

A Perfectionist Culture

Looks like:

- **Mistakes** are seen as personal, i.e., they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are—mistakes.
- There is **little appreciation** expressed for the work that others are doing. When appreciation is expressed, it is directed at those who already receive the most credit.
- It is more common to point out how the person or their work is inadequate. It is common to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work **without ever talking directly** to the person in question.
- Making a mistake is confused with being a mistake.
- Doing wrong is confused with being wrong.
- There is little time, energy, or money put into reflecting as a group and identifying lessons learned that could improve practice, **little or no learning from mistakes**.
- There is a lot of splitting hairs/nitpicking.
- People bring up every imperfection in others' contributions or find exceptions to generalized observations that are offered.
- Very good at identifying what's wrong, but have little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what's right.
- The perfectionist fails to appreciate their own good work, often pointing out their faults or 'failures', fixating on inadequacies and mistakes rather than learning from them, the person works with a harsh and constant inner critic and **this is reinforced** by the organizational culture.

Perfectionist workplaces struggle with:

- Poisonous level of stress and anxiety, self-blame, difficulty with teamwork, avoidance of feedback and reflection, and significant indecision.
- Holistic and systems thinking that might allow them to innovate or solve the root cause of issues.

A Perfectionist Culture (cont.)

Antidotes:

- Emphasize a **culture of appreciation**, where the organization takes time to ensure that people's work and efforts are valued.
- Develop a 'learning organization,' where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and that those mistakes offer **opportunities for growth**.
- When things go wrong, don't automatically search for someone to blame or assume there is someone at fault.
- Foster an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results. Develop an **ability to fail** and transform from those failures.
- Separate the person from the mistake. When **offering feedback**, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism.
- Ask people to include **specific suggestions** for how to do things differently when they offer critical feedback.
- Realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work. It often contributes to low morale for everyone and does not help you or the group learn from mistakes.
- Develop other sources of **motivation** in your organization such as a shared vision and a commitment to personal and organizational learning.