URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/challenges-in-a-culture-of-consensus

Moore Foundation President Steven McCormick discusses the prevalence of a "culture of consensus" inside nonprofit organizations. In this type of culture, employees committed to the mission may feel entitled to touch all decisions and, subsequently, if they disagree with a decision, may also feel a false sense of entitlement to not align with the decision.

Transcript

Another challenge for non-profit organizations is the - candidly the culture, typically is one of consensus.. And in part, I think that's attributable to the ethos, the mindset of the - okay, I have devoted my life to a cause, to a mission that is sort of sanctified by the non-profit status bestowed by the government on this enterprise.. And consciously or unconsciously people in non-profit organization, I think feel they're a little special, because they've sacrificed to go work for a non-profit, a cause - the cause driven.. And that is a very admirable characteristic and it is quite true.. People who work in non-profit organization obviously are there for the cause.. And non-profits typically don't pay as well as a for profit, if you could benchmark.. And so almost unavoidably or at least I'd say understandably a culture of a non-profit very much is like we're all in this together and therefore I want to make sure I get to touch every decision and I want to make sure that I'm okay with every decision.. And if I'm not okay with the decision, I sort of feel a sense of - I have legitimacy in like not aligning with that.. My father started and through his whole life ran a very successful business, engineering business as a matter of fact, got his degree at Cal.. My father was a great small business leader at that time, in the 50s and 60s..

But he very much had the outlook like this is my business, my capital in this business.. I get to make the decisions.. And he was not autocratic, but he didn't tolerate a lot of well, you know, I don't think I align with this, it's like you're on the bus or you're off the bus.. So non-profit organizations are challenged by that kind of culture and I don't say that dismissively or derisively, it's just the reality.. So being an entrepreneur in that culture can be a bit of a challenge.. Candidly I've looked back on my now 35-year career in the not for profit sector and thought I'm not sure I really had the patience over all those years to deal with that sort of culture, and I've made a lot of mistakes because of that.. Because you can't fight that, you've got to work with that...