LEADING ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH TRANSITION

Communication and Cultural Change

Stanley A. Deetz
Sarah J. Tracy
Jennifer Lyn Simpson
In Cooperation with SETONWORLDWIDE

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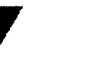
Contents



Introduction ix
Leadership and Cultural Management x
What This Book Does xi
Overview of the Chapters xii

Acknowledgments xv

1. Managing Hearts, Minds, and Souls 1
Managing Culture as a Part of the Overall Strategic Plan 3
Historical Roots of the Cultural Approach 6
Basic Elements of Corporate Culture 8
Cultural Sites and Levels 12
Culture in the Contemporary Workplace 14
Character and Strength of Culture 18
Culture and Fundamental Assumptions 21

2. Assessing and Changing Organizational Culture 29
Reasons for Initiating Cultural Change 31
Evaluating a Particular Culture 35
Leading the Cultural Change 38
The Change Process 42

3. Vision and Cultural Development 49
Building a Vision 51
Why a Long-Term Vision? 52
Adapting to Change 58
Building Identification 58
Developing and Implementing a Vision 60

4. Guiding Interpretations and the Art of Framing 67
The Centrality of Interpretations 69
Why Framing? 72
The Relation of Framing to Visioning and Culture Change 73
The Social Construction of Interpretive Frames 73
Discursive Instruments for Framing 75
The Dangers of Framing 85
Recognizing Framing Opportunities 87

5. Employee Participation and Cultural Change 92
Employee Participation and Cultural Change 94
Questions Regarding Empowerment 100
Methods of Participation in Change 106
Developing Principles of Dialogue 108

6. The Ethics of Cultural Control and Organizational Change 116
The Need for Ethical Considerations 118
Cultural Elements Conducive to Unethical Behavior 120
Ethical Considerations of Cultural Control 126
Creating an Ethics Program 130
"Walking the Talk" 133
Ethical Considerations of Cultural Change 138

7. Culture and Technological Change 143
How Are Technology and Culture Related? 145
What Counts as Information? 146
Identifying Goals of Technological Change 148
Assessing the Potential Impact of Technological Change on Culture 149
The Influence of Cultural Identification on Adaptability 154
Assessing the Usefulness of Technological Change 156

8. Managing Culture Through Transition Periods 160
Organizational Transition and Culture Clash 162
The Passing of an Organizational Founder or Leader 162
Organizational Transition Owing to Economic, Personnel, and Market Changes 167
Mergers, Acquisitions, and Other Corporate Reorganizations 171

9. Managing Culture in Multinational Organizations 183
The Transnational Organization Today 185
Gauging Cultural Adaptivity 189

10. Putting a Change Process Together 196
Looking Back 198
Managing Culture 198
Leading and Managing 199
Writing Cases 200
Toward a Learning Organization 205
Putting What You Know Into Practice 207

Index 221

About the Authors 231

Introduction

Success in business or by any organization today cannot be achieved by formula. Positive outcomes result from luck and unpredictable changes in tastes and markets as well as from creativity, hard work, and good management. Frequently, the best we can hope for is to increase the chances of being at the right place at the right time and being ready to meet the challenges once there. Positive business leaders face up to these real uncertainties and the lack of guarantees by promoting high levels of competence and adaptive learning environments in their companies.

The turbulent and unpredictable nature of the current business situation leads to increased concern with good communication skills. Making opportunities and making the most of opportunities requires developing high-performance workplaces filled with mutual responsibility, loyalty, and commitment to success. To succeed today requires less surveillance and supervision of employee behavior and more managing of hearts, minds, and souls—in short, managing culture.

This volume explores the process of building a business by exploring the relationship of cultural management to the overall business strategy and discussing the role of communication in cultural management. The various chapters discuss the role of leader communication in the formation and redevelopment of culture as an organization works through various changes, challenges, and opportunities.

Leadership and Cultural Management

Leading by managing organizational culture has many benefits. More autonomy is experienced by individual employees and units. Creativity and feelings of ownership are increased. Important coordination and control can be achieved without direct managerial intervention. Not only are benefits clear, but as will become evident, in many workplaces today no other form of management is likely to succeed. High-performance workplaces have a character and a soul.

Managing culture requires special communication skills. A technically proficient manager has acquired trade-relevant knowledge and learned how to gather financial information, read trends, and instruct employees. But few managers have learned to lead, to inspire, or to understand the basis for employees' internal motivation and resistance. The communication and work habits that have lead them to be selected as managers are often quite different from those that enable them to succeed as leaders. Directing employee work activities is quite different from enabling and inspiring appropriate self-initiative. Presenting one's point of view persuasively is quite different from having employees spontaneously see the situation in a particular way on their own.

Cultural management, however, is not without potential downsides and controversies. IBM managers were praised in the early eighties for having produced a "strong culture" where employees were happy and committed and seemed to function as virtually one body. By the late eighties these same managers were criticized for a monolithic culture promoting groupthink and slow responses to a rapidly changing market.

Cultural management also raises a host of ethical questions. The very concept of managing minds, hearts, and souls evokes images of *1984*. The widely reported image of Microsoft employees happily giving up nights and weekends and family, community, and civic responsibilities to build Windows 95 may appear as a dream to some, but posed wider ethical and social responsibility issues. In an age of "spin doctors," cynicism abounds and the ability to distinguish insightful, productive reframing from politically opportunistic obscuring is an important skill.

The promotion of communication activities that help manage culture has to be balanced with concern for responsibility and the dilemmas of "empowering" others. The materials in this volume are developed to maintain balance and promote useful discussions of the various dilemmas inherent in cultural management. Communication is considered in both its strategic and its participatory forms. Strategic communication functions to direct, inspire, and coordinate and arises from a leader's vision or overall plan. Participatory communication, in contrast, is the process through which we create, invent, and innovate together. Here the direction and best choices are not yet known. They are best produced through talk. The balance between strategic and participatory communication helps produce an adaptive, ethical, and vibrant culture and helps distinguish valuable from unproductive employee resistance to change.

What This Book Does

The primary purpose of this volume is to address the role of communication in organizational culture and cultural change efforts, especially during periods of transition, mergers, innovations, and globalization. The book is unabashedly normative and hopes to aid students and professionals in understanding and working with organizational cultural change.

Despite 20 years of cultural studies in the field of communication and increasing numbers of communication professionals and academics being called to work with organizational cultural change efforts, no book in the field has addressed communication and change efforts as a central theme. And although trade books and management texts have focused on cultural change, they have tended to be slim and superficial in the treatment of communication. Additionally, the best of these books have become quite dated and do not reflect contemporary situations and understandings.

