Description

• My cultural value of being a diligent worker has been passed down from having hard workers and good examples of meaningful work in my family background.

• The culture from which people come influences how they act – Gladwell’s discussion of cultural legacy – has helped me realize that I have been shaped by the cultural legacy of determination. Most people do not think of their family as having a “culture.”  They associate culture with countries and ethnic groups. But the family? For most of us, it’s just a group of familiar people doing what they always do.

Yet it is exactly this—a characteristic way of thinking, feeling, judging, and acting—that defines a culture. In direct and subtle ways, children are molded by the family culture into which they are born. Growing up, their assumptions about what is right and wrong, good and bad, reflect the beliefs, values and traditions of the family culture. Most take for granted their family’s ways, and they carry into adulthood numerous attitudes and behaviors acquired in childhood.

Organizational Cultures

In the 1980s, management theorists and consultants popularized the concept of organizational culture. They described corporations in anthropological terms, pointing to their social structure, norms and laws, language, dress codes and even their artifacts. Organizations with distinct cultures invariably bore the imprint of their founders. The corps of clean-shaven IBM executives dressed in white shirts and blue suits reflected the personality, beliefs and style of Thomas Watson, Sr., just as the bearded Apple employees wearing jeans, T-shirts and Birkenstock sandals reflected those of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak.

Like corporations, family foundations have distinct organizational cultures, and they are as varied as the families that generate them. They run the gamut from formal, with tightly run meetings held in foundation boardrooms, to informal, with gatherings around a family member’s dining-room table. As in corporations, the values and norms of the founders and their families determine the focus of the foundation as well as how it is governed, how conflicts are handled and how emotions are expressed.