

Culture Report 2021

rETHink, WS6 - Culture Development

Operating Workstream Team (OWT) of Workstream 6:

Prof. Dr. Gudela Grote (Co-Lead), Dr. Chris Luebke (Co-Lead),
Martin Ghisletti, Maximilian Buyken, Dr. Hansjürg Büchi, Dr. Nikolaus Gotsch, Dr. Dieter Schmid (external coach).

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Executive Summary

WS 6 has stimulated discussion and reflection about the values of ETH, those officially espoused and those enacted in day-to-day operations, in order to help build the cultural foundations for sustainable organizational development at ETH. In 2021, WS6 provided the stage for and encouraged conversations about ETH culture, leading to some preliminary insights into the values ETH members cherish and discrepancies between espoused and enacted values. From what we have observed, we see some immediate actions the ETH should take within rETHink as well as some activities that should be encouraged to foster continuous reflection on culture across the organization. However, we also propose for the ETH to engage in a systematic culture development process in order to create a shared sense of what ETH specifically stands for and to help close gaps between good intentions and action at all levels of the ETH.

Observations on values in the SDP 2021-24

The values *responsibility*, *openness*, *diversity*, *team spirit*, and *excellence* mostly resonate with ETH's members. Three observations stand out:

- (1) People feel that the ETH would be a better place if the current values were enacted more.
- (2) It would be desirable to develop values more specific to ETH that can create an even stronger sense of belonging and identity.
- (3) Excellence is a hallmark of top universities, but also an overused and ill-defined concept, which tends to create conflict more than integration.

Proposed next steps

Step 1: Amend the five values as a cultural “baseline” for organizational development

Step 2: Culture dialogues in rETHink workstreams, in other ETH initiatives and across the ETH

Step 3: Encourage bottom-up culture-related activities

Step 4: Explore options for a systematic culture development process at ETH

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1 Introduction

1.1 rETHink

To set the course for ETH Zurich's future organizational development, president Joël Mesot initiated the rETHink project in 2019. rETHink is intended to allow ETH Zurich to:

- strengthen individual responsibility and scope for action on all levels
- establish excellent professional structures throughout the university for mentoring students and managing staff
- strengthen strategic and operative leadership at all levels
- reduce complexity or find constructive ways to manage it
- promote cooperation and the values that foster a sense of belonging among the ETH Zurich community
- shape and strengthen a culture that supports ETH Zurich's strategy – now and in the future.

Six workstreams (WS1-6) were established to reflect on the organizational structure and address the current and future challenges affecting ETH Zurich. These are:

- WS1: Executive Board, basic architecture & boards
- WS2: Professorships
- WS3: Support for professors
- WS4: Organization of academic departments
- WS5: Organization of Central administrative units
- WS6: Culture development

1.2 Workstream WS6

Mission of workstream 6

WS6's mission is to inform ETH's organizational culture development aimed at inspiring the ETH community to contribute to ETH's mission of "*paving the way in a complex world.*" Further, it is to support this development by stimulating discussion across the ETH on the espoused values of openness, responsibility, diversity, team spirit, and excellence.

Mandate of workstream 6

Workstream WS6 is not to manage culture development in the organization (this must be done through the leaders in the organization), but to *address the importance and role of culture development and to make suggestions for stimulating and implementing culture development* (reinforced during SL-retreat held on 9/13-21), thereby facilitating the "unfreeze" component of organizational change invoked by rETHink.

Tasks

The following main tasks were identified as central for WS 6 in 2020/21: First, develop an understanding of the existing values, culture(s), and general developments at ETH as well as of the relevance and impact of culture in general. Second,

initiate a broad discussion of the question "Which culture helps ETH fulfil its mission?", including reflections on the five values defined in the SDP 2021-24 and on the fundamental notion that cultural values serve as linkages in decentralized decision-processes. Third, provide tools and supporting structures for such discussions.

For 2022, the main tasks foreseen are to further stimulate these broad discussions and to support WS1-5 in reflecting on the cultural implications of the planned changes in roles, work processes, and structures.

Organization

The WS6 team consists of:

- **Executive Board Lead:** Joël Mesot, Sarah Springman.
- **Operative WS Lead:** Gudela Grote, Chris Luebkehan.
- **Operative WS Team:** Maximilian Buyken, Martin Ghisletti, Hansjürg Büchi, Dieter Schmid (coach).
- **Core team:** Roland Baumann (Communications), Micha Bigler (Student), André Blanchard (PEKO), Pius Krütli (D-USYS), Ulrike Lohmann (KdL), Sacha Menz (strategy commission), Maxim Polikarpov (PDoc, OA), Silke Schön (TP), Judit Szulàgy (APTT), Konstantinos Voulpiotis (AVETH), Werner Wegscheider (HV).
- **Project Management Office:** Nikolaus Gotsch.

1.3 Foundations of organizational culture

The following foundations of organizational culture informed the general approach taken by WS6.

- **Culture is us – not the others:** Culture is *shared* understanding, shared values, shared contribution, and shared responsibility. It is a **common agreement** on what is essential in life and business – outspoken or not.
- **Culture is a multi-level framework**, and its levels are often depicted within an iceberg-model (cf. figure 1). Based on *basic assumptions* such as a scientific world view and progress by insight, *values* both abstract and concrete inform the *artifacts* of culture, i.e., soft manifestations such as behavior, social interaction and collaboration, and hard manifestations such as structures, processes, and the strategy of an organization.
- **Culture development is a continuous and long-term task.** Culture is always there, it is impossible not to have a culture, but it is fluid and can be changed in processes of shared sense-making. Culture development never ends. It is a path-dependent undertaking, starting with the culture in place, which may be a 'good' or 'bad' fit with the organization's purpose and may involve internal tensions and lack of appreciation by the organization's members.
- **Culture development combines bottom-up and top-down approaches** and acknowledges their interdependence. While culture cannot be prescribed top-down, leaders have a strong influence on the behavior of all organizational members. The organizational development becomes more effective the more members actively participate.

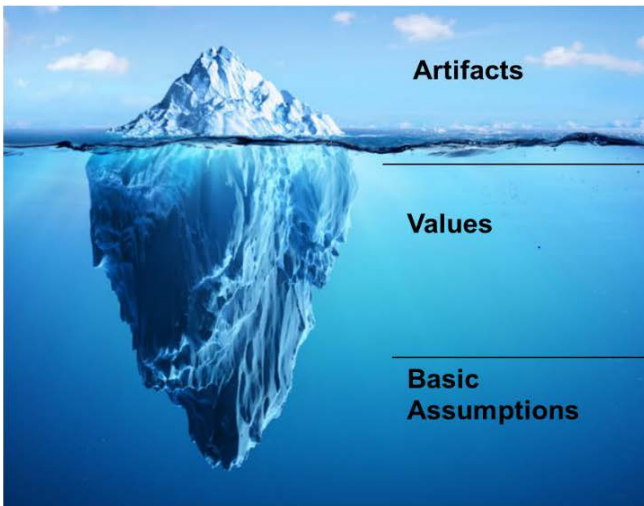


Figure 1: Iceberg model of culture by Edgar Schein

Hard manifestations

Strategy, structures, processes, standards, tools, leadership principles, language, architecture, infrastructure, facilities

Soft manifestations

behaviour, social interchange, collaboration, rituals...