The materials included in this book were initially developed as the electronic text for an online course in organizational culture and culture change as part of an executive master's program at Seton Hall University—SETONWORLDWIDE. The materials and course have been very successful with mid-level managers. The audience for the course, however, is greatly restricted. With the agreement and encouragement of SETONWORLDWIDE, we redeveloped the materials to work with a somewhat less sophisticated student and professional audience.

The material in the volume proceeds from relatively general issues related to communication, culture, and cultural change to specific practical contexts where these concepts are of value. Each chapter begins with common questions that guide the development of the chapter. We suggest considering them on your own before you begin your reading. You may also find it useful to pose your own related questions.

Case studies are used throughout to provide examples of organizational change efforts, highlight concerns raised in the text, and add the complexity of actual life choices. The cases are not meant simply to exemplify concepts but rather to pose issues for discussion with others. Additional cases are suggested at the end of several of the chapters.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1 introduces the relation between the leader's building a successful business and the management of culture. It begins with a consideration of how managing the workplace culture relates to the overall strategic development of a business. The chapter shows why the concern with culture has been a major feature of business thinking during the past 20 years and why this trend is likely to continue. Basic concepts are introduced that are used for the remainder of the volume.

Chapter 2 focuses on cultural assessment and change as a part of building a business and working in organizations. Included are discussions of what a positive culture accomplishes in the workplace, how one determines the appropriateness of the existing culture, and basic considerations in a change process.

Chapter 3 considers how business concepts, visions, or mission statements relate to building a business and the development and transformation of culture. Included are discussions of the characteristics of powerful visions, how one launches a vision campaign, how the vision can be connected to other workplace activities, and how one achieves buy-in from key employees. Finally, the chapter investigates how individuals invest their identity in the organization and explores ways to reward such investments.

Chapter 4 discusses the processes through which people develop their interpretations of events. Consideration is given to how a leader's values and perspective become embedded in the corporate culture. The discussion focuses on how language usage, stories, and ritual can shape, frame, or reframe employees' understandings of events.

Chapter 5 considers the various processes leading to the collaborative development of visions. The process of empowerment is developed. Strategic conversation and dialogue projects are shown to be useful in creating alternative futures and opening the business to the wider collective learning process. Widespread participation is shown to aid innovation as well as loyalty and commitment.

Chapter 6 explores a number of ethical issues in investigating and changing cultures. Cultural management raises a host of ethical questions. Are some cultures more ethical than others? How do cultural characteristics relate to the ethical behavior of members? What are the ethical issues related to cultural control and cultural assessment?

Chapter 7 looks at the probable impacts of the implementation of new technologies, especially information technologies, on cultures. The chapter considers the information management systems (IMS) subculture and its relation to wider organizational cultures, how technological innovation influences power dynamics, how particular cultures resist technological innovation, and how others overly idealize it. Special attention is given to how one works with cultural issues during technological implementation.

Chapter 8 looks at cultural changes and ways of managing culture during organizational transitions. Such transitions include the passing of the founder and other changes in top management, economic crises, and reengineering and reorganization activities as well as mergers and acquisition.

Chapter 9 introduces issues related to the globalization of business and the relations among multiple cultures. The chapter encourages the recognition of the possibility of multiple positive cultures, the development of multiple cultural forms of leadership, and the translation of visions into multiple cultural contexts. Special attention is given to intercultural communication and the relation of different and at times competing cultures in international organizations.

Chapter 10 provides a review and an extensive case focused on learning when to lead and when to manage, how to choose moments for intervention, and how to direct existing trends using the material developed in the book.

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—Stanley A. Deetz, Sarah J. Tracy, and Jennifer Lyn Simpson
Boulder, Colorado

1

Managing Hearts, Minds, and Souls

Overview

Managing the hearts, minds, and souls of employees is a key element of building a successful business today. For the past 20 years this need has been loosely conceptualized as managing the "corporate culture."

Actually, the concerns this term highlights have been of interest to leaders for a long time. John Clemens (1986) traced the Western world's concern with corporate culture to a funeral oration by Pericles in 431 B.C. Pericles, now recognized as the father of Athens's Golden Age, was attempting to inspire unity in his people in their battle with Sparta. The speech effectively displayed the two central elements of establishing a strong corporate culture: determining what makes the organization different and eloquently communicating those differences to the organizational members.

At least since that time, scholars and managers have tried to get a handle on the elusive subjective side of work life. Whether the concern has been with "spirit," "climate," "meaning of work," or "quality of work life," the core issues have been the same. Human beings are more than rational creatures. They are not animated machines. How employees personally feel, think, and see the company and their work have a significant impact on the character and quality of their work, their relation to management, and their

response to innovation and change. Culture is a concept many have found useful and necessary to understanding, managing, and strategically changing organizations.

This chapter provides an introduction to the role of communication in developing and transforming corporate culture. First, the culture concept is developed in relation to the overall plan of building a business. Second is a discussion of the social, economic, and historical changes that have accentuated the concern with corporate culture in recent years. Third, the roots of the organizational culture approach in business are discussed. Finally, the concept of culture is developed in such a way as to aid our attention to the values and decisional premises that underlie organizational behavior and highlight different assumptions people make about the nature of others and work.

Key Objectives of the Chapter

- ▼ To develop the capacity to integrate cultural concerns in the overall business plan
- ▼ To recognize the conditions leading to the need to manage culture
- ▼ To recognize the external and internal factors contributing to specific cultural characteristics in an organization
- ▼ To identify different culture *sites* or *levels*
- ▼ To begin to examine how underlying values and decisional premises influence behavior and decisions in actual workplaces
- ▼ To recognize differences in the character of different cultures and the relation to work activities
- ▼ To recognize the fundamentally different assumptions people make about their work world and the consequences for leadership.

Questions to Consider

- ▼ When you build a strategic plan, how do you take into account human factors?
- ▼ How can various activities of an organization be difficult to coordinate?
- ▼ Do you feel that members of organizations you are involved in "walk their talk"? If so, where is this most evident? If not, what have been the consequences?
- ▼ Do you think that the wider national culture greatly influences the productivity of employees and companies?
- ▼ Do you think people naturally enjoy quality work? Do authority structures, reward systems, task quality, or intangibles of work life have the greatest influence on employee commitment and productivity?

