

Organisation Culture as an influence upon the behaviour of members of the organisation.

The way an employee acts, is deemed as being an important vehicle for communicating a company's overall corporate values and performance goals. This is particularly true where the employee performs a customer facing role within the organisation. Beliefs and values instilled in them via their understanding of the organisational culture of their company, will directly affect the way in which they interact with not only fellow colleagues, but more importantly, outside entities such as customers, clients and suppliers. The subject of organisational culture is a complex one, and this essay will attempt to define some of the broader aspects, as well as analyse some of the more fundamental issues more closely. Several key criticisms of the current theories on organisational culture will also be introduced.

Organisational culture is a combination of the values, beliefs, experiences and attitudes which make up the personality or shape of the organisation as an entity. It could be defined as a specific set of norms and values that are generally shared by individuals and working groups within an organisation, these influences will control the way in which the representative of an organization will interact with each other and with external stakeholders.

The values and beliefs of an organisation are a manifestation of the kinds of goal that its members should strive to meet, as well as ideas about the standard of behaviour members should utilise in achieving these goals. From these organisational values will develop guidelines and expectations, prescribing the kinds of behaviour deemed appropriate for employees to demonstrate in particular situations, thus guiding and controlling the interaction of all members of the organisation. The effect of this will be to give an overall corporate "feel" to all internal and external interactions.

Corporate Culture in an Evolving Company.

Organisational culture can have a negative and positive effect upon a company, certain forms of corporate culture would definitely be seen as detrimental if adopted by members of the organisation carte blanche, other forms will be seen as entirely beneficial due to the high level of standards it would instil upon members of the organisation. There are five basic types of organisational culture, they can be defined thus:

Blame culture

As the name implies, this form of culture is based upon fear and distrust. People will be unwilling to shoulder responsibility and will be very quick to place the blame upon others. The individual will be committed to themselves; loyalty is to the self, not the company. Innovation will be stifled in such a cultural climate; due to the fact people will be unwilling to take the risk of introducing new ideas.

Multi-directional culture

A culture of this form will encourage very minimal inter-departmental interaction and cooperation. Loyalty will be to the individuals working group or department. Departments in turn will become segregated, often with a clique like nature, antagonistic in its approach to other departments. This almost confrontational interaction between departments is extremely detrimental to productivity and efficiency, as loyalty is to the individual and their immediate peer group.

Live and let live culture

The key word of this form of culture is complacency; this produces a very low output of creativity. The members of a live and let live culture have given up their passion for their work; they exhibit very little vision and are unwilling to stir themselves into any form of proactive advancement. Entities will cooperate, both on an individual and departmental level and the company will function, but it will seldom evolve new ideas and plans. Loyalty here is divided between the individual and their group. Individual and level of Group.

Brand Congruent Culture

Brand congruency is a form of organisational culture in which its members have a firm belief in the service or product of the organisation. Individuals and working groups will feel good about the goals the organisation is striving to achieve and will cooperate freely to help achieve them. People will work passionately, utilising personal skills and knowledge to proactively solve problems. They may not always agree with the views and actions of the management team, but they accept them. Members of such a culture will place their loyalty at group level.

Leadership Enriched Culture

Within a leadership enriched culture, individuals will often feel the organisation as a whole is an extension of themselves. They will be extremely well aligned with business goals, and will feel happy about their personal achievements within the organisation. Often quoted as being a family, the organisation as a whole will provide fulfilment to its members, whilst attempting to rise above ego and encourage people to support and nurture each other, thus producing the best results. Leadership of this culture will not develop followers, they will instead, help to develop other leaders. IN this form of culture, everyone will be loyal to the organisation and working actively towards common goals.

We can clearly see that the five key types of organisational culture defined above, follow a series of changes in loyalty, beginning with the loyalty being firmly rooted in the individual, and culminating in an egoless, harmonious

working environment where loyalty is given freely to the organisation as whole.

