

Organizational Beliefs Questionnaire

Pillars of Excellence

(Third Edition)

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The **Organizational Beliefs Questionnaire (OBQ)** is designed to help you and your associates learn about the culture of your organization. An organization's culture has several levels. At the most superficial and easiest to observe level we can listen to people's attitudes and opinions and see typical behaviors (norms). These things are, like the weather, relatively changeable and might better be thought of as the "climate" of the organization. At the next level we might ask people about behaviors and opinions that reflect underlying *values and beliefs*. This is more difficult; one must build logical and research-based connections between values or beliefs, which are often hidden, and the views and actions that accurately reflect those values and beliefs. The deepest level of culture is extremely hard to assess, consisting of assumptions about the nature of people, work, and the organization. Most people are not even consciously aware of those assumptions. Identifying them and measuring them can usually be done only by someone willing to take the role of a cultural anthropologist, an individual with extensive training in the clinical observation of social interaction who "lives" in the organization for a period of time as a participant-observer.

Attitude and opinion surveys or questionnaires that measure norms of behavior can be very helpful for identifying group and organizational problems and finding ways to improve an organization's climate. But such measures tell little about the underlying values and beliefs that determine much of what happens in an organization. The **OBQ** is designed to assess not norms and attitudes but values and beliefs. It is based on more than a decade of organizational research. That work starts with the groundbreaking study by Tom Peters and Richard Waterman, who wrote one of the most important management classics, ***In Search of Excellence***. The more recent research of James Collins and Jerry Porras, reported in their best-selling book ***Built to Last***, identifies in detail the cultural characteristics of organizations that have been successful over the long-term — fifty years or more.

We can assess an organization's culture by examining the values and beliefs shared by most people in that organization. This is done by looking for behaviors and actions that reflect — or contradict — certain values and beliefs. By understanding your organization's culture you and your associates can work to improve its operations and effectiveness. After you respond to the fifty statements on the next page, you can review the **Interpretive Guide** that follows. This guide will give you more information about the meaning of your responses. Even more valuable will be examination of the responses of those in your group, department, or division, since it is the measure of agreement that gives the most reliable measure of culture. You and your associates will get the most out of this assessment process if you wait until after you have completed the **OBQ**.

Instructions

On the next page are fifty statements. Each one refers to actions people in the organization might take, based on their values or beliefs. Your task is to report the extent to which people in your organization agree (or disagree) with each statement. Of course, you can't be expected to know exactly how everyone in your organization might act, but you probably have a generally accurate idea of how *most* people think and what *most* people would do. So, give your best estimate of the overall level of agreement (or disagreement) that people in your organization would have with each statement. Note that you are *not* answering in terms of your own, personal views. Instead, you are trying to be an objective observer.

A two-part **OBQ** Response Form has been inserted in this booklet. Take out this form and review and follow the directions at the bottom of the form. Do not separate the two parts of the form; the bottom part is a carbonless recording form that turns your responses into numerical scores, to make the calculation of total scores easy.

ORGANIZATIONAL BELIEFS QUESTIONNAIRE

In my experience, people in this organization . . .

1. believe in taking pleasure in what they do.
2. are always on the lookout for ways to do things better.
3. accept and achieve goals that outsiders might consider unrealistic.
4. have a lot of discretion over how they go about fulfilling their responsibilities.
5. care about one another.
6. feel personally responsible for quality.
7. cooperate to get the job done.
8. expect better results every year.
9. believe in promotion from within.
10. are aware that top management has communicated a clear philosophy for the organization.
11. would be surprised if a co-worker expressed pleasure in his or her work.
12. are quick to apply useful new ideas.
13. believe that the risks associated with striving for high goals are not worth taking.
14. feel responsible for the details of their work.
15. receive support for their professional development activities.
16. try to maintain an acceptable but realistic level of quality.
17. work together as a team, even across departments or divisions.
18. believe in keeping things steady, on an even keel.
19. are ready to step in when key positions become vacant.
20. feel that everyone is entitled to his or her own view as to the purpose or mission of the organization.
21. enjoy what they do.
22. concentrate their efforts on maintaining things as they are.

23. see opportunities for exceptional achievements where others might see unacceptable risks.
24. focus on getting the job done rather than worrying about the fine points.
25. are seen as the organization's most valuable resource.
26. will not accept work that is below top quality.
27. share information freely to achieve our common goals.
28. see financial measures (profit/surplus, return on investment, etc.) as very important.
29. get the training they need to prepare them for future responsibilities.
30. are committed to a common philosophy or purpose for the organization.
31. enjoy their work as much as they do play.
32. believe we must constantly seek to do better if we are to be successful.
33. set specific, difficult goals.
34. see themselves as in control of what they do.
35. know that the organization is more important than any of the people who work here.
36. believe that we can achieve perfect quality.
37. believe in keeping work problems to themselves.
38. are committed to continued growth of the organization.
39. believe in clear job roles: managers "manage" and workers "work".
40. believe that profit is a result of achieving our goals, not itself our goal or mission.
41. would say they work in order to be able to enjoy their time off the job.
42. expect constant improvements in how we do things.
43. recognize our history of setting and attaining difficult goals.
44. take action, on their own, to deal with problems.
45. know they are respected and valued.
46. assume that quality is one necessary aspect of any goal.
47. compete with our competition, not with one another.

