

Fire-fighting Culture - (The word culture is derived from the Latin verb *colere*, which means "to cultivate.")

Organizational Fire-Fighting is quite simply a short attention span and the tendency to be reactive to internal and external forces rather than envisioning, forecasting, and scenario planning the future. Among its consequences, fire-fighting seems to have an incredible numbing effect on the brain, and more importantly the numb skulls who don't show any evidence of having a brain!

FF companies have cultures led by heroic leaders who are often in a state of denial about their situation. They tend not to coral the strength of their people, focusing instead on putting out the fire and celebrating a sense of achievement. Their focus on a Monday morning is to look for and start a fire for the week ahead!

The majority of organisations function on a pretty simple basis: make something, find a customer and sell it. Alternatively, define the service as outlined by the customer and or stakeholders, and provide it at the least cost/ best value. Heroic leaders however cannot shine in an environment quite so mundane so they add complexity. They don't value the people dimension too much, and don't like SOPS (standard operating procedures), processes or developed strategies.

Organizational FF as a problem is not limited to an organisation of any particular size, it can affect large and small alike. Hidden behind the façade of business plans and budgets is a fire-fighting leader awaiting to take charge; establishing the best way to lead and manage is not to plan, but to be reactive and respond to a self defined crises.

A FF culture has many people running around putting out fires, quite often fires are created so they can be put out. The heroic leader is often one cultivated by previous FF leaders, and demonstrates an incapacity to understand any management science, and can even feel threatened by it, claiming their business is far to complex for anyone else to understand.

Everyone becomes wrapped up in the process of FF and after a while it feels like you add no value unless a fire is being put out. Everyone is on the run, change, more change and change again. Generating ad-hock reports, chasing yet another demand by he who must be obeyed regardless of the on-cost associated with the request. Everyone becomes stressed, relationships become tight, and everyone loses sight of the business purpose.