

Closed Culture

What is closed culture?

In Health and Social Care settings a “closed culture” can have serious implications on the quality of care provided. Having an understanding of what this entails is important in recognising where it exists, implementing care standards, safeguarding adults at risk and promoting a positive working environment.

Definition of Closed Culture:

A closed culture in health and social care is one where there is a lack of transparency, open communication and external scrutiny.

- Secrecy and restricted information
- A hierarchical structure where dissent is discouraged
- Minimal involvement of service users and their families in decision making processes
- Poor recognition and addressing of concerns

Signs of Closed Cultures

Identifying a closed culture can be essential for timely intervention. Some common signs are:

Limited Communication

- Staff may be discouraged from discussing concerns or incidents
- Information flow between different levels of hierarchy is restricted
- People that draw on care and support and their families receive limited information about care processes

Lack of Accountability

- There is little to no external auditing of services
- Failures of mistakes are often hidden or not reported
- A blame culture exists where staff fear repercussions for speaking out

Resistance to Change

- Innovation is discouraged, and traditional methods strictly followed
- Staff training and development are minimal or non-existent
- Lack of feedback mechanisms, or feedback from people or their representatives is ignored.

Causes of closed culture

A variety of factors can contribute to a closed culture including:

Organisational Structure

- Highly centralised management often results in marginalised frontline staff.
- Overemphasis on maintaining hierarchy, this can stifle open communication.

Leadership

- Poor Leadership styles can create an atmosphere of fear, creating a lack of psychological safety.
- Lack of emotional intelligence from leaders can result in poor staff morale.
- Frequent changes in leadership can disrupt continuity and stability

Consequences of closed cultures:

On those who draw on care and support

- Risk of abuse and neglect increases due to lack of oversight
- Quality of care deteriorates, affecting the wellbeing of service users.
- Service users may feel powerless or unheard

For staff:

- High levels of stress and burnout due to a negative working environment.
- Job satisfaction decreases
- Staff displaying unhealthy coping mechanisms

Addressing a closed culture:

Promoting Transparency

- Open lines of communication at all levels
- Robust Incident reporting systems
- Whistleblowing procedures

Leadership Development

- Trained leaders / inclusive management styles
- Approachable and responsive to concerns

External Scrutiny

- Regular inspections by independent bodies
- Encouraging advocates/ family to participate in care planning and reviews.

Empowering staff and people who draw on care and support

- Involving people in decision making
- Feedback mechanisms and opportunities for people to share their views and co-produce in the development and improvement of services.

Resources

[Our work on closed cultures - Care Quality Commission](#)

<https://youtu.be/BMKcssYPEXg>

[Fostering Openness In UK Health And Social Care: Tackling Closed Cultures - CQC](#)