48. concentrate on success.
49. expect managers to have the technical expertise needed to deal with problems.
50. are guided in their actions by the organization's philosophy.

The *Organizational Beliefs Questionnaire*: Interpretive Guide

Searching for Excellence

One of the most popular business books of all time was the 1982 best-seller by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, ***In Search of Excellence***. They reported the results of a national study of American firms widely recognized for corporate excellence, both in profitability and in the "quality of worklife" reported by organization members.

Peters and Waterman identified a set of principles or characteristics they believed were associated with excellence. For example, the excellent companies seemed to "stick to the knitting," that is, they appeared to concentrate on and make the most of their key strengths, the things they did best. Several other such characteristics were identified by Peters and Waterman. Their conclusions were, however, called into question when follow-up studies revealed that many of their excellent firms were not excellent only a year or two after their book was published. This led many to discount their entire study, but if we go *behind* the supposed characteristics of excellent organizations, to examine the more subtle factors behind excellence, we find some interesting things overlooked by the critics.

In a chapter toward the end of the book, titled "Hands-On, Value-Driven," Peters and Waterman concluded that having a specific set of beliefs or values was one of the most important factors behind excellence. These beliefs included placing a high value on financial results and other objective measures of success (market share, return on investment, and so on). But that focus was always coupled with an emphasis on the things the company did. That is, in excellent organizations people see profit as a natural by-product of doing something well. What's more, everyone — from the top of the organization down to the front line employees — had a basic (though sometimes simplified) grasp of the firm's business philosophy, and could express it clearly. The set of values and beliefs identified by Peters and Waterman were the basis for the research that led to the development of the first edition of the ***Organizational Beliefs Questionnaire (OBQ)***.

The Latest Re-Search

More than a decade later two other scholars, at Stanford University, decided to study excellence in organizations. James Collins and Jerry Porras, however, focused explicitly on the values and beliefs, the culture, of such organizations. And, to avoid the trap of studying excellent organizations that turned out a few years later to be less than outstanding, Collins and Porras examined only organizations that had long-term histories of excellent performance, extending over at least fifty years. Many of the firms they studied had demonstrated excellence for over a hundred years! And, to make fair comparisons, Collins and Porras paired each of their excellent firms with another organization in the same industry, founded at roughly the same time. These comparison firms were selected not as poor examples; on the contrary, they were uniformly well-performing organizations. Their performances however, were always dramatically less impressive than the results achieved by the excellent firms they were compared to.

The values and beliefs Collins and Porras identified as characteristic of the excellent firms, organizations they characterized by the title of their book as "built to last," were quite similar to those identified by Peters and Waterman. There were also some differences, some additional factors. For example, those firms that are built to last typically value change and progress. In fact, these organizations not only value change, they incorporate a variety of methods of support for this value, for example, by ensuring that employees have a lot of personal discretion in how they go about doing their jobs and achieving their goals. Thus, individual autonomy and responsibility for innovative actions are also valued in these latter-day excellent firms.

The **OBQ** has been revised to incorporate the new findings of Collins and Porras, reported in their best-selling book *Built to Last* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994). None of the ten values found by Peters and Waterman to characterize excellent organizations has been eliminated, but almost every one has been modified, often in substantial ways, to take into consideration the research findings of Collins and Porras. Thus, what we used to call "attention to detail" has been changed to incorporate what appears to be the more important value of personal responsibility.

The chart below shows the ten values and beliefs derived from Peters and Waterman's classic work as revised based on the latest research of Collins and Porras.

The **OBQ** was developed to measure the overall "excellence culture" of an organization. The **OBQ** doesn't condemn any individual, because it is not an individual measure. It refers to patterns of shared beliefs, not to any one person's values. It can be useful for creating awareness of the values that drive organizational excellence and of the extent to which those values are present in an organization. And, it can be a first step in creating cultural change, changing values so that they more closely match the ten key excellence beliefs. This, in turn, is a step toward organizational excellence and revitalization, toward renewed organizations that can again contribute to American economic achievement and help the US compete effectiveness in international markets.

TEN VALUES AND BELIEFS THAT SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

I.	Work can be as much fun as play.
II.	Seek constant improvement..
III.	Accept specific and difficult goals
IV.	Accept responsibility for your actions.
V.	Care about one another.
VI.	Quality is crucially important.
VII.	Work together to get the job done.
VIII.	Have concern for measures of our success.
IX.	There must be hands-on management.
X.	A strong set of values and beliefs guide our actions.

