Whenever the topic of career search came up I had always heard people mention the importance of an organization’s culture. Never understanding exactly what “culture” meant in this context, I smiled and nodded my head as the words flew over my head.

After my first day at Snapette, however, this term finally sunk in. In my opinion the culture of an organization is quite analogous to the details of a painting. Although all of the details seem subtle and possibly unimportant at first glance, you soon realize that they constitute the uniqueness of the art piece, making it have the powerful effect that it does.

For example, at Snapette the setup is quite informal. We sit at two large desks, wear casual clothing, and treat each other with equal respect, as friends would. Snapette’s atmosphere fosters creativity, free-flow thinking, and openness. Personally, I enjoy this because I feel comfortable expressing my opinion. I know that my thoughts will be listened to and that I will be given credit.

I feel that the informal aspect of Snapette’s internal operations as well as its comfortable, open environment are due to the fact that is it a startup.

The startup culture is unique within itself. One notable aspect is that entails a small employee base. This creates close-knit relationships between employers and employees. I find it easy to ask my bosses questions and bring up my concerns with them.

Furthermore, because Snapette is a fashion startup, most of the team is female. Because the everyday office-goers are women, there is a lot of compassion, kindness, and expression in the work space. Compared to other small organizations I have worked with, Snapette feels much more inviting and interesting because there is no awkward communication barrier between me and my bosses.

From the outside, Snapette runs seamlessly as it constantly produces new and improved versions of the product and takes time to listen to user-input. From within, I can see why it is that Snapette is so efficient and successful. It’s all in the details—all in the culture.
Entry 2: More on Culture

Change is a big theme in the startup culture. Because companies like Snapette are so small and based almost entirely on technology, it is quite easy for them to take their product in a new direction. They simply ask their coders to create a different feature or design.

I find that Snapette’s current priority is to reach out to make themselves more well-known. This is why other interns and I are promoting the application on a variety of social media platforms.

Snapette is also exploring how to take the organization from being a social platform for fashionistas toward becoming a tool used by all shoppers. I find the ability to make such drastic changes in mission exciting because it brings new options to the drawing board pretty often. This reaffirms my thought that I want to ultimately work in a job in which I work with clients on projects for certain periods of time rather than doing office work on a computer for days, only interacting with my co-workers at professional meetings.

I find the startup culture extremely exhilarating. I consider whether I’d like to work in one myself when I graduate. The only way I would work in a tech startup is if I founded it or if I was entirely convinced that it was a multi-million dollar idea.

I recently spoke with a friend who dropped out of the University of Michigan to pursue full-time work on his tech startup, which is somewhat like a Craigslist, organized by university, for college students. He told me that he wants to come to New York to work on his venture because the startup industry here sees the real-world application of their products. Whereas in San Francisco, where the biggest startup atmosphere pervades, the entrepreneurs often invent just to invent, making applications and websites that only apply to a small audience for an unnecessary need.

I, too, would want to stay in New York if I worked in a startup for this exact reason. I want my time to be spent on something that improves human life. Moreover, however, I realize that financial stability is a large value of mine. Living paycheck to paycheck, knowing that the startup may not be in the .01% of those that “make it,” would be uncomfortable and distressing for me.
Entry 3: Embrace new opportunities

In the beginning of my internship, my boss at Snapette specified that she wanted me to come into the office at least once per week. I felt worried that travelling downtown during the week would overwhelm me. First semester was a huge transition. I realized that I had little time to relax with the workload that engineering school gave me. I learned that it was necessary to micromanage my time in order to balance my schedule. Although I had grown a lot over the fall, I knew that second semester would be an adjustment as well, and I was afraid that I would have no time to set aside for the commute to Snapette.

I brought up this concern with Emily, the VIP coordinator, who spoke to my boss about it. Ultimately I agreed to try coming into the Snapette office once per week.

To my surprise coming into the office was a great success. I realized that it worked well because I can’t be distracted by my academic studies at the office whereas if I was in my dorm, I could have felt pressured to study for my classes. Basically, the commitment to office time translated to a commitment to work for the internship.

Starting my weekly work at the office gave me the motivation and footing to continue it at home for the rest of the week because I was able to ask my boss any questions that arose at the beginning of my project. Having the simultaneous office and virtual internship experience was eye-opening. Knowing my work habits and ease at distraction, an all virtual-internship would have been difficult for me to master.

I was also glad that I had intermittent visits to the Snapette office because they helped me acclimate to the culture of the organization. When I developed relationships with my boss and other employees, I could easily understand what their expectations were and thus, I completed my tasks more thoroughly and to their liking.

On top of this, being able to have face-to-face contact with Snapette employees gave me access to resources for work, such as tips and training for creating email templates, and resources for myself, such as references for future jobs and internships.