Concrete values (guidelines, principles)

Concrete behaviour guidelines to live the values in every day life (in research/teaching/transfer/dialogue and leadership/collaboration)

Abstract values

Abstract value concepts (according to SEP 21-24: Responsibility, Openness, Diversity, Team Spirit, Excellence)

Basic assumptions

Scientific world view, progress by insights

1.4 General Approach of WS6

Based on these foundations, workstream 6 developed the following general approach.

Phase 1 (2020-2021): The aim of phase 1 was to encourage and engage in a broad discussion about the five generic values stated in ETH’s current strategy and development plan (SDP 2021-24). To this end, we organized various “Dialogue Windows” in spring 2020 to discuss with different groups at ETH their understanding of ETH’s values and their perspectives on culture and culture change at ETH.

In autumn 2020, a concept and supporting elements for ETH-wide culture discussions were developed, which then took place in 2021. The discussion was launched by a “Pulse Check Survey” in December 2020, in which all ETH members could share their perceptions of the five ETH values both by means of quantitative scales for the importance and enactment of the values and in free descriptions. 353 participants (amongst them 64 English-speaking) filled in the pulse check (some findings are presented in chapter 3 in this report, link to the pulse check report: [here](#)).

A wide range of culture discussions happened in 2021 within research groups, departments, central units, the Schulleitung, various ETH bodies, communities (DVK, HV, PEKO, AVETH, etc.), and other ad-hoc groups. The results were presented at the rETHink Assembly in October 2021 and are documented in this “Culture Report 2021”.

we are on a good path, but the path is still long¹

These informal, open-ended discussions are assumed to continue into 2022.

Phase 2 (Outlook for 2022): The aim of phase 2 will be to support specific discussions and decision-making processes in the other rETHink workstreams. WS6 will accompany the workstreams WS1-5 to help them address culture issues within their workstream remit and take cultural issues into account for better decision-making and implementation of organizational change.

¹ The blue boxes highlight key insights and statements from culture discussions gained over the last months.

2 Culture Discussion Elements

2.1 Supporting elements

To enable the culture discussion within the different units and groups of ETH, various supporting materials have been conceived, developed, and made available. In addition, individuals from the ETH community were nominated and trained to provide support. The following support elements were established:

- **Content:** the ETH charter and possible discussion questions for each value.
- **Methods:** a *Remote Meeting Guideline*, a *Values Workshop Toolbox*, and a *Moderation Toolbox*.
- **Moderation:** About 15-20 moderators were trained in two training sessions and were individually coached to assist in individual workshops (train-the-trainer instructions).

All supporting materials are available on the rETHink website.

Additionally, *Culture Contact Persons* in each Department and Schulleitungsbereich were nominated and empowered to link WS6 with the respective parts of the ETH community. In total, 26 contact persons were briefed and accompanied in meetings and supported through direct contact with members of the core team of WS6.

2.2 Culture discussion

The discussion about the five values, and in general about culture and values at the ETH, took place across the ETH within research groups, departments, central units, the Schulleitung, ETH bodies, communities (DVK, HV, PEKO, AVETH, etc.), and in ad-hoc groups. The *Culture Contact Persons* initiated, accompanied, and supported such discussions in many instances.

Discussions on values improve the working atmosphere

The organizers of culture discussions could provide a short report about their discussion and the outcome with a standardized feedback form. By the end of November 2021, dozens of feedback forms have been returned. We estimate that a fair number of culture discussion has also taken place without submitting the feedback form. Assuming that close to 100 cultural dialogues were realized, about 1000 people have been involved overall. However, we also must acknowledge that most of the ETH community is likely to not have been engaged yet.

One particularly successful initiative to stimulate culture dialogues was undertaken by AVETH. They developed visualizations and personas linked to the five ETH values to be used by research groups to discuss which personas they would like to see as members of their teams. They were also asked how they would describe an ideal candidate for their

teams. Both, the feedback form and the AVETH survey, were attempts to capture the meaning of the five values quantitatively and qualitatively. However, this information only represents a fraction of the scope and impact of the culture and values discussion that took place.

Values are the brackets between different cultures

Overall, phase 1 in 2020/21 aimed to sensitize ETH members to the topic of culture and values. We believe that there have probably been more open discussions about values and culture in the last 18 months than there have been in the last decade. This means that the goal of phase 1 has been achieved. The next step will be to channel these discussions towards building the sustainable foundations for cultural and organizational development at ETH Zürich.

In phase 2 in 2022, the focus of WS6 activities will shift from an overarching discussion about the values to specific decision-making processes within the different workstreams. After the topics and draft solutions developed by the rETHink workstreams are handed over to line management, WS6 suggestions and recommendations should continue to help in decision-making and implementation.

2.3 Culture discussion documentation

To capture the culture discussions that have taken place across ETH, a MIRO board was designed with the external partner *Housatonic* (cf. **Appendix**). They created a rich visualization of the different comments and insights from the feedback handed in via the feedback form. The core statements that came in via the feedback form are listed on a timeline that also shows where the dialogues have taken place. The individual comments have been reorganized so that items touching upon similar topics or being connected in other ways are close to one another. Under the headings of *Key Takeaways*, *Big Learnings*, and *Red Flags*, more general insights were drawn from the individual feedbacks.

The discussion on values created more closeness and mutual understanding in our team

The *Culture Contact Persons* of the Departments and Schulleitungsbereiche were brought together in two touchpoint workshops in June and September 2021 to reflect upon the results of the culture discussions and the visualization on MIRO. We close the board as documentation of the evolution of our discussion at the beginning of 2022.

The Miro board is not meant to be an exact protocol of culture discussions that have taken place but rather to illustrate the diversity of opinions and perspectives. Thus, it can be a source of inspiration for upcoming discussions.

How do you feel about each of these five people? Whom would you hire?