Managing Culture as a Part of the Overall Strategic Plan

A successful business strategy results from a number of key considerations. First, market conditions largely determine the possible financial success of the selling of any good or service. Identification of and customizing the product to a particular market niche is central to building any business. Second, control of critical performance variables is central to keeping production costs down and meeting the challenge of potential competitors. Third, adequate monitoring of the environment and making adaptive changes is essential to continued success under changing resource and market conditions. Finally, a workforce must be recruited and developed in ways that support the aforementioned needs.

The Relation Between Strategy and Culture

The corporate culture is not just one of many considerations in building a business. Rather the culture impacts on each of the strategic dimensions listed above. The way organizational members think and feel influences the relation to the market, workplace performance, adaptability, and workforce development and commitment. A positive business strategy and positive corporate culture go hand in hand. An effective strategy must grow out of the culture and the culture must be strategically shaped.

A positive workplace culture actualizes the latent potential in all members and reduces the need for managerial intervention and direction. All employees have the potential to contribute, do right, achieve, and create. Accomplishing each of these potentials can be thwarted by various organizational blocks. The desire to contribute is blocked by uncertainty about purpose. The desire to do right is limited by work pressures and the temptation to serve one's self. The desire to achieve can be sidetracked by lack of focus or of resources. And the desire to create cannot be fulfilled if opportunities are lacking or there is a fear of risk.

Actualizing these potentials requires both a business strategy and appropriate cultural conditions. The ability of an employee to contribute is enhanced by the effective communication of core values and mission. The ability to do right is aided by specifying and enforcing of the rules of the game. The ability to achieve is supported by carefully built and supported targets. And the ability to create is stimulated by open organizational dialogue to encourage learning.

If support for these potentials is built into the corporate culture, the need for direct intervention by upper managers is lessened and commitment, autonomy, and motivation are increased. The old view of business called for direct managerial supervision. Employees were seen as needing to be motivated, pushed, or coerced into meeting business objectives. Compliance was an endless issue. A corporate culture was developed and reinforced that required more of the same. The new cultural view says that employees are not inherently lazy and resistant, nor are they naturally motivated and open to change. The nature of the employee is a cultural product. A positive corporate culture creates employee potentials and the context in which they can be realized.

> Culture enhances social integration; social integration eliminates the need for bureaucracy, and increases levels of investment which, in turn, enhance performance and productivity. Thus, by manipulating culture, substantial increments in profitability should accrue.
>
> —*Gideon Kunda and Stephen Barley (1988, p. 21)*

Why Lead by Managing Culture?

Successful business leaders have gradually moved from traditional forms of management, primarily based in hierarchical decision making and managerial supervision and control, to managing by managing culture. Many reasons exist for this change. They have to do with structural, social, and market changes. As long as these new conditions persist, the competitive advantage will continue to go to businesses that focus on the corporate culture.

The most obvious, and best understood, reason for the change to managing corporate culture was the perception that some cultures lead to greater productivity than others. In the late 1970s, managers in the United States saw increasing economic difficulties in their companies largely arising from Japanese competition. Even superficial analyses revealed that cultural features were a major reason why Japanese workers were more productive and their products of higher quality. At that time, the stronger, clanlike corporate cultures of Japan provided production innovations and worker dedication unmatched by American companies. American managers rushed to learn the Japanese way and companies in the United States with strong cultures were suddenly highlighted. The success of Japanese companies, viewed partly as a result of their cultural

distinctiveness, encouraged Western managers to analyze how their corporations could make better use of team spirit, corporate pride, and worker morale.

More subtle changes were taking place, however, that may account for the Japanese success at that time and the fact that cultural management has persisted longer than the Japanese success story. Important social changes and changes in the nature of products and work processes provided management with a crisis of control. The rise of professionalized workplaces, geographically dispersed facilities, decentralization, and turbulent markets contributed to the difficulty of coordination and control. As is explored in Chapter 2, each of these conditions makes corporate culture of more interest.

In the face of these changes, the use of more indirect and unobtrusive control through cultural management offers possibilities and advantages not shared by traditional activities. In fact, many workplaces could not function at all without a strong shared culture. Most of these new social realities are not likely to go away. Cultural management will continue to be a key feature of successful business for some time. Cultural management presents a different form of leadership, a form understood in Eastern cultures for some time:

The Way of Lao Tzu, Number 17

> The best (rulers) are those whose existence is (merely)
> known by the people.
> The next best are those who are loved and praised.
> The next are those who are feared.
> The next are those who are despised.
> It is only when one does not have enough faith in others
> that others have no faith in him.
> (The great rulers) value their words highly.
> They accomplish their task; they complete their work.
> Nevertheless their people say that they simply follow nature.
>
> —*4th/6th century* B.C. *(1963, p. 130)*

If the leader used few but carefully chosen words, the way will seem natural and people will feel that the methods and accomplishments are their own.

Exercise 1.1

- How can organizations contribute to the member's potential to contribute, to do right, to achieve, and to create?
- When you consider yourself as a member of an organization (including an academic or university community), to what extent do you believe that your department's administration has considered your beliefs and values? In what ways have these been taken into account? In which ways have they been ignored or glossed over?

Historical Roots of the Cultural Approach

> This ability to perceive the limitations of one's own culture and to develop the culture adaptively is the essence and ultimate challenge of leadership. The most important message for leaders at this point is "Try to understand culture, give it its due, and ask yourself how well you can begin to understand the culture in which you are embedded."
>
> —*Edwin Schein (1992, p. 2)*

Until a shift in focus during the early 1980s, most organizational scholars and leaders strove to provide a scientific, objective, and causal understanding of organizations. Organizational studies measured outcomes—such as productivity, effectiveness, and employee satisfaction—so that they could be predicted and controlled in the future. In this tradition, organizational metaphors were patterned after the scientific approach and businesses were compared to machines or systems. These metaphors led researchers and practitioners to conceive of communication as just another variable that could be understood through the lenses of input and output rather than an important phenomenon in and of itself.

A Scholarly Approach to Culture

This traditional approach came under fire in the late 1970s as organizational scholars began to develop the organizational cultural approach. Whereas the traditional approach compares organizations to machines, those interested in culture use analogies that compare organizations to clans or tribes. The underlying motive of the organizational cultural approach is to understand and learn how organizational life is accomplished through communication. Inherent in this view is that meanings do not reside in messages, channels, or texts on screens; rather they unfold through social interaction and sense-making activities of people.