An interesting offshoot of organisational culture is the concept of Entrepreneurial culture. This model of organisational culture is seen as a more agile form of corporate culture. It will focus not upon goals so much as exploration. It will nurture creativity in its members and promote overall tolerance of creative people. It will aggressively promote the ideas of seizing market opportunity as a way and means to deal with prosperity and survival. Although similar working values and norms will be injected into the culture as more traditional types, it will provide a much more dynamic, agile and animated work environment than other forms of organisational culture. It is interesting to note, that many of the features found within an entrepreneurial culture can be seen as being almost completely incompatible with most other forms of organisational culture. Specifically the promotion of self, and allowance for ego within its members. Whilst they may be loyal to the organisation as a whole, quite often its members will retain an element of self promotion and development within its structure. This is obviously critical in ensuring people maintain creativity and to promote free thought. One can but speculate on the effects upon an individual who is forced to cross the line in either direction, either to join an entrepreneurial culture, after having been a member of another type of culture or to leave one and join a more mainstream form of corporate culture. It would seem that values are promoted differently across types; this would lead to a possibly stressful transition for the individual.

Changing an Established Organisation Culture

Taking the point raised above, regarding an individual who is forced to make an inter-cultural move, then it would appear likely that any change in an established culture would also affect its members.

When attempting to change one or more aspects of the culture of an organisation, it is best attempted as a long term project. Cultural change is a slow process and one that should be approached carefully. Members will need time to assimilate the changes, quite often they will have problems in accepting changes if they are too large or too quick. If the company has a very strong culture to begin with, then changes may be extremely hard to bring about.

Several steps should be taken by any company wishing to change its organisational culture, to ensure that changes are successfully implemented, with a minimum of disturbance to the workforce. The required effect under review would need to be defined and scoped, with a clear view towards implementation developed before any other physical action is taken. Changes should first be introduced into the top level management team, they should be embraced and supported wholeheartedly by team members, as this will demonstrate the support and trust the management team have in the new changes, this will filter down and instil confidence within the workforce. Efforts should be undertaken by the management team to stress that changes are

not being made to fix a broken culture, and that the company does not need the proposed changes to continue functioning, but that the changes are being introduced to enhance the company and make some minor adjustments. Once this has been achieved, steps should be taken to familiarise the members of the organisation with the proposed changes before implementing them. This will give people time to come to terms with the changes whilst not being effected by them. Often this kind of gentle approach to change will result in the workforce actively seeking the implementation of the changes, once they have been given sufficient time to consider them in a non-threatening manner. Finally, when the changes are put into place, feedback should be gathered at regular intervals, this can be used to judge the effectiveness of the changes, how successfully the changes have been adopted and to measure the effects upon the members of the organisation.

Criticism of Organisational Culture

Some experts have expressed an amount of scepticism regarding the functionalist and unitarist views of corporate culture put forward by mainstream management analysts. They do not necessarily deny that an organisation can exhibit a cultural phenomenon; they do come forward with supposition that indicates the way that making cultural assumptions could stifle dissent and become a tool for reproducing management produce propaganda and ideology.

It would be incredibly short sighted to accept the belief that a single, unified culture must exist within all organisations, or that cultural change will eventually reflect the interests of all parties within an organisation. It has been suggested that a very many of the assumptions held by those who are producing the theories of corporate culture are not new. They simply reflect the well documented tension between the structural or formal aspects of an organisation and the informal or cultural side. Additionally, it is a perfectly reasonable hypothesis that sees the possibility of an organisation having many cultures, and as such, sub-cultures may often overlap or contradict each other. The very tidy definitions of cultural forms found in educational material, will rarely even acknowledge that such complexities may exist.

Possibly the strongest and most widely accepted criticism of modern theories of organisational culture, is that in effect, it is culture that drives the organisation and not the organisation that drives the culture. In effect, an organisation is the sum of its culture, so how can it be effectively measured, categorised and changed? A tree is often utilised to give a symbolic representation of this hypothesis, whereby the roots of the tree are the culture it grew from, the branches and leaves are the product of the original root system. Changes to that root system will often have unknown results upon the rest of the tree, at the very worst causing it's death.

If we take this into consideration when thinking about organisational culture, then it is quite easy to see how, in its initial stages of development, a company may be the product of its culture or group of sub-cultures. This does not however, take into consideration the pressures placed upon the original

organisation culture once the company has grown several fold. If we use the same tree symbology, it could be said that in some cases, a tree will die, when its root system can no longer support the upper growth area such as branches and leaves. In this situation, to ensure the life of the tree, then external changes would need to be enforced upon the roots, to affect a cure and maintain the health and growth of the tree. In a similar fashion, a large company may benefit from proactively monitoring and changing its organisational culture to maintain maximum health and growth. Although every possible precaution should be taken to ensure that no lasting damage is caused to the underlying culture that originally formed the basis of the company.