindset - Common background - Needed expertise 	<p><i>"And I think that this topic of hyper growth requires a very special mindset. We have only hired people (...) who are insanely willing and enthusiastic about change." (E8)</i></p>
Onboarding Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The onboarding process is intended to integrate new employees into the existing culture - It addresses the topic of corporate culture explicitly through, e.g., culture days, culture sessions, etc. - Length of onboarding process - Founder touchpoint 	<p><i>"We have a very detailed onboarding process so that employees can be integrated straight into the organizational culture." (E9)</i></p>
Promotion	<p>Cultural role models are promoted to management positions, e.g., early joiners</p>	<p><i>"So far, we have always been fortunate enough to have had quite strong anchors by splitting the early joiners into different leadership positions in different teams." (E6)</i></p>
Sanctioning and Separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sanctioning or separation of employees who do not behave in accordance with the corporate culture - Separation of employees who do not fit culturally (anymore). 	<p><i>"[...] if someone violates our values, then it is already the case that we issue a notice of dismissal." (F15b)</i></p>
Evaluation of Employee Behavior and Feedback		

Awards and Appreciation	<p>Linking rewards and appreciation to the behavior founders and managers are concerned with.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person-to-person - Public praise (online or analogue) - Value rewards 	<p><i>“What we focus on extremely strongly is simply showing recognition and appreciation for people by highlighting concrete examples, by actively highlighting people in larger meetings with reference to these values, where they have acted accordingly in the specific situation.” (F2)</i></p>
Performance Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corporate values are specifically defined with action-based deliverables associated with each value. - It includes specific evaluation criteria and takes place one to two times a year. 	<p><i>“Then [values and principles] are just things where people are evaluated or get feedback on: how much did the behavior actually match these values or principles in the year.[...] we therefore have an evaluation process.” (F7)</i></p>
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bi-directional feedback - Linking feedback to the behavior founders and managers are concerned with. - There are no specific evaluation criteria and it takes place on a more regular basis than performance assessment. 	<p><i>“For me, this also includes direct feedback if you somehow have the feeling that people are not acting [in accordance with the company’s values], and that you don’t just let it go, but address it in our weekly 1:1 meetings, which always take place between employees and their supervisors.” (F2)</i></p>
Resources		
Salary and Benefits	Salaries and benefits are linked to company values and express desired behaviors.	<p><i>“So as a practical matter, clearly alignment with values is also tied to compensation” (E11)</i></p>
Training and Workshops	Employees are trained on cultural elements, i.e., values and soft skills required by the desired corporate culture.	<p><i>“Then we have another separate training, where it’s practically all about the values. What do they mean? How were they selected? What is expected?” (E11)</i></p>

Organizational Design and Structure		
Organizational Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The corporate culture provides an orientation grid that states which is the most suitable form of organizational structure for a company. - The structure influences how decisions are made, responsibilities and power are distributed and communication takes place. 	<i>“The structure plays a decisive role, because structures signal values. For example - (...) leadership: If too much leadership is with one person (...) then this forms power constructs in an organization (...).” (E8)</i>
Dedicated Function for the Topic of Corporate Culture	<p>A Person or group(s) of persons who are internally dedicated to the topic of corporate culture, e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founders - HR - Institutions - etc. 	<i>“And that’s why we are currently looking for a Head of HR or Head of People, who really deals with these topics on a full-time basis.” (F5)</i>
Organizational Processes		
Process Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The deliberate creation and design of internal processes to reinforce cultural elements/values, e.g., recruiting, onboarding, performance assessment, etc. - However, specific processes are assigned to the thematic areas. - Daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual cycles of routines, procedures, and other recurrent tasks 	<i>“And then to ensure, through practically sustainable, scalable processes, that [the corporate culture] is always remembered and positively reinforced.” (E11)</i>
Event & Rituals		
Team Events	Events that promote a sense of team cohesion through joint activities and team building measures within and outside working hours.	<i>“We have a relatively large portfolio of networking opportunities.” (E9)</i>