In the academy, the ideas of organizational culture draw quite heavily from the field of anthropology, with one of the leading proponents of this interpretive approach being the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Cultural theorists attempt to provide vivid descriptive accounts of organizational life and concern themselves with articulating the recurrent themes that specify the links among values, beliefs, and action in an organization. According to anthropologist K. L. Gregory (1983), who studied knowledge-intensive companies in Silicon Valley, the corporate world is just as wondrous, strange, and exotic and full of specialized meanings and significance as a remote village on the other side of the Himalayas. Thinking about the organization as a clan or tribe with an exotic culture can lead to important new insights.

The Business World Catches the Culture Craze

Three groundbreaking books had an unprecedented impact on American corporate leaders. Since their publication in the early 1980s, business books have skyrocketed in popularity. These three best-sellers appeared during a time of international competition and domestic economic turbulence. The books helped corporate leaders to focus on organizational values, visions, and leadership, concepts that are integral to the culture management approach.

William Ouchi's Theory Z. The first book to popularize the concept of organizational culture was William Ouchi's *Theory Z* (1981). Ouchi's book explained how corporate success correlated with the organization's ability to adjust to its surrounding national culture(s) and its particular standards for excellence. The primary conclusion of his analysis was that the best type of an organization (a "Theory Z" type) would integrate the values of individual achievement and advancement common to U.S. organizations with the sense of community so common in the Japanese workplace.

Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy's Corporate Cultures. Another best-seller that analyzed organization culture was Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (1982). Whereas Ouchi (1981) focused on values and norms ascribed to particular national cultures, Deal and Kennedy detailed the varying components that make up a "strong" culture. They identified five: (a) the business's external environment, (b) organizational values, (c) organizational heroes, (d) rites and rituals, and (e) the cultural network.

Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's In Search of Excellence. The third book that brought culture to the forefront of corporate thought was Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982). The authors analyzed 62 companies that had been described as "excellent" by journalists, scholarly experts, and employees. They found eight common themes that illustrated these businesses' cultures: (a) a bias for action; (b) close to the customer; (c) autonomy and entrepreneurship; (d) productivity through people; (e) hands-on, value-driven; (f) stick to the knitting; (g) simple form, lean staff; and (h) simultaneously loose-tight properties.

From the brief descriptions of these books, a preliminary idea of what culture is emerges. Nevertheless, its definition is in no way explicit or clear-cut, and researchers continue to argue about how culture should best be understood.

Basic Elements of Corporate Culture

Culture has been described as everything from common systems of values, beliefs, and norms to collections of shared social knowledge. The organizational culture construct is derived from that used in anthropology, yet even here scholars have disagreed on its definition. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) defines culture as "the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations" (p. 145). Geertz compares culture to a spiderweb that people spin through their everyday communication with each other.

Some have argued that it is difficult for the organizational theorist to borrow the cultural construct in its entirety. Be that as it may, the construct continues to be widely used in the study of organizations. Edwin Schein (1992, p. 9) outlines some of the most widely used conceptions of culture. They include observed behavioral regularities when people interact (e.g., language, traditions, rituals); group norms, standards, and values; espoused or articulated values; formal philosophy; rules of the "game"; learning the organizational "ropes"; climate, or the feeling portrayed through organization's physical layout and the way people relate with each other; embedded skills or the special abilities of the organization (not necessarily articulated in writing); habits of thinking, mental models, and other linguistic paradigms; shared meanings; and "root metaphors," or integrating symbols. Linda Smircich and Marta Calás (1987) suggest that we should not think of culture as some kind of thing, container, or possession. They argue that culture is not what an organization *has;* rather, it represents what an organization *is.*

Culture: Two Worldviews

One major division in the culture approach is whether primacy should be on internal psychological factors (such as underlying beliefs, assumptions, and unconscious mental frameworks) or whether we should focus more on external factors (such as behavior, language, physical artifacts, and company rhetoric). With this question of primacy, another question emerges. Do internal values create external behaviors and communication patterns, or do external actions create people's internal assumptions and beliefs?

In the first worldview, cultural change is conceived of as emanating from internal, deep value change. As Ouchi (1981) says, "A culture changes slowly because its values reach deeply and integrate into a consistent network of beliefs that tend to maintain the status quo" (quoted in Schein, 1992, p. 75). A basic assumption of this view is that an organization can best change its habits and actions by first changing its employees' internal values and belief structures.

In the second worldview, the focus is on external behaviors, actions, and communication patterns as shaping and forming internal values and beliefs. According to this view, the best way to go about changing an organization's culture is to first change its everyday habits, communication patterns, and espoused goals. For instance, the psychologist Daryl J. Bem (1972) developed a "self perception" theory that argues that people first observe their behaviors and communication and then conclude that they hold values that uphold their earlier actions (Bem, 1972). In this

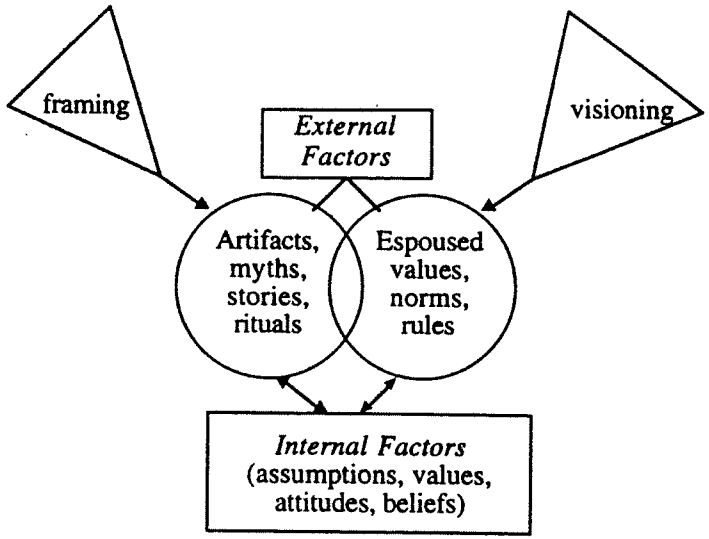

Figure 1.1. The Culture Process

NOTE: Managers can control everyday communication and espoused values through framing and visioning. This, in turn, can affect underlying assumptions. The more the two spheres overlap, the more closely behavior is congruent with the articulated goals of the organization.

view, an organization can be regarded as a system of symbols that socially construct peoples' values. These symbols, or discursive instruments, create order and clarity out of chaos. Examples range from verbal symbols such as organizational myths, jokes, stories, slogans, and corporate logos to material elements such as the physical layout of work and office space, exterior design, and the designation of parking spaces for employees.

