

# Culture & Alignment

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# Culture in Organizations

- Looking at in four sections today
  1. Introduction to culture concept
  2. Culture as organizational glue
    - Goffee and Jones reading
  3. Study of a specific organization culture
    - Van Mannen on Disneyland
  4. Organizational subcultures
    - Problem of alignment

# Key elements

- Shared beliefs and values
  - Members of culture take for granted
  - Unite against outside world
  - Reflected & reinforced by stories
- Shared actions
  - Including rituals (often not noticed by participants)
  - Constant "enactment" reinforces it
- Way of reproducing
  - "socialization" of new members
  - Sometimes ritual, e.g. fraternity hazing

# Different Versions of Culture

- Found in many disciplines
  - Sociology
  - Anthropology
  - Management
- Place stress on different aspects
  - Beliefs and cognition
  - Actions
  - Rituals
  - Folklore, etc.

# Exists at Different Levels

- International
  - e.g. culture of industrial societies
- National
  - E.g. culture of modern United States
- Regional
  - E.g. Midwestern culture, Brooklyn, etc.

# Two Kinds Key Here

- Organizational culture
  - Shared & reinforced within particular firm
  - Many successful organizations have strong culture
- Professional & Occupational cultures
  - Doctor, programmer, manager, hacker, etc.
  - Formal & informal parts to socialization
  - Can form strong subcultures in single organization

## What Does Culture Get?

- In business, often presented as key to motivated and harmonious workforce
  - Culture will give shared vision
  - Make work harder, worry less about money
  - Alternative to cruder management methods
- Hope to solve problems such as
  - Distrust between different teams
  - Low morale
  - High employee turnover
- Culture consulting is popular
  - Run workshops, advise on improving

## Goffee & Jones Reading

- Recent classic from Harvard Business Review
  - Culture as organizational glue
  - So focus is on relationship of individual to group
    - In general terms – less on specific content of cultures
- Two main dimensions to culture
  - Sociability
    - Friendship, teamwork, sharing
    - Compromise, influence through personal relationships
  - Solidarity
    - Pragmatic pursuit of shared goals
    - Depends on shared motivations, benefits to individual
    - Needs clear roles, responsibilities, measures

## Gives Four Possibilities

- Paper names each type
  - Gives examples, discusses strengths & weaknesses
  - Each is appropriate for some kind of firm
- Communal culture is often seen as idea
  - High in both dimensions
    - Famous days of Apple, Nike, HP, etc.
    - Clear, shared goals and values
    - Good for innovation across different teams
    - Good for uncertain environments, organizational learning
  - But they also note problems
    - Best for religious, political, civic
    - Focus on charismatic leaders
    - Tensions between sociability and solidarity

## Case of Disneyland

- “The Happiest Place in the World”
  - Conveying suitable emotion is very important
- Not a naturally happy experience
  - Lots of screaming children
  - Waiting in line for hours
- Jobs are not necessarily so great
  - Mostly repetitive
  - Low pay
- So how do they do it?

## Van Mannen Article

- Close up study of different aspects of work culture in one organization
  - Very smart and readable article
  - Methodology is called “ethnographic”
    - Traditionally used by anthropologists on Pygmies, etc.
  - He isn’t offering a grand theory here
    - Try to look at same kinds of things in context of your own experience of organizations
    - Socialization, Status Hierarchy, Enforcement, Rituals

## Socialization

- Process by which individual becomes part of a specific culture or society
- Many processes
  - Formal (e.g. the training at “U. of Disneyland”)
    - Also the “Assimilation” program in Capital reading
  - Informal
    - On the job training (learn from other workers)
    - Out of work social events (at dorms, volleyball, etc)
- Many components, eg.
  - Learn language (no “theme park” or “ride”)
  - Learn specific roles (e.g. African Queen operator)

## Status Hierarchy

- Ranking of roles by prestige
  - Exists in broader societies
  - May be different within organization
    - At Disney Tour Guides > Skilled rides > Other Rides > Sweepers > Soda Jerks
    - In 1960s data processing Analyst > Programmer > Operator > Card Puncher
  - At Disney, age, looks, college aspirations, etc. are also important

## Mechanisms to Enforce

- Initial selection
- Human feedback
  - Supervisors
    - Constant threat of observation
  - Visitors (will tease if seem sad, etc)
- Design of work itself
  - Scripts, rides, etc.
- Removal of offenders
  - Rapid, harsh punishment

## Rituals & Values

- Explicit statement of "values"
  - "everyone is a child in Disneyland" etc.
- All organizations have rituals
  - One at Disney is public firing
    - Pulled off shift, marched into office, out of park
  - Also talk of Walt "in the park" etc.
  - Retirement party is one common ritual
- Rituals reinforce identities
  - Express values
  - Show importance of tradition beyond individual

## Role of Workers in Creating

- Culture is not usually as designed and controlled as at Disneyland
  - No individual discretion, almost total control
  - Even there, he sees some resistance to official culture
- Many cultures have elements management doesn't officially encourage
  - Racism, sexism, etc.
  - Cynicism about corporate mission
  - Worker solidarity against supervisors

## Setting Cultures

- Hard to change
- Many firms try
  - Mission statements
  - Culture consultants, etc.
- Often produces gap between official values and culture
  - Versus actual situation
  - E.g. Enron ethics policies

## One Culture for Whole Firm?

- Seems to be assumed by Goffee & Jones
- Van Mannen article focuses on a single integrated culture, although
  - Many different roles within it
  - Supervisors, managers work differently
  - Within culture, agreement on
    - High/low status activities, etc.

## Organizational Subcultures

- Another important kind of culture
- Much socialization into work roles happens outside/beyond specific organization
  - Especially for technical/professional work
  - Informatics School, Medical school & residency
- Specialist work is often similar in different kinds of organization
  - E.g. network admin in hospital or accounting firm
  - People often move between different sectors
- So culture of specialists may be disconnected from culture of broader organization

## Subcultures of IT Work

- General image is that IT people tend to be
  - Poor communicators, rude to users
  - More interested in technology than people
  - Drawn to cool technologies rather than useful applications
  - Setting status hierarchy on technical skill
  - Disloyal to firm, focused on skill development
- One reason why CIO role of business/technology bridge is so hard

## One Common Problem

- Clash of cultures between
  - Users of technology
  - Producers of technology
- Sub cultures of IT people are distinctive
  - Most users do not share
  - Don't design the system you want to use!
- Examples
  - Designing search capability
  - Customizing look and feel

## Alignment Concept

- Explored in reading from CIO Magazine
  - "IT/Business Alignment"
- Problem is divergence in
  - Culture
  - Priorities
  - Language, etc.
- Want to get IT, marketing, operations, etc. working together

## Improving Alignment

- Article deals with this
  - Full of corporate doubletalk
  - Case study of Capital One Financial Corp
    - Challenging because 14,000 workers
- Involves "Corporate Assimilation Program"
  - Orientation into firm as a whole
  - Claims risk-taking, but communal culture
- Also mentions "training and financial metrics"
  - At executive level

## Sees Alignment on Personal Level

- Idea seems to be that assimilating individuals will align groups
  - Quote: Morris sees the gulf between the typical IT and business personalities as a matter of human nature. He says, "I believe that if left to their own devices, IT and business people will polarize like ends of a magnet because they see the world through different lenses. Business people don't burst into my office shouting, 'Nigel, I have a new technology!'"

## Coming Sessions

- Three out of four next talks will be guest lectures
  - Chance to talk to experienced people
  - First hand accounts of
    - IT careers
    - CIO work
    - Problems in alignment, etc.