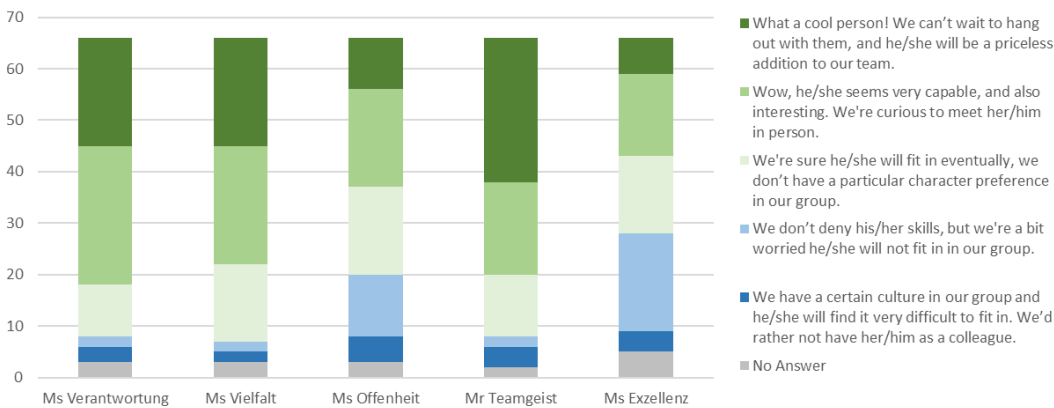


Figure 2: AVETH Teambuilding Survey – rETHink your culture, N = 66 groups

3 Results of Surveys

This chapter summarizes the survey results regarding the five values stated in ETH Zurich’s current strategy and development plan (SDP 2021-24): *excellence*, *responsibility*, *diversity*, *openness*, and *team spirit*. In the following, we summarize the findings for each of the five values based on the Pulse Check Survey (cf. Table 1) and the AVETH survey (cf. Figure 2).

Pulse Check Survey:

Summary of «importance of values»

Based on the ETH Pulse Check Survey with 353 participants, the evaluation of the *importance* of the values shows that *responsibility* is perceived as the most important value for a successful future of ETH Zurich. When looking at the distribution, it is noticeable that for about 180 participants, *responsibility* is rated with 10 (on scale 1-10), i.e., maximum importance. When looking at the distributions for *openness*, *team spirit*, *diversity*, and *excellence*, the importance is no longer estimated at 10 by so many participants: 140 (*openness*), 130 (*team spirit*), 110 (*diversity*), and 90 (*excellence*).

Summary of «living the values»

Based on the ETH Pulse Check Survey, the evaluation of the question as to how much participants perceive that the value

is lived at ETH, *excellence* was in first place. There were also the highest number of the top values 9 and 10 given for *excellence*. The German-speaking participants perceived diversity as much more lived than the English-speaking participants. Otherwise, there are no noticeable differences between the two language groups.

Comparison of «importance» and «living» of the values

When comparing the surveys of *importance* and *living the values*, it is noticeable that although *openness* and *team spirit* are rated as very important, on average, they are lived least from the respondents’ point of view. *Responsibility* and *diversity* are also clearly lived less than they are considered important. Lastly, *excellence* is considered least important but most lived.

AVETH Teambuilding Survey:

The AVETH Teambuilding Survey approached cultural values at ETH Zurich by asking research groups whether they would hire specific personas who stereotypically embody one of the five values. *Team spirit* is most important, closely followed by *responsibility* and *diversity*. Personas with stereotypical *openness* and *excellence* would be hired least. The personas’ descriptions are depicted in figures 3-7 on the following pages, along with the more detailed findings per value of both surveys. Please note, the respective personas’ gender refers to the gender of the embodied value in the German language (e.g., “Ms Verantwortung” based on “die Verantwortung”).

Table 1: ETH Pulse Check Survey. Importance and experienced living of values at ETH. Mean(SD) on scale 1-10. N=353.

	Importance of value		Living of the value	
	DE	EN	DE	EN
Responsibility	9.25(1.23)	8.97(1.71)	6.49(2.47)	6.13(2.48)
Openness	8.80(1.67)	data lost	5.65(2.62)	5.23(2.66)
Team Spirit	8.43(1.87)	data lost	5.63(2.88)	5.91(2.29)
Diversity	8.12(2.18)	data lost	6.04(2.66)	4.53(2.92)
Excellence	7.52(2.60)	data lost	7.18(2.49)	7.77(2.01)

Ms Verantwortung: She finished her Bachelor's and Master's degree at ETH Zürich. When growing up, her parents taught her from a young age that having the confidence to support her own opinion and take responsibility for her own actions would be the key to success in life. This became especially relevant in the male-dominated academic world she chose to enter, and she has developed a very strong, ethical, personality. You can always expect from her to take feedback and try to improve herself at every opportunity. It comes at no surprise that Ms Verantwortung takes a personal responsibility in slowing down climate change by travelling less and that she especially enjoys the mental aspect of her favorite sport, marathon running.

Figure 3: Depiction of responsibility in the AVETH survey



3.1 Responsibility

Responsibility as defined in the SDP 2021-24

“Integrity, mutual respect, and respect for people and the environment form the foundation of our actions and reflect our freedom in research and teaching. We are tackling the great challenges of our time and use a culture of critical thinking and the constant search for sustainable solutions as our basis.”

Desirability of responsibility as a value for ETH

ETH Pulse Check Survey: The mean rating for the *importance* of the value responsibility was 9.25 (SD=1.23). This was the highest mean rating of any value.

AVETH Survey: In the description of their ideal candidate (cf. figure 3), words related to *responsibility* were mentioned by about a third of the research groups.

Current state of responsibility at ETH

In the ETH Pulse Check Survey, the mean rating for the *experienced* responsibility by German-speaking respondents was 6.49 (SD=2.47) and by English-speaking respondents 6.13 (SD=2.48). This was the second-highest rating across respondents, the highest being for excellence.

Positive experiences reported in the survey relate to the Schulleitung and supervisors acting responsibly during the Covid-19 pandemic, supervisors' willingness to take responsibility for their teams, and the larger ethical goal of working towards global sustainability. Occasionally, also the responsibility of ETH and its members towards the general public was mentioned, as was the readiness of the ETH Schulleitung to take measures against power abuse by professors.

Conclusion regarding responsibility

Responsibility appears to be an undisputed value, which is also experienced in ETH daily practice. A threat to responsible behavior is the leeway given to high performers who are perceived by some as being exempt from taking responsibility due to their exceptional achievements.

Ms Offenheit: She joined ETH Zürich after completing her degree at EPF Lausanne. At home, she learnt early on that secrets only hinder the development of mutual trust. She detests to hide things, emotions, thoughts: everything that is going on in her head, including criticism to others, will flow out unobstructed and uncensored. Not everyone appreciates this, but she does not care. Her “open door” philosophy applies to everything: from keeping an open, detailed Outlook calendar for everyone in her group to see, to publishing her research in open access journals and making her data publicly available, and even communicating the personal feedback she received with others.



Figure 4: Depiction of openness in the AVETH survey

3.2 Openness

Openness as defined in the SDP 2021-24

“We are open to new ideas, new talent and new partnerships. As part of this openness, we attach importance to internal and external transparency. Participation and involvement are important features of our decision-making process and have an identity-forming effect. Students, researchers and employees are on equal footing in this regard. We are known as a place where people can freely express opinions and engage in open debate.”

