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Introduction

Culture permeates all aspects of any society. It acts as the basic fabric that binds people together. Culture dictates tastes in music, clothes, and even the political and philosophical views of a group of people. Culture is not only shared, but it is deep and stable.[1] However, culture does not exist simply as a societal phenomenon. Organizations, both large and small, adhere to a culture. Organizational culture determines how an organization operates and how its members frame events both inside and outside the organization. This paper explores the basic concepts of organizational culture. It describes what organizational culture is, its importance, how it is formed, and the various types of organizational cultures that exist.

What Organizational Culture Is

A plethora of definitions exist for organizational culture. Various scholars define culture as how an organization goes about meeting its goals and missions, how an organization solves problems, or as a deeply rooted value that shapes the behavior of the individuals within the group.[2] In reality organizational culture is all of these things. In its entirety organizational culture consists of an organization's shared values, symbols, behaviors, and assumptions.[3] Simply put, organizational culture is "the way we do things around here."

Organizational culture consists of three parts: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions.[4] Artifacts are the easiest to notice, but yet their meanings may remain elusive to outsiders. Through a process of realization, artifacts take on the symbolic meaning of the organization's values.[5] Only those that have been educated in the organization's culture will know and understand the larger meaning behind the artifact. The Library of Alexandria is a prominent artifact in librarianship. To an outsider the Library of Alexandria may seem like an impressive feat of the ancient

world. But to librarians the Library of Alexandria has a much different meaning. It was the first library and the ideal to which all other libraries strive. When a library is wrestling with a decision someone will usually debate whether the proposed change adheres to the virtues for which the Library of Alexandria stood. Values form another integral part of organizational culture. When an organization faces a crisis, its leaders must formulate a plan to alleviate the danger posed. Successfully thwarting the crisis validates the plan and it becomes a shared value of the organization. When a similar crisis arises in the future, the organization will reuse the plan to avert catastrophe and right the ship. After repeated success, the value becomes an underlying assumption of the organization.[6] These underlying assumptions form the basic core of all organizational culture. They are difficult to know and understand because they are rarely articulated. In order for one to determine the assumptions of an organization one must become immersed in the organization and its culture. Underlying assumptions manifest themselves through the perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of members of the organization.[7] When an idea is posited that does not conform to the underlying assumptions of an organization then that idea is rejected outright without any thought or debate. Any challenges to these assumptions will result in defensive behavior from the members.[8] Therefore organizational culture can explain the resistance, fear, and sometimes "irrational" behavior that one encounters in any organization, especially when trying to implement change.

At this juncture it is important to differentiate between climate and culture. Climate consists of the day to day feelings of the members of the organization and is highly susceptible to changes within the organization. The climate will be very good for a time if the staff receives raises or if the library is furnished with new equipment. Conversely, if budget cuts occur or the number of staff reduced the climate will suffer. These conditions are all temporary, whereas culture is more permanent and lasting. Culture can and does change, but at a much slower rate than climate. It is a powerful force that can encourage and support an individual's efforts or thwart them before they are started. Organizational culture can be used to both explain and create end results.[9]

Importance

In any organization three levels exist. The first level is the individual. At this level the main thrust is to motivate the employee so that she will meet the wishes of her employer. The second level consists of the group where management focuses on relationships among employees and the formation of a group identity. The third level is the organization itself and the goal at this level is to create a smooth and efficiently running organization.[10] In order for the goals of the third level to be met, the goals of the first two levels must be achieved first. If a worker is not properly motivated to

carry out her tasks, or if a department is having trouble working together, then the organization as a whole will suffer.

Meeting the goals of the first two levels has become increasingly harder. In today's world of globalization, intense competition, and instant communication, change is constant, and the "IBM Man," a company lifer who began and ended his career with the same company, is a phenomenon of the past. Workers now scan the job market for the jobs that will put them in the best position to succeed both financially and professionally. With workers changing jobs so often, worker loyalty to an organization is vanishing.