An Integrated Approach

A useful alternative view is more extensive, and admittedly fuzzier, than the two world views described above. In this alternative view, culture is inherently implicated in both what we *do* and how we *think* about what we do. Culture is made up of and mutually constituted by both the internal and the external; values affect behaviors, and behaviors affect values. Together, the two create organizational culture. Thus, culture should not be thought of as a product that an organization has; rather culture is the ongoing process of what an organization is (see Figure 1.1.).

Although internal and external elements are equally important in making up a culture, organizational leaders have more direct control in shaping communication patterns and overt behaviors than they do in changing deep-rooted value systems. Therefore, much of this book's focus will be on how leaders can create and change a culture through the way they communicate. Chapter 3 examines how leaders can affect the espoused values, norms, and rules of their organization through visioning and how this can shape employees' identification with the organization. Chapter 4 focuses on how managers can best frame organizational stories, myths, and everyday communication so that they are in line with the values that are best for the organization.

In summary, culture can be considered to be a set of loosely structured symbols that are maintained and co-created by a recreative pattern of internal factors (such as attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies) and external factors (such as language, behaviors, espoused values, and physical artifacts). These symbols, and an absence of other symbols, help make sense of organizational members' shared (and unshared) values, beliefs, and assumptions.

Exercise 1.2

Describe an experience where you have been involved with an organization where people talked about or espoused one set of values, but behaved in a way that exemplified other values.

- What kinds of beliefs and values dominated this organization's formal literature (organizational mission, rules, and regulations)?
- What kinds of beliefs, values, and topics dominated informal communication and everyday organizational member behavior?
- Were the organization's espoused values congruent with the employees' or members' everyday behaviors?
- What does this tell you about this organization?

Think of three influential people in an organization with which you are familiar.

- In what ways do they symbolize the character of the organization?
- Are their actions more in line with the organization's explicit mission or with informal organizational myths?

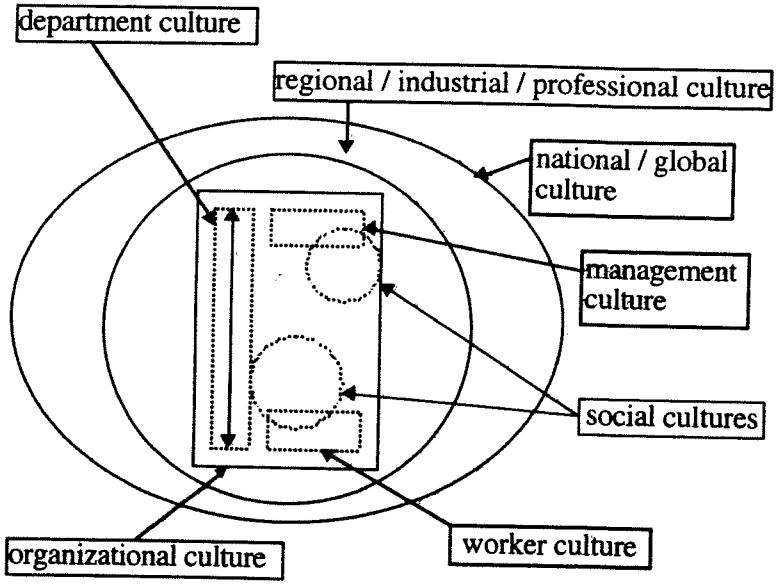

Figure 1.2. Culture Levels

Cultural Sites and Levels

Culture is not something that is easy to control. One of the central difficulties of managing culture is understanding the multiple organizational subcultures and countercultures. By focusing on one distinct overriding culture, the manager can lose sight of the great likelihood that there are overlapping (and sometimes conflicting) cultures that coexist at different levels and sectors in any organization. Thus, multiple values simultaneously compete in their goal of shaping the organization (see Figure 1.2). The first step in managing these cultures is being able to identify and understand them.

National Culture

At the macro level, organizational leaders must be aware of cultural differences across nations. Customs that seem normal and natural in one nation may be unnatural and even offensive in another. Chapters 8 and 9 specifically speak to how organizational leaders should recognize the possibility of multiple cultures and how they can translate their organizational vision into multiple cultural contexts.

Regional, Industrial, and Professional Cultures

At the next level are the regional, industrial, and professional cultures. Some organizations have a particular sense of identity and a special way of thinking that is specific to their geographical area. This is true in the case of businesses located in Silicon Valley, California. In this region, the values of innovation and diligence thrive in a way unparalleled in the rest of the country, and this has caused the area to boom with knowledge-intensive, cutting-edge companies. Certain industries (e.g., auto industry) and professions (e.g., doctors, lawyers, public relations practitioners) also have distinct cultures that may be similar to or different from a particular organizational culture. For instance, the agriculture industry has different values from the auto industry. Likewise, most doctors tend to keep the Hippocratic oath as a first priority, whereas lawyers are socialized to value the client/lawyer privilege.

Corporate Culture

The next level of organizational culture, that of the corporation or business itself, is the one most questioned and analyzed. Using a culture approach, organizations are viewed metaphorically as "clans," "tribes," or "living organisms." Although a certain organization may have several overall values (such as "total quality") that run throughout the company, most of the time subcultures exist throughout the organization.

Subcultures: Hierarchical Levels, Departments, Social Groups

Subcultures can be found hierarchically and departmentally. The values that characterize the thinking of upper management may be very different from those that characterize the assembly line workers. For instance, automobile company management may have cost cutting at the top of its list of values, whereas assembly line workers may have the value of "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work" as their first priority. Likewise, values vary in each department. Engineers tend to have different priorities and values from accountants, salespeople, and machine

operators, for example. In addition, "social" subcultures cross over hierarchical and departmental lines. This is true, for instance, when a certain configuration of employees all play on the organization's softball team or attend the same church.

Because every organization is filled with subcultures, it is naive and erroneous for top management to assume that its culture (which includes its values and priorities) automatically permeates or even "trickles down" to other parts of the organization. This is why communication, whether through visioning (Chapter 3), framing (Chapter 4), or dialogue (Chapter 5), is vital to shaping and modifying a strong corporate culture. It is through communication that managers can shape and modify organizational culture.

Exercise 1.3

- The culture of an organization is encoded in the internal values and external behaviors that give form to everyday experience. Think about an organization with which you are familiar. How would you describe its culture?
- Identify subcultures in this organization. How are they differentiated? Are they in conflict or harmony? What impact do these subcultures have on shaping the organization? What functions do these groupings serve for their members? Is their overall effect on the organization positive or negative?
- How is culture communicated through this organization formally and informally?

