

MANAGING CULTURE IN ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Almost all organizations claim to have their own organizational culture. Organizational culture plays significant roles in influencing members in organizations in terms of commitment, loyalty and satisfaction. Organizations do not only produce products or services to be marketed, but they also produce organizational values, symbols and norms to be delivered, promoted, extended and appreciated to existing members, newcomers and outsiders. The organizational culture is not only able to change, guide and display the behaviour of the individual but also give significant contributions by influencing the thought, feeling, interacting and performance in the organization.

INTRODUCTION

There are differences in interpreting and defining culture, but organizations recognize that culture is an "invisible asset" (Itami, 1987) that is supposed to be shared, learned and transmitted (Beaumont, 1993). In support, Schein (1985) defined culture as:

A basic assumption and belief that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and taken for granted fashion an organization view itself and its environment. These assumptions

and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in its external environment and its problem of internal integration.

The question is how can the organizations utilize culture as a social glue that holds the organizations together while at the same time build their own "fences" through hierarchical layers, functional units, sub-groups and status-quo? It has been realized that the existence of these elements will develop differences, create boundaries, widen the gap and diffuse the relationship at organizational, departmental and individual levels. These "fences" will distance members from reaching the common organizational culture, and will also isolate, departmentalize and compartmentalize the culture from being single, common, understandable and acceptable to all members.

Morgan (1986) considered organizational culture to be an important tool for the organizations to reside in the ideas, values, norms, rituals and beliefs in order to sustain organizations as socially constructed realities. Organizational culture is also an important mechanism to channel messages and information that will differentiate between permissible and non-permissible patterns of behaviour. According to Lawson and Shen

(1998), organizational culture is not just any thoughts, feelings, values, and actions, but rather the unifying patterns that are shared, learned, aggregated at the group level, and internalized only by organizational members. Thus it is not an easy way for organizations to develop a single organizational culture as it goes beyond description, understanding, explanation, predication and control (Sackmann, 1991).

It should not be denied the needs for organizations to cultivate their cultural identities by shaping values, exploring members' cultural potentialities and acknowledging the cultural networks either formal or informal. As it has been suggested by Huczynski and Buchanan (1991), the company's policies, decisions, activities and even their success will be determined by the organizational culture. For example, if the organizations truly value customer service, members in the organizations will unquestionably adopt the culture of being highly sensitive toward customer complaints, product quality and openness toward new ideas. Members of the organization are ready for immediate response toward customer complaints, dedicated to quality improvement and highly value innovations.

In such a case, a strong organizational culture provide a clear idea of what is required from its members, and a clear sense of objective can be pursued (Carnall, 1990). A strong organizational culture plays a role as a reliable compass and as a powerful lever to guide and balance member's behaviour. As organizational culture is a dynamic process and exposed to changes, it is continuously learned by members in the organization and simultaneously modifying it as a result of individual learning, experience, opportunity and threat.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND THE ORGANIZATION

Other than profits, organizations have stories, slogans and myths to be appreciated and to be proud of. They have heroes whom managers and workers can emulate. Organizations are human institutions that provide practical meaning for members' action and behaviour.

They reflect not only the personality of the individual members but the organizations that they represent. In such cases, managing organizational culture requires a better understanding of cultural paradigms and the value of cultural change.

According to Sackmann (1991), culture will act as a control mechanism to create organizational commitment, achieve integration within organizations and help the organization adapt to the external changes. Besides, organizational culture will act as a "scanner" to approve or to disapprove certain character, attitude and personality of members from their existing psychological bounds. Once the psychological bound is untied, it will be easier for the organizations to develop, formulate and create new "organizational men" who are far-sighted, proactive, action-oriented and even prepared to sacrifice for the sake of the organizations.

Undeniably, when members interact with the organizations, they feel both fear and hope. They may be afraid of having their rewards taken away, losing their jobs, being separated from their existing work group or being reprimanded for not delivering the expected performance. They may be also afraid of punishment that will be imposed on them by the groups through isolation, boycott and underrating as a result of their achievement which might not be favourably accepted by the groups' members or which failed to achieve the groups' target. The members may also worry about their own abilities of fulfilling the organization's and group's expectation. At the same time, they hope to be favourably accepted, recognized and rewarded for their ability to meet the target. They need to be appreciated by both the organizations that they represent and the groups that they belong to. The organizations, on the other hand, may want every return from every expense they had invested in their employees. The organizations want organization members to prove their abilities and loyalties to the organizations.

