

Cultural Analysis Report

Natalie Romeo

Wilmington University

ORG408

The company you work for should make you feel proud and inspired. As I conducted research on the culture of the Walt Disney Company over the course of seven weeks, I have become even more appreciative of this corporation as a whole. Being a cast member for five years has shown me the various aspects of this company's cultural values as well as how this caters to employees and consumers. Throughout my research, I have developed themes, cultural elements, and characterizations in attempt to categorize and display what makes the Walt Disney Company so special.

Gathering information on the company was the first step to developing an analysis of culture. This was not hard, as I already have decent knowledge of the company's ideals from my time working for Disney. With help from the company website, I was able to learn so much more about the history, language, and reference to place elements. I also spoke with cast members and leaders affiliated with the company on their opinions about working for Disney as well as the culture in their current workplace. Being that I am displaced in a transferred role different from my home of entertainment, I have gotten to experience a whole new culture in merchandise. This has helped me develop a greater sense of working in this company and what being a cast member is all about.

The elements I have gathered really showcase the values and standards that the Walt Disney Company has been known for. There is such a rich history surrounding the Disney brand and thousands of stories from generations of Disney enthusiasts; cast members and guests alike. The icons and symbols, such as Mickey Mouse or Cinderella's Castle are well known across the world. The quality the company produces each year is paramount, from classic films to vacations touching thousands of people with Disney memories. These elements extend to employees of the company as well. Although this is a massive company, each cast member has a story to tell about

why they came to work here and why they never left. Some people work for Disney for over ten years and feel a sense of family here, as seen in Appendix A. It can be hard working at a place filled with families when we don't get to see ours everyday; which is why it is important to have people to lean on at work. The standards for work ethic are high as well as the expectations of respect and inclusivity for everyone. One of my favorite aspects of working for Disney is the acknowledgement of their 5 Keys Basics, which are their standards for professionalism in the workplace. Each key represents a principle that cast members should live up to each day; Safety, Courtesy, Show Efficiency, and Inclusion (wdwnt.com, 2021). This creates a positive, professional, and inclusive work environment for everyone to feel comfortable being themselves. Essentially, the organizational ethics of the company recognizes that all cast members should expect nothing less from each other so long as everyone follows the 5 Keys. Having organizational ethics ensures the standards for the organization to promote and maintain positive behavior (Butts, n.d.). This helps explain why Disney's workplace culture is so diverse and community-driven.

The themes I developed during my analysis of the Walt Disney Company help define what makes this organization so special for millions of people. I decided the best descriptions to encompass the Disney name are: Service, Traditions, and Storytelling. Customer service is an essential part of running a business, especially in the theme park industry where customers expect a certain treatment. Disney experiences are known around the world for their unmatched service and excellence. This past year has been especially difficult to navigate, dealing with a pandemic while still trying to maintain the magical quality for guests and consumers. Still, the company manages to provide optimal customer service amidst the safety precautions in place.

Disney is all about creating magical experiences and making people happy. This can still hold true even though there are restrictions such as mask policies and temperature checks.

Disney has many traditions woven into its history to make it the company we know today. From the stories of Walt's childhood that helped create Main Street USA to the training we all receive as cast members to emulate the man who started it all, Disney is known for its traditions (See Appendix B). Also among these are the classic appearances of Disney cast members which originated in the 1960's with a typical family-oriented theming. People come to Disney parks and recognize these symbols as part of the tradition. However, this vintage "Disney Look" has had to keep up with the times. The recent update to the guidelines for cast member appearances has changed some people's perspectives on the company, as well as helped so many employees to feel comfortable in expressing themselves. This change is for the better, even if some may see it as a political move that deviates from the traditional presence Disney is known for.

Disney prides itself on its ability to create stories and provide their guests with context to the world they have created. We are all "Storytellers" for the company, as we help guests transport themselves into another time, story, or world during their visit. This is a theme and not just an element, because it is prevalent in each cast-member, workplace, and product the company provides. Examples of this would be the architecture of storefronts throughout the parks and resorts that are designed to make guests feel as though they are a part of the story. Even Disney Springs has a storyline and the cast that work there help guests feel immersed in the experience. Storytelling at Disney goes beyond the classic fairy tales as well. Nothing would be possible without the cast members themselves, who all come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Everyone has a story to tell that can enhance the guests' experience even more. By

embracing and appreciating diversity, cast members can create a different world while working which translates to guest and employee satisfaction.

The overall characteristic to describe the culture at Disney that I came up with is experience. This is the one word that encompasses what the company strives for and produces everyday for guests and cast alike. Disney's sole focus is on guest experience and the memories that it can provide for people through its rich traditions, classic stories, and elite customer service. While working for this company, I have had countless experiences of my own through performance, guest interactions, and making connections with people from all over the world. Everyone I have ever worked with came here for a purpose and has strived to live up to Walt's vision for his company. The determination to create memorable experiences for people is what drives the Walt Disney Company to success year after year.

During the process of conducting research and observing cast members, I noticed some common opinions on the culture at work. While this may be "The Happiest Place on Earth", it is still a business like any other. Not everyone is always content with their workplace environment, and at times it is hard to stay positive and remember what we are all working towards. Based on the Organizational Culture Inventory, the operating culture and the ideal culture hold expectations for how business should run versus how it actually runs (InspiredLeadershipNow.com, n.d.). For Disney, the behaviors that are expected are sometimes overwhelming to uphold being that it is not always easy keeping a positive mindset at work. It is important to maintain an ideal culture that is in alignment with the values and goals the company has established over time. This is also part of the experience of working for one of the biggest entertainment industries in the world. We must remember our purpose for coming to work at Disney and how we can improve the overall experiences we share.

Through working, observing, and experiencing, I came to the conclusion that the Walt Disney Company has a generally ideal culture. The company has always established clear values through its integrity, presentation, and the responsibility to always strive for improvement. Progress was one of Walt Disney's aspirations and he would be proud of how his company has grown while maintaining its ideals and heritage. While nothing is ever perfect, there are common goals that everyone at Disney shares. Making memories and magic through stories, service, and traditions is what the Disney experience is all about; for guests and cast members alike. I am inspired everyday by the people I work with and the principles this company has established that continue to prosper.

References

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Appendix

A. Quote from a Walt Disney World Cast Member:

“We are all like a family. Not everyone gets to see how we all lean on each other and go to each other for help or to make our day better. Sometimes it is hard and we are tired, but we always have each other here.” -Anonymous

This quote relates to the sense of community cast members experience while working with the company. This expresses how although it may be hard working at a theme park seeing families together while missing their own, cast members can find a family in each other.

B. Quote from a Walt Disney World Cast Member:

“Everyone has to go through Traditions when they start with the company, which really helps give perspective on why we’re all here. They talk about Walt’s legacy and all his hopes and dreams for his company; now we get to carry on that legacy for him. I try to remember that since that really stuck out to me when I first got hired.” -Anonymous

This quote helps express everyone’s main goal within the company. Learning about Walt Disney’s legacy and traditions guides cast members to continue the success year after year. This displays the ideal culture of working at Walt Disney parks.