Culture in the Contemporary Workplace

Culture performs a number of very important functions in most contemporary workplaces. Understanding the way culture influences the workplace helps show the importance of it and provides some insight into when development and change are necessary. Following Vijay Sathe's (1985) work, coordination, decision making, control, motivation and commitment, and justification will be considered.

Coordination

Decentralized decision making, increased use of cross-functional teams, and professionals working at remote sites make surveillance of the work effort and coordination of decisions very difficult. Shared values can provide coordination and invisible management. With a strong culture, individuals and groups with little direct contact can make passively-coordinated decisions because their decisions are made using the same premises and values. Upper management does not have to anticipate all contingencies if similar underlying values and assumptions guide the decisions of diverse groups. Furthermore, strong cultures tend to generate identification with the organization and greater trust of other groups and members. This in turn increases the amount and clarity of communication and aids coordination.

Decision Making

Basic assumptions and values enter into decision making in a variety of ways. Business decisions are nearly always made under conditions of great uncertainty. Information is often incomplete and changes in environments are not always knowable. Values and assumptions fill in the gap between what one knows and the need for a decision now. Values are deeply involved in decision making even where uncertainty is less. Basic questions of what should be produced, what risks are to be assumed, and how a problem should be handled are not answered by knowing more but are based on preferences and values. In most cases organizations develop rather routine decisional premises that are deeply embedded in culture-based activities that implement these values and preferences in an invisible way. Culture matters.

Control

Workplaces today suffer from both too much control, which stifles creativity, innovation, and shared responsibility, and too little control, which makes coordination and direction difficult. Culture can be responsible for both.

Some workplaces have experienced a crisis of control in part owing to the decline in the strength of external cultures. For most of the 20th cen-

tury, work relations have assumed a stable and consensual set of values and moral standards given by the wider society. Traditionally in the Western world, the so-called Protestant work ethic provided an important extra-organizational motivational form. Basic standards of hard work, honesty, belief in quality and standards, and accurate reporting provided a voluntary conformity to social practices. The general expectation and support of these has declined in contemporary society. Certainly work processes and corporate effects on other institutions have been partially responsible for this decline in workers' as well as managers' and owners' commitment to shared values. Corporate culture can provide values and direction in the face of the changing and often weakening external culture.

Traditional forms of control are often structurally limited in modern workplaces. Surveillance is often difficult, responsibility is hard to fix, and the costs of member disruptions and even sabotage are great in many industries. Inappropriate activities, resistance, and rule violation can create problems, since corporations have generally relied on voluntary compliance with rules and internal regulations. With sophisticated equipment, common data banks, and highly coordinated processes, these acts are considerably more costly and harder to blame on someone. Although increased monitoring is likely in many corporations, surveillance is costly in itself and often fosters an environment where increased disruption is likely. Control from a strong culture and resultant acts of self-surveillance are obviously a solution preferred by most management groups.

Culture provides powerful and often invisible control. For this reason it is valued in workplaces today. But as will be discussed, it can also reduce creativity, innovation, and adaptability precisely because of power and invisibility. In addition, managers need to distinguish between cultural control and brainwashing. Although leaders can do much to inculcate their values in employees, they must also allow for feedback and dialogue, issues that are dealt with more specifically in the later chapter on ethics.

Motivation and Commitment

Explicit systems of rewards and sanctions are difficult to administer in the modern organization, especially with team processes and highly integrated activities. The supervisor frequently lacks the "trade-relevant

knowledge" necessary to assess the employee's effort. Sanctions in most day-to-day operations are difficult to assign, often have negative side effects, and usually end up appearing capricious. Rewards in even the more obvious cases of sales commissions are often complicated by the effects of support staffs, engineers, and others traditionally outside of the sales process. Monitoring the amount and quality of work in the service industries becomes increasingly difficult. And supervisors often lack the authority to reward meaningfully except in unusual cases. A positive corporate culture reduces the need for the type of motivation and direction thought to be gained from supervision and reward and punishment systems.

A positive culture increases self-management and increases the commitment and motivations arising from the individuals and teams themselves. When a person feels emotional attachment to and identifies with the business, he or she feels greater commitment and is more motivated. A committed employee is more likely to base choices on the perceived good of the company and find ways to accomplish personal objectives within the parameters of the overall business objectives.

Justification

Complexity, distant financial imperatives (and manipulations), white-collar layoffs, and changing attitudes to authority challenge the felt legitimacy of the company and upper management. After a couple of decades of leveraged buyouts, reorganizations, reengineering, mergers, and downsizing/rightsizing/upsizing, many employees are quite cynical. The sense of trust that came with the assumed contract of lifetime employment and the confidence that upper managers and owners had the best interests of the company rather than themselves in mind has largely disappeared. Traditional figures of authority have been questioned and even ridiculed. Authority has lost its mystique and is more clearly seen as arbitrary.

It is difficult for the large corporation to mimic the characteristic of the family firm and thus to achieve the loyalty and personal identification frequently attributed to it. The lack of personal contact places greater demands on reason giving and explicit justifications, but these become increasingly abstract and hidden from view. Decentralization, widespread decisional participation, and explicit cultural management are necessary to reclaim legitimacy in most businesses.

Character and Strength of Culture

Corporate cultures differ in both their character and their strength. Both have significant influence on workplace performance and on change efforts. *Character of culture* refers to the specific values, beliefs, and activities that compose a culture. *Strength of culture* refers to the amount of overlapping support and sites providing repetition of dominant cultural elements as well as the intensity of member identifications with the culture. The character of the culture provides the direction of cultural impact and the strength of the culture provides its force.

Character of Culture

Many of the "sites" of culture influence the particular culture of an organization. The founders of the organization carry in cultural elements as they initially structure, hire, and manage the company. They bring in a pattern of values, assumptions, and practices they have drawn from their own experiences and their national, regional, ethnic, religious, occupational, and professional communities. Employees may be selected who fit well in the founder's life world, but inevitably they bring varying cultural orientations from their own experiences and communities. Depending on the relative strength of the founders and the various external communities, a culture emerges as an amalgamation of different proportions or cultural forces. Part of the business may differ in what emerges based on the relative identification with the founder and the strength of occupations and professional groups.

Business experience also influences the culture. Periods of nationalism or specific events in the history of the company can change the relative strength of different influential elements. Corporate cultures, although relatively stable, are influenced by organizational learning, training programs, and environmental events. Bell Laboratories, for example, has maintained many features but still is a very different place today from a couple of decades ago. In the past 20 years Bell Labs has changed from a university-like research center in a regulated monopoly, to a market-driven R&D operation in AT&T after divestiture, to an innovative technology company as Lucent Technologies. Much efforts and resources have been put into these changes and many employees have left who would not or could not adapt to the new culture. But change happens.