How to Score the OBQ

Scoring is made easy by a pressure-sensitive form. The Response Form you used to record your answers has a Scoring Form attached beneath it. Separate the two sheets and you can see that the marks you made on the Response Form circled numbers on the Scoring Form. If any of your circles are unclear, just return to the top sheet to locate your original response and re-circle the appropriate number on the Scoring Form.

Add the circled numbers in each column of the Scoring Form and place the sums in the boxes provided in the Individual Sub-Totals row. Add the ten scores to obtain your overall Total **OBQ** Score. The row below the Individual Sub-Totals row is provided to record the average scores for your group.. This means adding up everyone's score for a particular value and then dividing the total by the number of people who answered. This will give you a clear picture of how your own scores compare with the averages for your associates.

Plotting Your Scores

To get a picture of your scores, and those of your associates, about the strengths of the ten beliefs that drive excellence, plot your scores on the pillars of the illustration on the next page. Each pillar corresponds to a column on the Scoring Form and is identified by a Roman numeral. Plot the Sub-total from each column of the Scoring Form onto the corresponding pillar of the illustration. Do this by making an "X" on the scale at the point that represents your Sub-total Score for each column. Then connect these X's with a solid line to form a plot. If you computed group scores, you can plot the corresponding Average Group Sub-totals on the same scales, using circles as marks. Connect the circles with a dotted line. This gives an easy visual comparison between your perceptions and those of the group.

Interpretation of Scores

Your interpretation of your scores on the **OBQ** should begin with a comparison of your own, individual scores and the averages for your group. You can make this comparison for both the overall total score and for each of the ten values and beliefs assessed by the **OBQ**. The following chart gives some general guidelines for interpretation of the total scores. It is based on results from more than a thousand respondents.

Total Score Range	Level of Excellence	Percent of all Organizations
211 to 250	Roof is Up (Excellent Organization)	About 5%
186 to 210	Pillars in Place	Less than 20%
156 to 185	Foundation Laid	More than 50%
131 to 155	Site Cleared	Less than 20%
below 130	Planning Stage	About 5%

The next chart gives reference score ranges for the scales that measure the ten values and beliefs.

Value/Belief Score Range	Level of Effectiveness
24 to 25	High
21 to 23	Moderately High
13 to 20	Average
8 to 12	Moderately Low
5 to 7	Low

Group Discussion Suggestions

The value of the **OBQ** is its ability to stimulate meaningful discussion that could lead to a more effective organization. The following questions may be useful for provoking such a discussion or a series of discussions.

It is important to assess whether the scores obtained reflect the actual level of excellence in your organization, in terms of objective measures of performance. Does your group total score accurately describe your organization? Do the ten value/belief scores generally reflect the values and practices of people in your organization?

Which of the ten values and beliefs is especially strong in your organization? How do you account for that? Which are particularly weak? What are the effects of these weaknesses?

What can be done, both in the short term and the long run, to improve the overall excellence climate of your organization?

Evaluate each of the ten values and beliefs, and develop a specific action plan that you and your associates would be willing to implement in order to strengthen those beliefs that are weak.

Consider what policies might interfere with these values and might need to be changed.

Think about what new policies might be developed to add strength to certain values.

Identify specific behaviors, your own and others, that would help establish or strengthen certain values.

Reference Bibliography

Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H., Jr. ***In Search of Excellence.*** New York: Harper & Row, 1982.

Collins, J. C., & Porras, J. I. ***Built to Last.*** New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

To learn more about how culture is built, see:

Schein, E. H. ***Organizational Culture and Leadership.*** (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Kotter, J.P., & Heskett, J.L. ***Corporate Culture and Performance.*** New York: Free Press, 1992

About the Author

Marshall Sashkin is professor of human resource development at The George Washington University. He teaches graduate courses in the area of management and organization development, leadership, consulting skills, and research design and methods. Marshall received his bachelors degree in psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and earned his Ph.D. in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan in 1970. Since then he has conducted research, taught at several universities, and consulted with numerous public and private sector organizations (including the American Red Cross, TRW, GE, and American Express). From 1979 to 1984 he was professor of industrial and organizational psychology at the University of Maryland. For nine years after that he served as senior associate in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the research application arm of the United States Department of Education. In that position he developed and guided applied research aimed at improving the organization and management of schools. Marshall has authored or co-authored more than fifty research reports and over a dozen books, including *Putting Total Quality Management to Work* (with Kenneth J. Kiser; Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, California). He is the author of many questionnaire instruments widely used in both research and executive development programs, including the *Conflict Style Inventory*, *The Visionary Leader (Leader Behavior Questionnaire)* and *The MbM Questionnaire (Managing by Motivation)*, all of which are now available from HRD Press.