Desirability of openness as a value for ETH

ETH Pulse Check Survey: The mean rating for the *importance* of the value openness was 8.8 (SD=1.67). This was the second-highest mean rating of any of the values.

AVETH Survey: In the description of their ideal candidate, the terms *open* and *open-minded* were mentioned by about half of the research teams.

Current state of openness at ETH

In the ETH Pulse Check Survey, the mean rating for the *experienced* openness by German-speaking respondents was 5.65 (SD=2.62) and by English-speaking respondents 5.23 (SD=2.66). This was the second-lowest rating for both the German-speaking respondents (only team spirit was slightly lower) and the English-speaking respondents (diversity was lower). Positive experiences reported in the survey relate to open exchange in one's team and generally open communication within the ETH. Negative examples relate to avoiding conflicts, lack of respect towards people lower in the hierarchy and the administration, sticking to standard solutions, strong silos, and lack of transparency in decision-making.

Conclusion regarding openness

Openness is generally considered as very important, but the daily reality is perceived as not so open, primarily due to strong hierarchies and lack of respect.

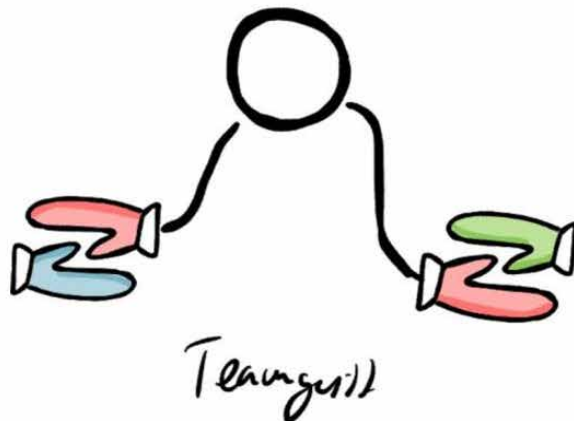


Figure 5: Depiction of team spirit in the AVETH survey

Mr Teamgeist: He is very pleasant to hang out with, and he knows everyone. Having made friends from every corner of ETH Zürich during his studies there, he wants to do a PhD being totally certain about joining your group. For him, nothing can be done individually: everything is the result of close collaboration with others. In fact, he already knows a handful of very capable researchers from other groups (inside and outside of ETH Zürich), with whom he can collaborate. In his free time he likes to play football, specifically as a center midfielder, preferring to assist rather than score. He is of course the captain of his team.

3.3 Team spirit

Team spirit as defined in the SDP 2021-24

“We solve complex issues in complementary teams that cut across disciplines and job functions. We are committed to ETH and maintain a culture of togetherness, mutual appreciation and mutual learning.”

Desirability of team spirit as a value for ETH

ETH Pulse Check Survey: The mean rating for the *importance* of the value team spirit was 8.43 (SD=1.87). This was the third-highest mean rating of any of the values.

AVETH Survey: In the description of their ideal candidate, words related to *team spirit* were mentioned by almost all research groups.

Current state of team spirit at ETH

In the ETH Pulse Check Survey, the mean rating for the *experienced* team spirit by German-speaking respondents was 5.63 (SD=2.88) and by English-speaking respondents 5.91 (SD=2.29). This was the lowest rating for the German-speaking respondents.

Positive experiences reported in the survey relate to a strong team identity, good collaboration, and support from team colleagues and supervisors. Negative examples relate to a lack of respect by supervisors (professors especially), self-centeredness of supervisors, mobbing, and competition.

Conclusion regarding team spirit

Team spirit is considered very relevant, with experiences strongly influenced by the respective team leader.



Figure 6: Depiction of diversity in the AVETH survey

Ms Vielfalt: A kid of diplomat parents who changed home every few years, Ms Vielfalt never spent many consecutive years in one place. After her Bachelor and Master degrees, she took off to travel around the world by herself. She speaks 6 languages fluently, has travelled in more than 50 countries, and has friends from all over the world. She took an opportunity to do a PhD in Zürich, and she is very excited to get to know yet another culture. Everything in her character speaks variety: she likes to hang out with everyone – and the more diverse the group, the better. She can adapt to and appreciate every situation and everyone she interacts with, but she will express her desire to do something different if called to spend too much time in a static environment.

3.4 Diversity

Diversity as defined in the SDP 2021-24

“Our success is based on the wide array of talented people in the ETH community who creatively develop bold ideas and put solutions into practice. We see all aspects of diversity as an opportunity. Our international orientation and our intense dialogue with society and across disciplines are factors that contribute majorly to developing new research questions and teaching our students.”

Desirability of diversity as a value for ETH

ETH Pulse Check Survey: The mean rating for the *importance* of the value diversity was 8.12 (SD=2.18). This was the second lowest mean rating of any of the values.

AVETH Survey: In the description of their ideal candidate, words related to *diversity* were mentioned by about half of the research groups. Sometimes *diversity* was described more specifically in terms of gender, culture, discipline, or perspective, in other cases *diversity* as such was listed as an important selection criterion.

Current state of diversity at ETH

In the ETH Pulse Check Survey, the mean rating for the *experienced* diversity by German-speaking respondents was 6.04 (SD=2.66) and by English-speaking respondents 4.53 (SD=2.92). This was by far the lowest rating for the English-speaking respondents.

Positive experiences reported in the survey relate to working in teams with a broad mix of nationalities, research interests, and disciplines. Occasionally, an improved gender balance was mentioned. Negative examples relate to the continued prevalence of “white males” at the ETH and discrimination against minority groups.

Conclusion regarding diversity

Diversity is generally considered less important than most other values. The large discrepancy between the German- and English-speaking respondents concerning experienced diversity may reflect ETH’s emphasis on German in many contexts as well as a stronger diversity mindset by individuals coming from other countries, especially the US. It is important to note that beyond gender and ethnic diversity, which is mentioned in most comments, one should also look into the diversity of knowledge, perspectives, and interests, which is mentioned in the AVETH survey. Moreover, diversity always has to be paired with inclusion, which is related to openness and respect.

Ms Exzellenz: She came to ETH Zürich to continue the research she started during her master thesis, which received a distinction and her University's best master thesis award. Quality describes everything she does, also in her private life. She will not compromise on the quality of her work, her appearance, her status, or her relationships, at any cost. A lover of philosophy in its purest form, she can debate about quality and has a very clear distinction with perfectionism, which she calls the enemy of every high-quality work. She has big plans for her future, wanting to be the world's best in her profession. In her free time, she is all about music, especially classical, and loves pushing herself on demanding piano compositions.



Figure 7: Depiction of excellence in the AVETH survey

3.5 Excellence

Excellence as defined in the SDP 2021-24

"We strive for excellence in everything that we do. Our students, researchers and employees shape our university and society with the high quality of their contributions."