This makes organizational culture so important. Culture creates sustainability for an organization and acts as the most powerful force for cohesion.[11] Anthropologists have posited that membership in a stable primary group is of the utmost importance for the well being of any society.[12] Organizations do not differ in this respect. Organizations require stability in order to survive. Organizational culture can provide that stability by allowing people to communicate with each other, coordinate efforts, and define members from non-members.

How Culture is Made

Culture is learned. In an organization it is taught to new employees through formal training programs, but generally informal methods such as stories, myths, rituals, and shared behavior do more to teach new employees "how things are done around here."[13] Organizational culture is formed from four major areas: how an organization uses its resources, an organization's structure, the people within the organization, and the process of completing the work of an organization. The mission and goals established by an organization define these four areas. And when they exist in harmony and balance a good culture, and subsequently a good working environment is created. When one of these four falls out of balance or becomes outdated the culture, working environment, and even the organization itself can rapidly deteriorate.[14] When an organization is without a mission or goals, then it will wander aimlessly through the desert. And it most certainly will not have any culture. The focus and direction that an organization's mission and goals provides determines how the organization will allocate its resources and complete the work at hand. As was mentioned above, these items define and form a culture.

Culture consists of two major areas. The first is sociability or the friendliness among workers. A highly sociable environment creates a pleasant working environment which fosters creativity and workers who go the extra mile to complete their assigned duties. Too much sociability however can create an environment where poor performance is tolerated, too much emphasis is placed on consensus, and cliques or

informal networks develop.[15] The second part of an organization's culture is how well workers collaborate and cooperate with each other, also known as solidarity. An organization with high solidarity is one where people continually work together to achieve common goals. With too much solidarity an organization becomes oppressive for all those who dare stray from the norm.[16] Without enough solidarity collaboration becomes impossible and the members of the organization only care about their performance and duties.

Studying an organization's culture is a complex task which requires collecting data from five areas. In order to fully understand an organization's culture one must look at the organization's desire to produce results, the environment in which the work is done, the perspective of the organization (traditional or innovative), how or if power is shared, and the amount of risk that is encouraged. But the one device that may tell one the most about an organization is communication. How an organization communicates is both a product and a cause of the culture.[17] A library may want its departments to work independently of each other so therefore communication among the departments is non-existent. And because communication is non-existent among the departments each department acts independently of each other.

Types of Culture

It is pertinent to note that no organizational culture exists on its own. Every organization will display a dominant culture, but will also contain fragments of other cultures usually in the form of sub-cultures.[18] It also is extremely important to keep in mind that no culture is the "right" culture. Any culture can be functional or dysfunctional. The culture in place in an organization must fit with the competitive environment and allow the organization to meet its goals and missions.[19] Every culture has a life cycle and must be routinely examined to see if it still fits the needs of the organization. Elizabeth Curry, facilitator of the Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute, uses the names of the cultures below in her leadership workshops. They are by no means the only names used, but are employed here due to their relative ease in understanding.[20]

Power Culture

A power culture emanates from centralized power in a charismatic leader. This leader acts decisively and unilaterally, but always with the best intentions for the organization in mind. Power cultures are demanding of the people within the organization. Late nights and weekends in the office often are the norm. Generally, motivation is not a problem since expectations are clear and loyalty is recognized and rewarded. In a dysfunctional stage power cultures can produce inefficient organizations where everyone waits for approval before moving forward on an idea.

This is seen in organizations that have become too large for one person to maintain all the control and authority. Employees may also spend too much time playing political games and trying to curry favor with the boss instead of actually working. Members of this type of culture often become burned out, and disloyal employees face a hostile and oppressive environment.