All in all, I learned that I should see unplanned occurrences as new opportunities and embrace them. I learned how to trust the direction of my boss, who was strongly suggesting the weekly visits because she knew it would give me a richer internship experience.
Entry 4: Be patient when problems arise

In the third week of my internship I received a text from my boss asking me to go to a fashion show. At first I was excited, but then it dawned on me that I didn’t know what to expect. How should I approach people to network with them? Where should I sit? How long was this event going to be? These were just a few of the questions that raced through my mind.

I was disappointed that I would not have any guidance at my first fashion show. When I got there I found many people to be exclusive, speaking only to the friends/co-workers they had come with and not very engaged when I tried to make conversation.

I enjoyed the fashion, but was a bit put off by the personal interactions. I planned on speaking to Caitlin to outline my goals and expectations that I had of my mentors at Snapette.

When I got into the office, Caitlin asked me how my experience was and explained that it was New York Fashion Week so they would be forwarding a bunch of last minute invites to fashion events to me. We discussed my concerns and she answered my questions.

Everything was cleared up for me in minutes and I avoided the confrontation. I learned that with patience, problems may resolve themselves as they did in this case.

In the future, if I encounter a similar problem, I will not “jump the gun.” I have the ability to foresee whether my boss will be the type of person to ask about my experience, and if so, I’ll be able to clear up any issues when the opportunity arises.
Entry 5: Appreciating the individual

In my interview with Snapette, Caitlin asked me to come up with a marketing project to drive downloads of the application. I was very familiar with the fashion and beauty community on YouTube and knew how penetrating it was since many videos received tens of thousands of views within hours of being uploaded. So I suggested that Snapette partner with a beauty guru on YouTube to have their application featured.

After I secured the internship, Caitlin contacted me explaining how excited she was that I was familiar with YouTube, which was new marketing territory to her. She was interested in giving Snapette a voice on the video social media platform and believed that my “expertise” in the area could really help. So my first project was to reach out to YouTubers in hopes of partnering with one of them for a video featuring Snapette.

On another occasion, I planned a conference call for Caitlin and a YouTuber. Caitlin included me by putting the conversation on speaker phone. Afterward she asked me about my thoughts and opinions on how the conversation went and potential ideas for collaboration.

In previous internships I held, I was asked to work with little direction and feedback. The worst part was that in the end of the project, my boss had taken all the credit for my creation.

At Snapette however, I knew that all of the team members cared about my opinions and about making the internship a valuable learning experience for me. They made me feel appreciated, which motivated me to work harder and made the work more enjoyable.

When I am looking for a career, I know that I will want to work in an environment where each individual’s contribution is acknowledged and praised. I now know that I enjoy collaborative team work, in which there is a common goal but also room for individual creativity.
Entry 6: What I gained

When I came into Snapette I expected to be restricted mostly to busy work. Although, some of my assignments fulfilled this expectation, I also was pleasantly surprised by my bosses’ attempts to involve me in projects that I was interested in as well as those which taught me new skills.

A few weeks after I started the YouTube project, I began to get a bit bored of contacting YouTubers with the same questions in the same email template. The director of business development, Angela, wanted to expand Snapette’s presence in Chicago. She asked me to help her with this task and I gladly agreed.

Before I began contacting boutiques in Chicago, Angela spoke to me about my assignment and conducted a few mock phone calls with me, giving different scenarios each time. I realized how much I enjoy learning through human interaction rather than through reading a book. I felt much more confident in my work when I began because I had already known what I was going to encounter through practice with Angela.

This communication via phone, rather than email, helped me see that I like building relationships with partners rather than communicating remotely. I also like to see direct impacts of my work. For instance, when I got a boutique to agree to partner with Snapette, I felt that I had accomplished a concrete goal: adding another store’s profile to Snapette’s current base of around 200.

Angela also taught me how to tailor my language for different audiences. I think this is a useful skill that I will be able to use in any industry that I enter.

Ultimately, my internship taught me much more than I had anticipated. Before Snapette, I was sure that I was going to go into the finance/business side of the fashion industry. So I took this internship, to honestly, “start somewhere.”

I learned so much from my four months with Snapette. I believe that my communication as well as my time management skills improved. Furthermore, I discovered that I did not want to pursue a career in fashion. I made over ten contacts, which was my original goal, but many of them told me that it was hard to find financial stability in fashion and advised me to make my money in another field and do fashion as a pastime. On the other hand, I thought I would not like the tech aspect of the internship, but I found out that I really enjoyed the tech startup culture and could see myself potentially working in it in the future.

By attending some events and panels at Columbia, my interest in consulting grew over second semester. I spoke to one of my Snapette bosses about this field, and she told me that she had worked for McKinsey & Co. and would be happy to be a reference for me in the future. In the end, I ended up meeting my goals in ways I had not planned; it was so bizarre but also so wonderful.

A large lesson learned was to keep my expectations and plans open to get the most out of any experience, especially one like this.
Me researching fashion companies for a small marketing project
Angela at work
The setup of the workspace, with several different startups at their own tables
The Snapette tables