Desirability of excellence as a value for ETH

ETH Pulse Check Survey: The mean rating for the *importance* of the value excellence was 7.52 (SD=2.60). This was the lowest mean rating of any of the values.

AVETH Survey: In the description of their ideal candidate, few research groups mention *excellence*, and if they do, they qualify it in terms of not striving for *excellence* at all cost.

Current state of excellence at ETH

In the ETH Pulse Check Survey, the mean rating for the *experienced* excellence by German-speaking respondents was 7.18 (SD=2.49) and by English-speaking respondents 7.77 (SD=2.01). This was the highest mean rating for all respondents. On the other hand, the importance of this value for a successful ETH future received the lowest rating of all five values with 7.52 (SD 2.6). The AVETH survey shows that doctoral teams are relatively critical of the employment of a colleague *Mrs. Excellence* and would prefer representatives of the other values as team members.

Positive experiences reported in the survey relate primarily simply to doing excellent work. Negative examples were related to promoting a "star cult," emphasizing competition at the cost of good teamwork and having no tolerance for failure.

Conclusion regarding excellence

Excellence is the least liked but most widely experienced value at the ETH. While there is clear agreement on striving to do excellent work, the negative connotations of excellence mainly concern individuals' desire to be the best at the cost of others and an attitude to accept nothing but exceptional competence and performance.

4 Results of Culture Discussions

4.1 Concrete discussions of values

The culture discussions, which were reported back to the project team, often took the five ETH values as a starting point, but also included broader critiques of ETH culture.

- (1) The understanding and interpretation of the concepts behind the values are very diverse. *Excellence* has a different meaning in the scientific environment than in the technical/administrative work environment, where people tend to talk about professionalism or efficiency. Excellence tends to be seen more as a goal or ambition and especially as a result of good teamwork. In general, *team spirit* is often confirmed as a very central value. The values *openness* and *diversity* are understood very broadly and differently. The understanding of “openness,” for example, ranges from physical accessibility to opinion-gathering and decision-making processes. Especially decision-making at ETH was discussed intensively and critically. This also fits with the concrete problems that are mentioned below under point 3 and corresponds to the ranking of the values in the ETH Pulse Survey, where the implementation of *diversity* was rated second lowest.
- (2) Several responses indicate that the creation of the canon of values is not comprehensible. The selection of the values seems somewhat random or arbitrary and not ETH-specific. In some cases, the inclusion of other or additional values is desired. For example, *respect*, *trust* and especially *critical thinking* are mentioned several times.
- (3) Specific critical points in the current culture are also addressed. These are:
 - Decision-making structures/hierarchies/power and power imbalances/(in)equality
 - Openness/transparency/mutual (in)understanding
 - Handling criticism/reproach culture
 - Academic freedom/autonomy

These critical feedbacks are not dominant, but they do show a clear profile of where the main problems lie. Key are appreciation and mutual acceptance on the individual level, dealing with the hierarchy between school management and departments, cross-departmental collaboration, decision-making processes, and overarching communication.

In the statements, partly contradictory perceptions and assessments are expressed, especially on autonomy and hierarchies. On the one hand, the culture of academic freedom is emphasized, especially by professors, and they complain that the understanding of the importance of the self-controlling academic system is dwindling. In this context, the

expansion of control by “headquarters” is lamented. In connection with this, it is also emphasized that this self-controlled system is dependent on a framework that is as free of hierarchy as possible, which is threatened by the university administration’s management structures and economization tendencies.

Conversely, other groups repeatedly point out that the professoriate, as advocates of hierarchy-free academic freedom, in fact lives of hierarchy structures and sometimes uses them negatively. Power and power imbalance are repeatedly deplored here. This is an example of a contradictory perception of the problem that cannot be easily resolved.

Positive mentions are repeatedly made of a generally good team spirit and group cohesion, good infrastructure, and a creativity-promoting environment. Pride is expressed in being at ETH and being part of this community.

We already have a lot of what we want at ETH

4.2 Culture discussions support togETHerness

A significant part of the feedback concerns the perception of the culture and values discussion as a process and the positive effects of these discussions on ETH’s development.

- (1) Culture and values discussions provide orientation, create understanding and commitment, raise trust, and bring different points of view into dialogue. The discussion is – as a process – an identity-forming, community-building, and common ground-building instrument. The discussion of values provides guidance.
- (2) Everyone is addressed in the culture and value discussions, according to the motto “Together, instead of alone” and everyone is (jointly) responsible. Several times, the discussions created a common understanding about the functioning of one’s own team and formed the basis for future-oriented changes. The culture discussion thus became a means of informal team building as well as a catalyst for more formal structural measures. It was sometimes described as a highlight in itself due to the positive atmosphere it helped create. Thus, the primary positive impact of the culture discussions occurred for the groups themselves, but with that they also contributed to a more open and inclusive ETH culture.
- (3) On the critical side, it is pointed out that the current rETHink approach creates the temptation to start culture discussions with a blank page. However, ETH already has an organizational culture, probably even different cultures. We should account for these and take their strengths and weaknesses as a starting point for the discussion. According to supporters of this perspective, a culture discussion should be conducted based on “concrete problems”, not at a fundamental level.

In continuing the culture discussion, it would be important to point out that all of us at ETH have our own cultural biography, e.g., origin, subject area, scientific or technical-administrative activity basis, or generation affiliation. We all carry a bias with us. We have to be aware of this bias, and we should develop a sensitivity for our own implicit evaluations.

5 Recommendations

WS6 has stimulated discussion and reflection about the values of ETH, those officially espoused and those enacted in day-to-day operations, in order to help build the cultural foundations for sustainable organizational development at ETH. In 2021, WS6 provided the stage for and encouraged conversations about ETH culture, leading to some preliminary insights into the values ETH members cherish and discrepancies between espoused and enacted values. From what we have observed, we see some immediate actions the ETH should take within rETHink as well as some activities that should be encouraged to foster continuous reflection on culture across the organization. However, we also propose for the ETH to engage in a systematic culture development

Culture is too important to be left to others

process in order to create a shared sense of what ETH specifically stands for and to help close gaps between good intentions and action at all levels of the ETH.

5.1 Observations on values in the SDP 2021-24

The values *responsibility, openness, diversity, team spirit, and excellence* mostly resonate with ETH's members. Importantly, no systematic differences have become apparent between different groups at ETH either regarding acceptance of or commitment to these values. Three observations stand out:

- (1) People consider the values as important but also see discrepancies between espoused and enacted values. They generally feel that the ETH would be a better place if the values were enacted more.
- (2) The values are seen as generic to any organization which aims to foster respect, trust, and accountability among its employees. It would be desirable to also develop values that are specific to ETH and that can create an even stronger sense of belonging and identification with the ETH.
- (3) Excellence is the one value that has some more specificity as a hallmark of a top university rather than as a characteristic of any organization. However, within the academic world, excellence is an overused and ill-defined concept, which tends to create conflict more than integration. Accordingly, it is not particularly well-suited as a foundation of ETH culture.