The two extreme poles between members and the organizations should be narrowed. The organizational group and individual goals need to be unified and be congruent. They should not think of "who I am" but "who we

are". They should realize that they need each other's contribution and their commitments for the progress of the organization. They should have a symbiotic but not a parasitic relationship and their commitment should not be one-sided. Members in the organizations should realize that joining the organization would enable them to earn an income and gain recognition and social status. On the other hand, organizations should realize that their prosperity, profitability and survival depend on the contributions, commitment and loyalty of their members.

When individuals join an organization, they carry with them a different pattern of thinking, experiences, expectations, qualifications, skills and expertise. Members' cultural meanings will be influenced by their perceptions, memories, beliefs and experiences and so their interpretation of even the same phenomenon may differ (Martin, 1992). For instance, some members may perceive a certain organizational culture as positive, while others may view it negatively. In analyzing this situation, Hofstede (1991) found that the individual had collected their own mental programmes or had developed "the software of the mind" before they joined an organization. Thus the organization and its members need to modify these existing "fences" in order to accept organizational culture.

It has been realized that there is no easy "recipe" to the solution of organizational culture-related problems as culture is predominantly implicit, imbedded and cemented in people's minds. Culture is neither something that is "out there" with separate existence nor of its own and directly observable. Cultural members enact what they perceive and fail to enact what they fail to perceive (Martin and Meyerson, 1988). Members may be conscious or preconscious of some aspects of culture that have been excluded, simply forgotten or taken for granted. Thus, it is not an easy task to dilute members' existing culture with the organizational culture, as both have their own interests, priorities and egos. The organizations should realize that those who do not take into account cultural

differences within the organizations might be misleading and ineffectual in the long term (Meek, 1992).

It has been realized too that the measurements of work culture, such as "hardworking", "efficient" and "responsive" are still questionable as they might be influenced by the organizational control mechanism such as rules and policies or by individual hypocrisies and not from their inner consciousness (Sathe, 1985). According to Anthony (1986), even where members accept the authority of the manager and their right to manage, there is always some reluctance by members to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the organization. This phenomenon is mainly due to the low level of members' acceptance of organizational culture as a result of the inability of the management to convey messages clearly, understandably and in a timely manner.

CULTURAL PARADIGM

Meyerson and Martin (1987) studied the level of members' acceptance toward organizational culture and reviewed three different cultural paradigms, i.e. integration, differentiation and fragmentation.

1. Integration Paradigm

This paradigm views culture as an integrated entity. Emphasis is given to consistency and the organization's wide consensus about the appropriate interpretation of the cultural manifestations. From these perspectives, cultural members agree about what they are supposed to do and why it is worthwhile for them to do it. Members are prepared to share the organizational values and reject any form of ambiguity, bias and injustice.

2. Differentiation Paradigm

The differentiation paradigm on organizational culture recognizes the inconsistency and lack of consensus toward the manifestation of culture in terms of action, symbol and content. The main reason for it is the existence of discrete subcultures that lead to differentiation in translating cultural meaning (Aldrich, 1992). However, at the organizational level of analysis, differentiated

subcultures may co-exist in harmony, conflict or indifference to each other. The way in which the management handles each of them will determine in what category each sub-culture is. Indeed, the organization should appreciate, accept and even utilize the strength from different spectrums of culture among their members as long as they are in line with the organizational objective, strategy and mission. Thus, it is a waste of time and resources to force individual members to accept a single designed culture.

3. Fragmentation Paradigm

The fragmentation paradigm views ambiguity as something inevitable and inescapable within the organization. This paradigm recognizes that members' consensus toward organizational culture is constantly changing as it is influenced by the events, attention and situations. According to this paradigm, it is rare and even difficult to have members' total commitment or total rejection toward the organizational culture. Individuals tend to accept the culture that benefits them and reject the culture that might invite uncertainties for their future careers, reward and status.

