

## The perfect fit

Understanding the environment you work in could help you climb the career ladder more quickly, writes **Jessica Twentyman**. So stop, look and listen to get a grip on company culture

**E**very workplace is different. Each has its own values, beliefs and goals – the characteristics that together make up its unique corporate culture.

All workplaces have one aspect in common, though: their most successful and respected employees tend to be the ones who actively support and promote those values, beliefs and goals in their daily working lives.

The good news is that most organisations don't employ someone who doesn't seem to fit with their culture, according to career coach Corinne Mills, managing director of Personal Career Management. The interview process, she says, is designed to weed out these people, ensuring that "the candidate is right for the company and the company is right for the candidate".

In other words, whoever originally recruited you did so in the belief that you and the company were a good match.

Once you're actually in the job, it's your responsibility to explore that culture more deeply, so that you can navigate it more smoothly. There are a number of questions you should consider here.

### HIGHER GOALS

Does your employer have a mission statement and how is this put into action? What are the company's corporate social responsibility targets? What charities or community projects does it support?

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### MANAGEMENT STYLE

Does your employer favour control or autonomy for its staff? What is the company's tolerance for risk? Does it rely on employees sticking to clearly defined business processes or is its approach more ad hoc? When it comes to reporting lines does it have a hierarchical or flat management structure?

### STAFF INTERACTION

Do the employees compete or collaborate, or a mixture of both depending on circumstances? Are their interactions generally formal or informal? What are the most commonly used means of communication –



### The ability to adapt is a good skill

telephone, email, instant messaging or some other means? To what extent do employees from different departments interact with each other?

Getting to grips with corporate culture will largely be a process of observation and interaction. By observing, you'll get to see how the organisation's high-fliers behave, speak and dress. By interacting, you'll get to learn more quickly about what you, the individual employee, is expected to do to fulfil the company's values and goals.

In career terms it's a useful exercise. Most corporate cultures evolve over time and some can change quite suddenly – if a new chief executive is brought in, for example. The ability to adapt and adjust accordingly is a good skill to have, not just for short-term job satisfaction but also for lifelong personal development. ■