5.2 Recommended next steps

Step 1: Amend the five values as a cultural “baseline” for organizational development at ETH

The descriptions of the five values need to be amended to serve as a cultural “baseline” for the next stages in rETHink as well as in other ongoing change initiatives. WS6 will provide a proposal for the amended values by April 2022 to be decided on by the SL.

Step 2: Culture dialogues in rETHink workstreams, in other ETH initiatives and across the ETH

By integrating cultural reflection into decisions on organizational changes undertaken in the other rETHink workstreams, it is hoped that the alignment between espoused and enacted values can be improved. Moreover, many ongoing activities at ETH have cultural implications, e.g., the respect campaign, the critical thinking campaign or the revision of regulations concerning professors and doctoral students. These activities need to be aligned based on a shared understanding of ETH values. Lastly, the informal culture dialogues started in 2021 should still be encouraged as a way to promote cultural awareness across the ETH.

What is my own contribution to a good work environment?

Step 3: Encourage bottom-up culture-related activities

In culture dialogues and discussions within the WS6 team, a number of easy-to-implement activities have been suggested to keep culture-related topics on the agenda of all groups across ETH. The following list of suggestions should also be publicized on the rETHink webpage and through other channels of internal communication. The recommendations vary in scope, required effort, and possible responsibilities (e.g., decentral vs. central) and would have to be worked out in more detail before implementation.

- (1) ETH members, e.g., in a research group, an institute, an administrative unit, or an entire department, take the time at regular intervals (e.g., every two years) to conduct an open and elaborate cultural discussion. They will thereby make sure that culture stays a relevant topic.
- (2) Cultural aspects within the departments are addressed regularly and based on concrete situations and examples at the initiative of the Executive Board and other bodies, e.g., within the context of
 - the yearly dialogues with the departments,
 - the departments' regular evaluations,
 - the conference of the Heads of Department, or
 - the Heads of Department & Executive Board planning meeting.
- (3) Departments engage external partners to analyze the departmental culture (see example of D-ARCH [ein Kulturwandel geht nicht auf Knopfdruck](#)).

- (4) AVETH's «personas initiative» is made known and available to the technical and administrative staff both in the departments and the central administrative units.
- (5) People who leave ETH, be it due to retirement or a job change, are systematically asked for their feedback on ETH's culture and values.
- (6) Supervisors and their direct reports discuss cultural topics (e.g., regarding their immediate working environment) during the yearly appraisal interview (Personalgespräch). The yearly appraisal interview guideline should be amended by specifically mentioning cultural topics to support this and remind the interview partners of cultural topics.
- (7) ETH members, particularly employees in non-supervisory roles, are actively encouraged to share their experiences regarding culture and values, both on formal and informal occasions.
- (8) Onboarding events are used as an opportunity to inform new employees about ETH's culture and values and offer them support for becoming part of it. Where possible, this support is sensitive to and takes into account specific aspects like being a woman in an (at least in many cases) still predominantly male environment.
- (9) Employees are systematically asked about their experiences once they have completed their first year of employment at ETH.
- (10) The people responsible for the periodic employee survey in VPPL check whether it is feasible (and will add value) to include questions about ETH's culture and values to the survey (without simply "inflating" the survey).

Step 4: Explore options for a systematic culture development process

From what we have learned about ETH culture over the last 1.5 years, we would argue that the ETH could greatly benefit from engaging in a more systematic culture development process, which would involve the definition of further, more ETH-specific values that are regarded as core to what makes ETH unique in the eyes of its members. Such a process will promote identification with the values and will help to bridge the gap between declared intentions and day-to-day action due to the public self-commitment to live by these values.

Moreover, such a process will inevitably challenge long-held basic assumptions and expose conflicting beliefs which is key to true culture change. rETHink has sent the ETH on a journey which we feel will only be successful if deeply rooted worldviews on the functioning of academic institutions are questioned and transformed.

tough choices we face -- individually and as institution - arise from value conflicts, from having to trade off and prioritize between individual values

6 Outlook 2022

6.1 New tasks and organization for WS6

The main activity for 2022 will be to support value-based discussions and decision-making in all workstreams and thus enable value and culture development in a close interplay with organizational change at ETH. Members of the core team of WS6 will be "lent" to the other workstreams, where they will, together with experts in organizational development and culture ambassadors from these workstreams, support decision-making and implementation of solutions. **Table 2** depicts the roles and tasks for this process of continuous iterative integration of cultural considerations into all workstreams.

6.2 Long-term perspective

Culture is the long-term success factor most difficult to copy and hence a crucial strategic asset. Only continuous work on culture will enable ETH to keep and even enhance its top position among the world-leading academic institutions. Single culture actions or initiatives will not produce much change. They might not even show short-term measurable effects. The bundling of these activities, the sum of many (small) actions and the persistence in developmental efforts will help assemble "a critical mass" that will create cultural transformation towards a truly responsible, collaborative, open, and inclusive ETH.

Table 2: Overview of roles and tasks for culture reflection in all workstreams in 2022

Role	Tasks and activities
One expert in organizational development / One culture ambassador from core team of respective workstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are aware of the importance of cultural reflection for the successful implementation of organizational change • Organize and moderate culture and value discussions together with core team members of WS6
Two members of the WS6 core team per workstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer their experience and knowledge from WS6 to other workstreams • Comprehend and support considerations regarding cultural implications of the decisions taken in the respective workstreams • Are linking pins between WS6 and the other workstreams
Core team WS6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflects on the discussions in the other workstreams • Supports team members in their role in the other workstreams

Appendix – MIRO Board

https://miro.com/app/board/o9J_IER2HGM=/






2021

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC



INTERACT WITH COMMENTS

1. Hover over a comment to see the author's name and profile picture.

2. Click on the comment to open the comment editor.

3. Type your comment in the text box.

4. Click on the comment icon to post your comment.

Key Take-Aways

Culture is shared understanding, shared values, shared contribution, shared responsibility.

Die ETH mehr die Schwäche, wenn sie Land haben neutral, international, beidseitig, Dialog, mehrsprachig, verschiedene Kulturen, Kernfähigkeit, Durchführbarkeit, ethisch gegenüber, Übergabe...

Culture is a **common agreement** on what is important in life and business.

Culture are us - not the others...

Die Erfahrung mit Miro und Zoom wurde als sehr **erfolgreich** bewertet.

More **collaborative** experiences.

Kommunikation ist beide Wert, sondern ein Ziel. Erweiterung darf nicht als "Ergänzung" für Rückentwicklung betrachtet werden.

Big Learnings 100:

Diskussionen über Werte und Kultur verbessern die Arbeitsumgebung.