The constraint faced by the organizations is how to categorize the members' levels of acceptance toward a certain culture in stated paradigms. Since culture and groups are dynamic and subject to change, their acceptance will be influenced by both internal changes (for example, company's policies, ideology and management style) and external changes (for example, technology, law and socio-politic). These forces may either strengthen or diminish member's acceptance toward organizational culture. At the same time, members tend to make a cost and benefit analysis as a result of cultural change. As such, organizations should ensure that when there is a cultural change, it is for the better. The organization should avoid creating a new problem(s) as a result of cultural change by developing an effective network of cultural transmission (McShane and Glinow, 2000). It should also be aware that what a group accepts as an effective culture today may not be so in the future. For example, unionism was formerly

accepted as an important organizational culture. Nowadays, with the introduction of effective human resource policies, unionism has been marginalized. The groups might have accepted certain behaviours as an organizational culture although they might have rejected it before. Above all, the element of rewards and punishments as a result of changing culture will determine members' acceptance or rejection toward culture (Daley, 1992).

CULTURAL CHANGE

Culture possesses far greater intrinsic worth than physical products. For physical products, organizations can easily change their production level, channel of distribution and promotional approach by changing the systems, methods and strategies. The organizations can determine whether to go on with the production or alter it by looking at the stages of the product life cycles. They can plan, implement and withdraw products from the market whenever required. But, managing culture is far more complicated than managing physical products. Once culture is produced and accepted as permanent or even deep-rooted, change itself becomes an impediment to future change (Sathe, 1985). Those who feel at ease with the existing culture will start to question, argue and protest about any cultural change that they have to make.

For certain cultural members, a change in culture may destabilize or threaten their existing positions. They worry about uncertainties, difficulties and unpredictable consequences as a result of cultural change. It is also problematic for any organization to determine whether the existing culture is at the stage of introduction, growth, maturity or decline. It is not easy for an organization to demarcate between each stage of the cultural life cycle. A major difficulty faced by organizations is when to introduce the new culture and when to exit the old culture from the organization. According to Alan (1990) changing culture is a long, complicated and expensive business with major implications for the future of the organization.

Although organizational culture seems difficult and slow in changing, still it must be managed in order to fit with the strategic

direction of the organization (Torrington, et al., 1992). It has been suggested that the possibility of changing and managing culture depends on how well culture is formulated, communicated and implemented in the organization. There is no such thing as trial and error in managing culture; once it is introduced, it should be first time right. There are possibilities that an organization's past experiences, the experiences of others and organization communication networks can be important means that could help an organization to achieve "first time right" introduction of a new culture.

CULTURE AND THE ROLES OF TOP MANAGEMENT: SUGGESTIONS

The top management should also bear the responsibility in determining the right culture for their organizations. They have the capability to formulate a clear and unwavering vision of the future and to determine the right direction in which the organizations are going. The top management should play the roles of innovators, implementers and pacifiers in handling the organizational culture (Mullins, 1993). According to Kreitner and Kinicki (1998), the behaviour that the top management models, the administrative procedures that it introduces and the reward systems it creates will speed up significant improvement in the quality of the company's products. So, it is the responsibility of top management to think and act strategically so that the organization will gain financially and morally from the creation of a new strong organizational culture. The top management should be the leading persons to remove all the biases, barriers and blockades that have prevented others from understanding and fully realizing the organizational culture as a way of work life. On the other hand, the top management should not be considered by the organizational members as a "sacred cow" that

will block a deep cultural change in the organization (Quinn, 1996).

It has been suggested that the top management should also translate their thoughts, plans and insights into action. To ensure success in changing the organizational culture, the top management must continuously, creatively and honestly articulate the company's vision, objectives, and goals. The messages should be clearly and directly addressed to the members of the organization without being filtered and altered by middle management or other parties. The top management should be on the stage together with other members of the organizations and not just as ordinary audience who are looking for members' mistakes and weaknesses. They are responsible to initiate members to uphold organizational culture as a driving force, a motivational tool and a visionary instrument. Indeed, the top management are the main actors who will determine the success of running "the organizational.cultural" show.

CONCLUSION

It has been realized that changing organizational culture is completely different from just changing organizational structure. Once organizational culture changes, the whole network of the organization will also change. Therefore, in deciding the type of organizational culture, collective views from all members about its implications should be taken into consideration. It is suggested that the acts of oversimplification, adhocracy and "taken for granted" should be avoided in dealing with organizational culture. All in all, managing culture is a combination of managing structure (people) and the future that needs to be handled strategically. □

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