Many researchers have developed typologies to describe differences in cultural character. Each of these draw attention to the particular cultural differences that make a difference. Focusing on character differences helps match particular cultural characteristics to specific business needs, aids the understanding of cultural clashes, and directs activities in change efforts.

Geert Hofstede and his associates (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990) have conducted extensive studies of cultures in different countries. They suggest that it is meaningful to account for differences based on differences in conventions, customs, habits, and mores. They identified the following six dimensions of difference:

1. Process-oriented versus results-oriented
2. Employee-oriented versus job-oriented
3. Parochial versus professional (do employees identify primarily with their own company or their own professions)
4. Open versus closed systems of communication
5. Loose versus tight (bureaucratic) control
6. Normative versus pragmatic (presses own view of the world versus responsive to customers) (p. 303)

Sue Cartwright and Cary Cooper (1992), considering this and other studies, describe four prototypical cultures. These will be used later in looking at the likely consequences of mergers and other changes that bring different cultures into contact.

Power Cultures. Power cultures are usually found in organizations where power is centralized in a few individuals, often founders or others central to developing the organization. Usually, these have easily identified leaders who like to make quick dramatic changes, often based in intuition. Such cultures thrive on personal loyalty to leaders, with reward and punishment structures often reflecting favoritism and perceived loyalties. Tradition is usually visibly present. Employees may feel personal commitment and loyalty but also disempowered, and they often experience low morale and lack ownership of decisions.

Role Cultures. Role cultures are usually fairly bureaucratic and emphasize logic, rationality, and the achievement of efficiency. Policy manu-

als are important and often fairly thick. One's role becomes one's principal source of identity. Individuals tend to become very status conscious with much open competition between organizational units. Employees frequently feel relatively secure in such cultures but lack innovation and risk taking. Such cultures are especially resistant to change and often do not adapt well to new environmental conditions.

Task or Achievement Cultures. Task or achievement cultures are characterized by flexibility and high levels of employee autonomy. They tend to lack strong formal structures. Team decision making is prized. The task becomes the primary organizing feature. Control and coordination tend to be ad hoc, aiding innovation but also creating difficulties of a common response, especially in times of crises.

Person/Support Cultures. Person/support cultures tend to be egalitarian. The personal growth and development of the individual is treated as equally important as business objectives. These cultures tend to be long term in focus, expecting to realize the human investment over a long period of time. Decision making tends to be collective and based on multiple needs of people and business.

Exercise 1.4

Complete the Sample Culture Assessment Test at the end of the chapter (Appendix 1.1).

Strength of Culture

The stronger the culture, the more impact it can have on employee commitment and performance and on corporate decisions. This can be both good and bad. A strong culture appropriate to the business mission and in tune with current environmental conditions can greatly enhance the company's performance and employee well-being. But in other circumstances, a strong culture can hamper performance and be quite resistant to change.

The strength of a culture is determined by several factors. First is the degree of redundancy. Redundancy is the number of different systems impacting on organizational members that share cultural characteristics. If company values are consistent with national and community values and with different levels in the organization and across the industry, the strength of the culture is increased. If the various systems are contradictory, the strength is reduced.

Second, the degree of integration increases strength. Cultural strength is increased when company values are carefully integrated with deeply held values of employees. Furthermore, cultural strength is increased when pay systems, employee relations, and espoused values are consistent.

Both redundancy and integration make company values and practices more thoroughly internalized by all organizational members and more likely owned by members. Weak cultures are more likely to be seen as arbitrary or contrived and may evoke compliance but less commitment.

Exercise 1.5

- Discuss the strength of the culture in an organization with which you are familiar.
- Would a stronger or weaker culture better meet organizational goals? Member goals?

Culture and Fundamental Assumptions

Culture is not like taste, fashion, or opinion. Culture involves the most basic assumptions people make about the nature of their world and the people in it. It includes their most basic ideas of what is proper and moral. To mess with these things is not just to change a person's attitude at work, it impacts on the sensefulness of the world—what is fair, how things should work. One of the reasons culture management is so powerful is because individual attitudes and ideologies often operate beyond

conscious awareness. Because most people understand their assumptions to be normal, natural, and right, they do little to question their basic beliefs—something that can have both positive and negative implications. Schein (1992) details the types of deeply held assumptions people hold about reality, time, space, human nature, and human relationships.

Assumptions About Reality

People differ in their views on reality and what is morally right. Although some people behave in ways that respect the spiritual or religious world as "real," others do not. People also differ in what they believe a certain concept or idea "counts" as (e.g., what is interpreted as war, unethical behavior, or success?). Although some people require significant amounts of data to prove an argument, others are happy to believe in a concept based on one person's testimony. Some assume that decisions should be based on universal rules, whereas others espouse a more experiential ethic.

Assumptions About Time

Like assumptions about reality, assumptions about time often only surface when people's assumptions clash. For instance, people differ on what they consider to be "on time," "time wasted," "enough time to plan ahead," "too much work in too little time," or a proper "learning curve time." Cultures also differ on whether they focus on past mistakes, present "to do" lists, or future goals. Assumptions can differ in regard to linearity of time. Whereas some people insist on doing "one thing at a time," others juggle multiple projects simultaneously. Frustration can erupt when these two types of people come into contact with each other (e.g., consider the last time you were waiting "forever" for a doctor because you did not realize she or he was seeing three patients at a time).

Assumptions About Space

Use of space tells us a lot about people's relationships and their status level. People make assumptions about intimacy based on how close someone stands to another person. Like all assumptions, though, no single definition of proper personal space holds true across cultures, and confusion or irritation can occur when people with different assumptions meet. What it means to "intrude" can also change across cultures. Whereas in the United States it is generally fine to stand in a person's line of view, in other cultures this would be considered to be as forceful as a verbal interruption.

Last, space indicates status. Generally, large corner offices with big windows and closed doors indicate high status. When this rule is "broken" it is very symbolic. Such is the case at a company Schein (1992) calls "Action," where secretaries are given the prime window offices. This decision about office space strongly symbolizes the way the company values and appreciates the important, but often monotonous, work its secretaries must perform.

