

Yet another 50 signs of an unhealthy organisation

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Following '50 signs' and '50 more signs', these are the third in the series. I have retained half a dozen favourites from the earlier sets, the rest are new observations.

I do wish organisations impressed me, the fact is they do not.

Here are 50 signs to look for to spot an organisation in serious decline. For the positive take, reverse to have 50 signs of a healthy organisation....I wish!

1. A risk averse, scared of exposure and responsibility culture means good opportunities are missed.
2. Cuts are made across the organisation without protecting parts that should be left alone.
3. There is reward for failure, as for instance shown by pay-offs for incompetent leadership.
4. Although apparently merged, constituent parts of the organisation have very separate identities.
5. Those that dare to confront poor performance are not supported – or worse.
6. Buildings, signage and general physical premise appearance is unimpressive.
7. Senior management are focused more on the next than the job they are in, so play it safe.
8. More effort goes into fine words, core values for instance, than the substance that makes these real.
9. The organisation is under-resourced, for instance in staff to meet acceptable performance levels.
10. There is too much 'badge chasing' to prove apparent quality of operation but no will for what it takes.
11. Most senior management are remote and detached – and would not be recognised by colleagues.
12. The organisation has become so complex and multifunctional it is virtually impossible to lead.
13. Most senior management if asked, would have very different ideas of organisation priorities.
14. The management of suppliers, often more critical to operational effectiveness than is known, is woeful.
15. A complacent culture of 'acceptable underperformance' has developed.
16. Absence is not managed, and is out of control, seriously increasing the burden on the most committed.
17. Ridiculously, 'the system' rules over good sense, rigid rule following harms flexible effectiveness.
18. Pay differentials between the very top and bottom of the hierarchy are vast and cause discontent.
19. New processes are blindly introduced into an unready culture... let's do 360 degree feedback!
20. Mistakes are covered up and left to worsen for fear of retribution seriously harming effectiveness.
21. There is no longer a role or purpose for the organisation – times have changed.
22. The organisation seems incapable of coming up with big ideas – innovation stalls.

23. An island mentality develops: “we are unique, we can’t learn anything from anywhere else” – rubbish!
24. The Peter Principle is evident across the organisation – and most worryingly at the top.
25. People are recruited, sometimes to key roles, without being told the true, very tough picture.
26. Income streams, and customer retention are taken for granted, so when this dries up...
27. No one accepts responsibility for anything: either ‘I didn’t know’, or ‘I was advised..’
28. The organisation doesn’t understand ‘you can’t shrink your way to success’ – so cuts and more cuts.
29. The madness of recruitment freezes across the board shows serious small brain thinking.
30. There is no appetite for contrary opinions to organisation direction – ‘good news only please’.
31. Key, often most senior managers are in their last jobs, with little motivation to rock the boat.
32. Those in a position to, look after themselves handsomely, and disproportionately to performance.
33. Career routes to retain talent are non-existent...potential is seen as growing rivals for senior posts.
34. Even low-level decisions are taken at an inappropriately senior level, slowing everything down.
35. Short term panic and cost cutting means positive initiatives are dropped showing no real commitment.
36. Former employees would not return for any money.
37. Key roles and functions with reputational significance are outsourced with damaging consequences.
38. Presenteeism means more unproductive hours are lost those physically at work than off on sick.
39. Senior management lack a body of knowledge that prepares them for leading the organisation.
40. Conflict is avoided, so disputes fester and a lot of matters are unresolved that could be sorted.
41. A feeling of organisation-wide powerlessness trickles down – external forces dictate and constrain.
42. The organisation lacks clarity of purpose and direction – where is this organisation going?
43. Really serious identifiable forces take the organisation by surprise, causing panic.
44. At the very least, unethical things happen, even downright illegal, leading to serious repercussions.
45. High value knowledge walks out of the organisation with no effort made to retain and use this.
46. There just isn’t enough learning going on....the learned dominate with no fresh thinking or ideas.
47. People who really should leave won’t as they are staying on for a redundancy pay off.
48. No one has the courage to challenge decisions or direction – the few in power plough on over the edge.
49. Those in the know about the bad times ahead ‘jump ship’ and leave successors to manage a decline.
50. The organisation suffers paralysis by analysis – meetings proliferate, and actions just never happen.