Role Culture

A role culture is a highly structured environment where clear objectives, goals, and procedures exist. An employee is judged almost solely on how well they meet these objectives and goals. In a functional stage role cultures operate highly efficiently and include built-in checks and balances of power. This culture rewards dependability and consistency and, due to its well-articulated procedures, produces little stress. However, taken to extremes role cultures can create an organization of automatons that simply follow the rules and have very little concern for that which is not in their prescribed area. This mentality creates an environment where cooperation and collaboration are non-existent and a person's talent may go unused. Change comes very slow in role cultures and those within the culture, especially a dysfunctional one, may become afraid to take risks.

Achievement Culture

An achievement culture is one where people work hard to achieve goals and better the group as a whole. This culture generally consists of highly motivated people who need little to no supervision. Rules and procedures are limited as they may interfere with the accomplishment of work. When a rule gets in the way of achieving a goal the rule is simply ignored. The best tools and methods for producing results are utilized, and when one goal is met, everyone quickly moves on to another. Because of this environment and mindset, achievement cultures tend to be highly adaptive. Unfortunately, members of an achievement cultures tend to burn out on their work. It may be difficult to establish control if the need arises as the culture cultivates individuals. Members may also become highly competitive with each other and the mindset of "whatever it takes" can lead to dishonest and illegal behavior.

Support Culture

A support culture acts like a tiny community where people support and trust each other. Members of this culture will cooperate, make sure everyone is together on an idea, and do all that they can to resolve conflict. Support cultures consist of good communication and excellent service both internal and external. This culture creates a nurturing environment where members like to spend time together and sometimes personal and professional lives can become blurred. When a support culture becomes

dysfunctional the needs of the individuals are placed over the needs of the organization. Due to a commitment to consensus decisions come slowly. Support cultures tend to not be very task oriented. And too much time spent together fosters personal differences that often hinder work and ruin the excellent service that is a hallmark of support cultures.

Conclusion

Organizational culture consists of an organization's shared values, symbols, behaviors, and assumptions. It allows its members to frame events in a similar fashion and provides the stability an organization needs to survive in an ever-changing world. No one perfect culture exists. In order for one of the four cultures (Power, Role, Achievement, or Support) to be the "right" culture for an organization, it must be functional and allow the organization to meet its mission and goals. It is very important that an organization periodically reviews its culture to make sure it still allows the organization to succeed in its competitive environment. One can never truly understand an organization until one understands the culture of that organization.

Organizational culture is a powerful force that has toppled the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and turned small businesses into powerful success stories. But organizational culture does not simply exist in the business world. All organizations no matter how big or small have a culture, including libraries. The culture of a library goes a long way towards explaining how that library operates, its employee satisfaction, and the level of resistance to change. Libraries no longer operate in a vacuum. The explosion of the World Wide Web and the subsequent "information revolution" has created a competitive market for libraries. With the right organizational culture a library can meet the need of its patrons and retain its rightful place as the world's leading information source.

Endnotes

[1] Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 10.

[2] Paul Sanchez, "Defining Corporate Culture," *Communication World*, November-December 2004, 18.

[3] Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, *The Character of a Corporation*, (New York: Harper Business, 1998), 9.

[4] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 17.

[5] Mary Jo Hatch, "The Dynamics of Organizational Culture," *The Academy of Management Review*, 18, no. 4, 665.

[6] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 19-21.

[7] Hatch, 661-662.

[8] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 23.

[9] Sanchez, 18-20.

[10] Ann Jordan, *Business Anthropology*, (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press Inc., 2003), 85.

[11] Goffee and Jones, 14-15.

[12] Desmond Graves, *Corporate Culture: Diagnosis and Change*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 1.

[13] Jordan, 45.

[14] Sanchez, 19-20.

[15] Goffee and Jones, 26-27.

[16] Ibid, 28 & 31.

[17] Sanchez, 20-21.

[18] Jordan, 86.

[19] Goffee and Jones, 37 & 41.

[20] Elizabeth Curry, "Four Examples of Organizational Cultures," (Tampa, FL: Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute, 2004-2005).

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