Wir brauchen mehr informellen Austausch und Raum (mehrsprachig, Vielfalt) für die größeren Fragen.

Diskussionen über Werte und Kultur verbessern die Arbeitsumgebung und die Zusammenarbeit.

Wir haben unterschiedliche **Perspektiven** auf das gleiche Thema, was die Diskussion herausfordernd, aber **konstruktiv** macht.

Culture **Discussions** help to **integrate different perspectives** and to build a shared understanding.

Kultur Diskussionen helfen, sich **besser kennen zu lernen** und besser zu verstehen.

Kultur Diskussionen werden schnell sehr **intuitiv** und damit **beliebt**. Wichtig ist ein **konkreter Fokus**, der dann auch in **regelmäßigen** Meetings thematisiert.

Eine **transparente Kommunikation** ist immer sehr **wichtig**.

Red Flags

Fertig mit **Vorverurteilung** - wir brauchen eine **konstruktive** **Konfliktkultur**.

Kultur und Wertediskussionen ohne **konkrete Ergebnisse** und **Maßnahmen**, die **angewendet** werden.

Rather ask **what you can do** for ETH than asking **what ETH can do** for you. **Less ego - more together**.

ETH soll **Entscheidungsstruktur** ändern.

2021

INTERACT WITH COMMENTS

Did you know? You can interact with comments on the blog. You can like, dislike, or reply to a comment. You can also report a comment if it is inappropriate.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are many ways to interact with comments on the blog. You can like, dislike, or reply to a comment. You can also report a comment if it is inappropriate.

Key Take-Aways

Culture is **shared** understanding, shared values, shared contribution, shared responsibility.

Die **ETHs** sind die **Schwäne**, wenn die **Landwirte** **essenzial**, **semisocial**, **bescheiden**, **flexibel**, **mehrsprachig**, **verschiedene** **Kulturen**, **Kontingenz**, **Darüberge**, **Kritisch** **gegenüber** **Obergeleuten**.

Culture is a **common agreement** on what is important in life and business.

Culture is **us** - not the others...

Die **Erfahrungen** **MitO** und **Zoom** wurde als **sehr erfolgreich** **bewertet**.

More collaborative experiences.

Exzellenz ist kein Wert, sondern ein Ziel. **Exzellenz** darf nicht als "Legitimierung für Rücktrittsangelegenheiten" **missbraucht** werden.

Red Flags

Diskussionen über Werte und Kultur verlaufen als **Ausweichmanöver**.

Wir brauchen mehr **informellen Austausch** und **Beim** **Interakt**, **off** **stapel** für die **grössere** **Fragen**.

Diskussionen über Werte und Kultur verlaufen **besonders** die **Zusammenarbeit**.

Wir haben **unerschöpfliche Perspektiven** auf das gleiche Thema, was die **Diskussionen** **ausfordert**, aber **konstruktiv** **macht**.

Culture **discussions** help to **integrate** **different perspectives** and to **build** **shared understanding**.

Kulturdiskussionen helfen, sich **bessere** **Normen** **zu** **finden** und **Besser** **zu** **sehen**.

Kulturdiskussionen werden **schnell** **sehr** **fruchtbar** **und** **dann** **belebiger**. **Wichtig** **ist** **ein** **konkreter** **Fokus**, **der** **dann** **noch** **zu** **möglichen** **Massnahmen** **führt**.

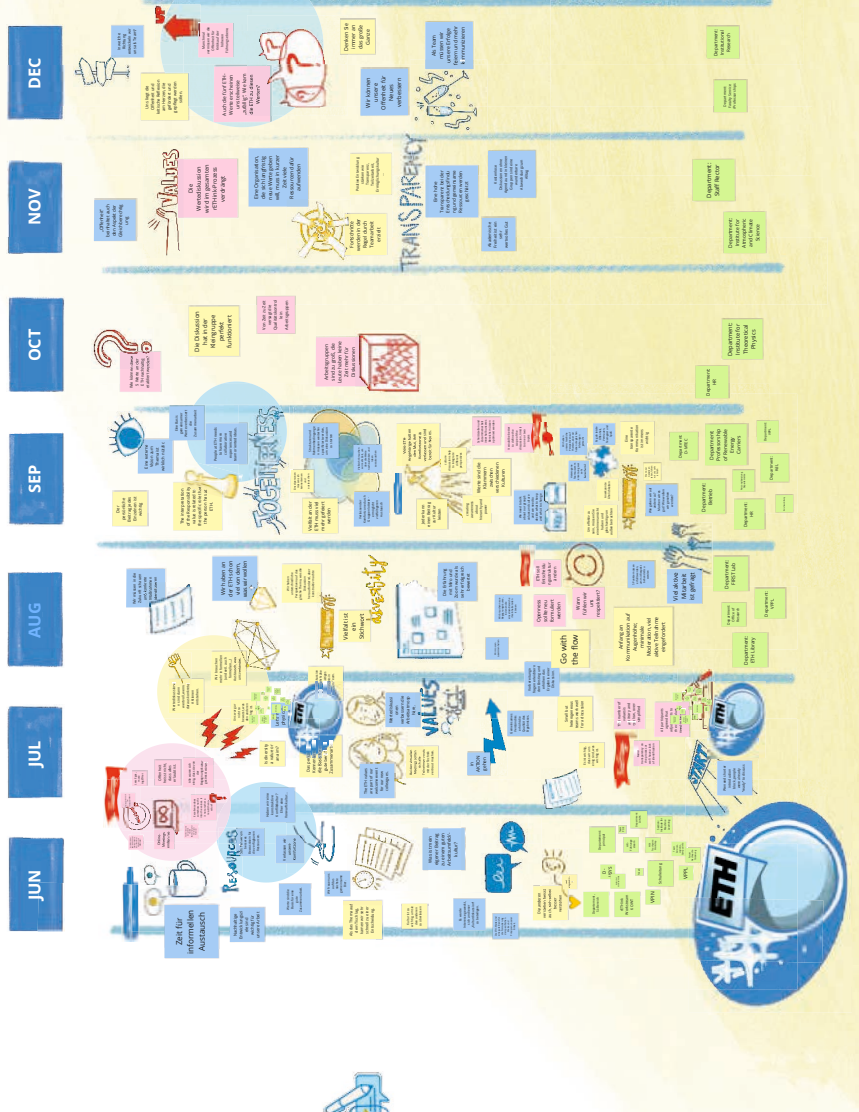
Eine **transparente** **Kommunikation** **ist** **immer** **wichtig**.

Fertig mit **Vorwurfskultur** - wir brauchen eine **konstruktive** **Konfliktkultur**.

Kultur- und Wertediskussionen ohne **konkrete** **Ergebnisse** und **Massnahmen**, die **abgeleitet** **werden**.

