ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

Organisational culture is to an institution the equivalent of the DNA for a human person, it plays a key role in shaping our behaviour even though it is invisible to the naked eye. It consists on the **pattern of shared values, beliefs, assumptions and other such factors** in an organisation. As leaders, understanding the culture of our organisation is relevant for many reasons, mainly 1) to safeguard and protect it 2) to use it correctly in our favour to fulfill the purpose of our organisation and 3) to know when and what to change in case it is necessary.

MAIN IDEAS

There is a famous phrase attributed to management expert Peter Drucker that says: "culture eats strategy for breakfast". This does not mean that strategy is not relevant, but rather that our efforts in creating a good strategy can be easily undermined by a strong culture misaligned culture.

What is a good model to understand organisational culture? Culture is comprised of many elements that are intertwined and affect each other. A quite comprehensive model was developed by McShane, Olekans, and Travaglione (2013) includes:

We could add to these concepts in the model the ideas of: norms, symbols, work ethic, and other smaller ones. See the exercise template for concrete examples on each item.

An interesting aspect now is learning how we can change or strengthen the culture in your organisations. Here is a list of 10 suggestions developed by Jon Katzenbach, Carolin Oelschelegel, & James Thomas. You can access the full length article here.

1. Work with and within your current cultural situations. Deeply embedded cultures cannot be replaced with simple upgrades, or even with major overhaul efforts.

2. Change behaviors, and mind-sets will follow. It is a commonly held view that behavioral change follows mental shifts, as surely as night follows day.

3. Focus on a critical few behaviors. Conventional wisdom advocates a comprehensive approach — everybody should change everything that's not perfect! But companies must be rigorously selective when it comes to picking behaviors. The key is to focus on what we call "the critical few," a small number of important behaviors that would have great impact if put into practice by a significant number of people.

4. Deploy your authentic informal leaders: Once identified, these leaders can become powerful allies who can influence behavior through "showing by doing. There are 4 type of informal leaders: Pride Builders, Exemplars, Networkers, and Early Adopters

5. Don't let your formal leaders off the hook. Most organizations tend to shunt culture into the silo of human resources professionals. But leaders in all parts of the company are critical in safeguarding and championing desired behaviors, energizing personal feelings, and reinforcing cultural alignment.

6. Link behaviors to organisational objectives. When people talk about feelings, motivations, and values — all of which are vital elements of strong cultures — the conversation can often veer into abstractions. Select behaviors that are aimed specifically at improving business performance and can be measured over time.

7. Demonstrate impact quickly. We live in an age of notoriously short attention spans. When people hear about new high profile initiatives and efforts, and then don't see any activity related to them for several months, they'll disengage and grow cynical. That's why it is extremely important to showcase the impact of cultural efforts on business results as quickly as possible.

8. Use cross-organizational methods to go viral. Ideas can spread virally across organizational departments and functions, as well as from the top down and from the bottom up.

9. Align programmatic efforts with behaviors. It is important to match the new cultural direction with existing ways of doing business. Informal mechanisms and cultural interventions must complement and integrate with the more common formal organization components, not work at cross purposes.

10. Actively manage your cultural situation over time. Actively monitor, manage, care for, and update their cultural forces. Even if you have a highly effective culture today, it may not be good enough for tomorrow

IGNATIAN NOTE

The concept of "culture" in the organisational context refers to "values and behaviours that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization" - Needle (2004). However, in our minds, our first reaction is to think of culture in the general anthropological term to refer to social behaviours and norms in human societies, thus, we tend to think of a European culture, Indian culture, American culture, etc. But for organisational development this mindset can be counterproductive. We use some sections of the General Congregation 34 decree 4: Our Mission and Culture to reflect on this:

> In the exercise of our mission, we bring a simple criterion from our Ignatian tradition: in our personal lives of faith, we learn that we are in consolation when we are fully in touch with what God is doing in our hearts, and we are in desolation when our lives are in conflict with his action. So, too, **our ministry of evangelizing culture will be a ministry of consolation when it is guided by ways that bring to light the character of God's activity in those cultures and that strengthen our sense of the divine mystery**. But our efforts will be misguided, and even destructive, when our activity runs contrary to the grain of his presence in the cultures which the Church addresses, or when we claim to exercise sole proprietorial rights over the affairs of God. [9]

> General Congregation 34 has brought together Jesuits from the cultures of Asia, the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, the European Community, Africa, North America, Australia, and Latin America; **this composition has heightened our awareness of the diversity of cultures in both the world and the Society**, and of the need to address the importance for our mission of the Gospel and culture. [1]

In these two texts we see how the organisational culture of the Society of Jesus exhorts us to be guided by "ways that bring to light the character of God's activity". This criterion is more relevant than the country of origin of any individual, it is cross-cultural and has been indispensable for bringing different world cultures under the same banner. This, in turn allows for this diversity of cultures to enrich the overall organisational culture of the Society of Jesus. The examples of the missionaries here is rich on insights. Think on Mateo Ricci SJ who adopted the Chinese culture and at the same time remained true to his missionary vocation and Ignatian culture, he was able to change history and become one of the few invited by the Chinese Emperor to the imperial court. Ricci understood what was primordial and what is secondary in the mission of guiding people closer to God. This brings us to the concept of "inculturation" adopted by the Society during the XX century: *"Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a "new creation."*

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Learning one approach to organisational culture
2. Using an existing model to analyse the culture of our organisation
3. Understanding relevant aspects of your organisation before engaging in change

"When people go to work, they shouldn't have to leave their hearts at home"
Betty Bender