Events dedicated to Corporate Culture	Events that are directly dedicated to the start-up's culture in an explicitly expressed way.	<i>"Personio recently organized a Culture Week and invited the whole company to Munich." (F3)</i>
Meetings	Meetings in which the corporate culture and values are lived, experienced and/or specifically addressed on a regular basis, e.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision making - The way meetings are held - Agenda - Public praise and allocation of value awards 	<i>"Then there's the Diversity Reminder, then there's the Vision Reminder, where the founders say something every week in the context of our values, our product, their vision. So there are so many subcultural rituals embedded in it." (E8)</i>
Office		
Layout and Design	Office layout and design to express or emphasize values and influence the behavior or interaction of employees.	<i>"A classic value is Prototype. (...) There are prototypes lying around everywhere, we have a large workshop (...). Then we made cutouts like this, where the word prototype is actually displayed in large letters on a shelf (...)." (F3)</i>
Office Utilization	The office is not only used to carry out work assignments, but also for social gatherings and social exchange beyond working hours.	<i>"People came up again in the evening, had a beer, arranged to meet up, and sometimes used Friday evenings for small private parties with their colleagues. I think that contributed a lot to the fact that people are just really good with each other (...)." (E13)</i>
Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founders spend time in new established offices to influence the cultural foundation there - Founders and employees visit other offices to foster or get an impression of the culture there. 	<i>"We have now sent people from us to the Netherlands so that they simply understand how we work. That on the one hand, as well as, people are brought from the Netherlands to us, so that they understand more how we are doing things." (E4)</i>

Communication		
Written Formulation and Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal statements of espoused values, e.g., values, code of conduct, policies, founder's agreement, vision, mission. - Written down and documented. 	<i>"But in the course of our work, it was actually from 50 employees onwards (...) where you have to try to write that down a bit, to define it. But also, of course, for such purposes as recruiting, external presentation and so on, that when you're asked somehow, 'Hey, what are your corporate values? Or what is your culture like?', you can then give a good answer to that question." (F12)</i>
Communication Style	The way in which communication takes place within the company.	<i>"And we communicated to the team a very long time ago (...) that we were planning to do this, and we gathered feedback and discussed potential problems or concerns with the team well before we did it." (F5)</i>
Communication Channels	Communication channels used by the start-ups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Face-to-face - Instant messengers - Email 	<i>"One thing we recently introduced is an appreciation channel on Slack, where if something cool happened or if someone wants to praise someone, they can post it." (F5)</i>
Active Participation and Involvement		
Decision-making and Development Activities	Involving employees in the culture development and maintenance activities in an explicit way, e.g., through culture clubs, committees, working groups, workshops, allocating ownership, etc. to discuss on cultural topics.	<i>"We have a fairly open participation culture. That means, on the one hand, you can join the Culture Club. If you simply say, I want to participate, you can join." (E6)</i>
Culture Multipliers	Implicit cultural multipliers that do not have an official role or title but are cultural multipliers by their nature alone.	<i>"And [corporate culture] is very much communicated, I think, by those who have been there for a long time, (...) [who are] absolute culture carriers." (F3)</i>

Culture Ambassadors	Explicit appointment of intrinsically motivated or elected cultural role models as cultural ambassadors.	<i>“And it wasn’t that we said we needed five people who were ambassadors, but who was up for it? And then we took exactly those people. And for them it really is an intrinsic need that we live according to these [cultural] things and that we spread them further, that they don’t get lost and that they make sure, for example, that this is dealt with in onboarding, that they discuss what this means to us.” (F7)</i>
Employee surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular employee surveys to query cultural issues. - External data gathered from employee review portals 	<i>“And we have a pulse check (...). This is a survey that is sent out to all employees. And it also measures various elements that you can then also relate back to our values. [...].” (E9)</i>

C: Interview Transcripts

The sixteen interview transcripts are not included in the printed version. They can be viewed upon request to the author of this thesis.

D: Value Award Example C14

Our ValueBee of the week 🐝

How would you image a great team player? 🤔

Would it be someone with a smile on their face, a helping hand and an open ear?



In our bi-weekly ValueBee voting, every [REDACTED] gets the chance to nominate (with an explanation) a colleague who represents one of our company working values the most. 🐝

This time, [REDACTED] have decided that our HR Operations Manager [REDACTED] is the person who represents our value "Team Play" best. 🐝

Thank you, [REDACTED] for always offering support, no matter how challenging times might be! We couldn't be happier to have you in our team! 💖

To celebrate your achievements, you also get to invite your team for a nice dinner. 🍷🍽️

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ValueBee Team Play

"We believe in great people that understand the value of a great team. We don't tolerate brilliant jerks. We care for each other and win together, thus we look left and right when steaming ahead and make sure others can follow".