Bleiber **ask** **what** **you** **can** **do** **for** **ETH** **then** **asking** **what** **ETH** **can** **do** **for** **you**. **Less** **ego** - **more** **together**.

ETH soll **Entscheidungsstruktur** **ändern**.



2021

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP



Zeit für informellen Austausch

Red Flags

Red Flags
 - Meetings werden nicht abgesagt
 - Meetings werden nicht abgesagt
 - Meetings werden nicht abgesagt

Online Meetings enden nie

Offenheit heißt nicht, dass alles erlaubt ist.

Alle waren sich einig, sie von der Begegnungskultur getrennt waren.

Es ist nicht so, wie es aussieht, sondern es ist so, wie es ist.

Die Werte sind nicht die gleichen, sondern sie sind anders.

Resources
 - Schaffen wir ein Bewusstsein für die verfügbaren Ressourcen.
 - Verlassen wir unsere Komfortzone
 - Werts sind die Basis für eine Zusammenarbeit.
 - Wir freuen uns auf das nächste gemeinsame Bier.
 - Als das Thema auf dem Tisch lag, kamen wir sehr schnell zu einer Entscheidung.

Is diversity a value or an aim?

Haben wir eine konstruktive Konfliktkultur? Eher eine Vorwurskultur...

Wir müssen uns nicht auf das nächste gemeinsame Bier freuen.

Die persönliche Identität ist die Basis für eine gute berufliche Zusammenarbeit.

The ETH values are part of our identity

Wir müssen in die Zukunft schauen und konkrete Maßnahmen identifizieren



Werediskussionen sind dann wertvoll, wenn darüber keine Aktionen entstehen.

Wir haben an der ETH schon viel von dem, was wir wollen



Wir haben unterschiedliche Meinungen zum gleichen Thema, was die Diskussion herausfordert, aber konstruktiv macht

Big Learning!!!

Vielfalt ist ein Stichwort



Eine externe Vision zum Thema ist wirklich nützlich

Eine Bergemeinsamer Werte verbessert die Zusammenarbeit

People at ETH needs to have more collaborative experience and team oriented ideas.



The interpretation of the responsibility value is related to the specific role that the person has at ETH.

TOGETHERNESS

Einigen Personen müssen sich gegenseitig unterstützen

Strukturen und Rahmenbedingungen spezifiziert werden, um eine Diskussion zu starten

Vielleicht brauchen wir mehr Zeit, um eine Diskussion zu starten

Verlassen der Komfortzone in Gruppenarbeit ist ermöglicht

Welcome event.
Co-Create new
Collaborates.

Wertediskussi
onen
verbessern die
Arbeitsatmosph
äre.



Bei den virtuellen
Meetings werden
Teilnehmer vorab
mit der Technik
vertraut machen.

in
AKTION
gehen

Was ist mein
eigener Beitrag
zu einem guten
Arbeitsfeld/
kultur?

Kultur ist zu
wichtig, um sie
nicht selbst
zu verbessern

Es wurde
Interesse geweckt,
sich am dieser
"Workshop" zu beteiligen.

Die ETH ist ein
ganzheitliches
System, das sich
ständig weiter
entwickelt und
Praxiswissen über
Erneuerliche
Energie.

Die anderen
verstehen heisst
auch, sich selbst
besser
verstehen



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Die Erfahrung
mit Miro und
Zoom wurde als
sehr erfolgreich
bewertet



Wir brauchen mehr
Begrüßungen, um
erweitern Netzwerke
für neue Ideen
zu können



ETH soll
Entscheidungsstruktur
ändern



Wann
fühlen wir
uns
respektiert?

Openness
sollte neu
formuliert
werden

Go with
the flow

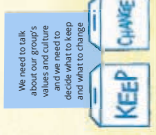
Anfang an
Kommunikation auf
Augenhöhe;
minimale
Moderation, viel
aktive Teilnahme
eingefordert

Viel aktive
Mitarbeit
ist gefragt



Um effektiv zu
sein, müssen Sie
entweder
haben und
gleichzeitig von
außen betrachten

Appliance
Anreizsystem



We need to talk
about values and culture
and we need to
decide what to keep
and what to change

Werte sind die
Klammern
zwischen
verschiedenen
Kulturen

Creating
awareness
about
hierarchy and
power

cultural help
describes
different
perceptions

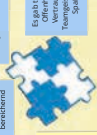
Jeder kann
einen Beitrag
zur Kultur
leisten

Viele ETH-
Angehörige hatten
den Mit- ihre
Komfortzone zu
verlassen und sind
bereit für Neues.

It would be better
to have a
discussion, limit it
to one or two
topics



Wir haben
unerschöpfliche
Themen, aber wir
haben nicht genug
Zeit um sie
anzugehen



Egal ob soziale
Offenheit,
Transparenz und
Teambuilding
wichtig

Eine
transparente
Kommunikation
ist immens
wichtig

Department:
D-MTEC

Department:
Professorship
of Renewable
Energy
Carriers

Department:
VPPL

Department:
Betrieb

Department:
HR

Department:
KdL

Department:
FIRST Lab

Department:
Office of
Research

Department:
VPPL

Department:
ETH Library

OCT

NOV

DEC



Wie können diese 5 Werte an der ETH nachhaltig etabliert werden?

Die Diskussion hat in der Kleingruppe perfekt funktioniert

Von Zeit zu Zeit versagt die Qualitätskontrolle in Arbeitsgruppen

Arbeitsgruppen sind zu groß, die Leute haben keine Zeit mehr für Diskussionen



„Offenheit“ beinhaltet auch den Aspekt der Gleichberechtigung



Die Wertediskussion wird im gesamten rETHink-Prozess verdrängt

Eine Organisation, die sich langfristig neue Werte geben will, muss in kurzer Zeit viele Ressourcen dafür aufwenden



Fortschritte werden in der Regel durch Teamarbeit erzielt

Positive Entwicklung stützen wie Transparenz, Teambearbeit, Ermöglichungskultur

TRANSPARENCY

Eine hohe Transparenz bei der Entscheidungsfindung und gemeinsame Ressourcen werden geschätzt

Akademische Freiheit ist ein sehr wertvolles Gut

Kostenlose Diskussionen ohne Agenda und in kleinen Gruppen sind eine wunderbare Abwechslung zum Alltag



In welche Richtung entscheiden wir uns als Team?

Uns liegt die Offenheit und kritische Reflexion am Herzen, die gefördert und gepflegt werden sollen.



Manchmal vermessen wir die Offenheit für Kritik auf der höheren Führungsebene.

Auch die fünf ETH-Werte erscheinen uns teilweise „zufällig“. Wie kam die ETH zu diesen Werten?



Denken Sie immer an das Große Ganze

Wir können unsere Offenheit für Neues verbessern



Als Team müssen wir unsere Erfolge feiern und mehr kommunizieren