Assumptions About Human Nature

Assumptions about human nature can have a tremendous effect on the ways people work and lead in organizations. Douglas McGregor (1960) labeled two distinct orientations as "Theory X" and "Theory Y." People who lead by Theory X believe workers do not really enjoy work, are only motivated by financial rewards, have little initiative, and thus must be tightly supervised. Leaders who operate under a Theory Y point of view, on the other hand, believe that workers generally enjoy work, are motivated by a variety of needs, desire autonomy and creativity, and thus do not require close supervision.

People also differ in their beliefs about human agency. Some people believe they have control over their environment and organizational world, whereas others believe humans to be victims or products of societal and organizational structures. The particular framework a person operates under can greatly effect day-to-day operations of an organization, such as the types of work incentives given and the amount of participatory decision making encouraged.

Assumptions About Human Relationships

People differ in their assumptions about how people should behave in groups. In Western societies, there is an emphasis on individual achievement, originality, and competition. Most Asian cultures, on the other hand, focus on group unity, family pride, and societal cooperation. When these cultures come together, there can be problems. These as-

sumptions affect the structure of organizational hierarchies, division of duties, and compensation.

Together, the above assumptions about reality, time, space, human nature, and human relationships make up rules of interaction—determining what counts as "right" and "appropriate." One of the reasons such assumptions are so powerful is because they are deeply held and often beyond conscious recognition. Nevertheless, these basic beliefs frame the ways that people go about their lives. They come to the surface often only when they clash with the assumptions of others. This is one reason why it is so important that a culture know itself before it decides to change or merge with another culture.

Cultural assumptions are strongly held by most people. Before the change process is considered in the next chapter, you may wish to consider moments when your own view of how things work or what is right and fair were challenged. Consider the death of a young parent or child, your feelings about the justice system after the OJ verdict or a divorce settlement, the first time you were offered dog or cat to eat, the promotion given for political reasons when you were more qualified, times when children shoot children at school. If you can think of such situations, it is easier to understand the horror and disbelief when culture change is attempted and the accompanying sense that the gods must be crazy.

Exercise 1.6

- Describe your personal beliefs about people and the way they are motivated to work.
- Imagine that you were caught in a Jim Carrey liar sequence with a new employee where you always told the truth. What would you say?
- Describe the real rules of life as you see them in most companies.

Review Questions

- What role does culture play in the development of a business strategy?
- Why did the culture approach emerge?

- What are the advantages of a strong culture?
- How could a strong culture be limiting?
- What culture sites or levels make up a culture?
- What actions can managers take in communicating culture?
- What are some of the basic assumptions that make up people's value structures?

Discussion Questions

- What do you consider to be the virtues and problems of managing by "hearts, minds, and souls"?
- Do you think that workplace coordination and control are more difficult today? If so, where and when? What evidence do you have?
- Why do deeply held assumptions about reality, time, space, human nature, and human relationships usually only come to the surface when they clash with another's assumptions? What are some instances when you have become aware of your own deeply held assumptions?

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Appendix 1.1

Sample Culture Assessment Test

Consider the following items. Choose the *one* response that most applies to your organization:

1. In this organization individuals are expected to give first priority to:
   A. Meeting the challenge of the individual task in which they are engaged.
   B. Co-operating with and attending to the needs of their fellow workers.
   C. Following the instructions of their superiors.
   D. Acting within the parameters of their job description.

2. The organization responds to its members as if they are:
   A. Associates or colleagues.
   B. Family or friends.
   C. Hired help.
   D. Contracted employees.

3. In this organization people are motivated and influenced most by:
   A. Their own commitment to the task.
   B. The respect and commitment that they have for their co-workers.
   C. The prospects of rewards or fear of punishment.
   D. The company policy or rule book.

4. A "good" employee is considered to be one who:
   A. Is self-motivated and willing to take risks and be innovative if the task demands it.
   B. Gets along well with other and is interested in their self-development.
   C. Always does what his/her boss tells him/her to do without question.
   D. Can be relied upon to stick to the company rules.

5. Relationships between work units or inter-departmentally are generally:
   A. Cooperative.
   B. Friendly.
   C. Competitive.
   D. Indifferent.

6. In this organization decisions tend to be:
   A. Made by the people on the spot who are close to the problem and have the appropriate task expertise.
   B. Made after considerable discussion and with the consensus of all those involved, regardless of their organizational hierarchy.
   C. Referred up the line to the person who has the most formal authority.
   D. Made by resort to established precedents.

7. It is most important for a new member of this organization to learn:
   A. To use his/her initiative to get the task completed.
   B. How to get on with his/her fellow workers.
   C. Who really counts in this organization and be aware of the political coalitions.
   D. The formal rules and regulations.

8. The dominant managerial style of this organization is:
   A. Democratic and open.
   B. Supportive and responsive to individual needs and idiosyncrasies.
   C. Authoritarian.
   D. Impersonal and remote.

If you scored mostly A's the dominant culture of your organization (as you perceive it) is "task/achievement"; mostly B's then "person/support"; mostly C's then "power"; mostly D's then "role."

SOURCE: Cartwright and Cooper (1992, pp. 66-68).

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2

Assessing and Changing Organizational Culture

Overview

Although most cultures are fairly deeply held and resistant to change, with careful attention cultures can and do change. This change can take many forms. A culture can be accentuated and its strength increased, it may be incrementally changed over rather lengthy periods of time, or it may be radically transformed usually over shorter periods of time. Each of these types of changes requires progressively more focused attention by organizational leaders or significant environmental changes—and often both—for transformational changes to occur.

Like any change in business strategy, cultural change can, and should, only be attempted with a clear plan and clear objectives. Before initiating a change process the organizational leader should be clear as to what the character of the existing culture is and what functions the existing culture performs. This requires careful assessment.

This chapter explores the reasons for initiating cultural change, the process of conducting an assessment of the culture, and the general features of change processes related to organizational cultures.

Key Objectives of the Chapter

- To identify situations where initiating a cultural change would be valuable
- To be able to perform a cultural assessment identifying the key characteristics of an existing culture and the need for a change
- To identify the arguments that convince particular others that a change is essential
- To recognize the primary sources of resistance to change
- To develop a change process through intervention in each of the places where culture is reproduced
- To produce an eight-step change plan

Questions to Consider

- Have you ever been involved in an organizational change effort? How did you feel? How did you respond? How did others respond? What might account for the differences in response you saw?
- What kinds of things could happen to an organization that would lead to a cultural change effort?
- Based on your own organizational experiences, to what extent do things have to change for management to want to give up its customary way of doing things?
- What kind of organizational changes might lead people to quit their organization?

Reasons for Initiating Cultural Change

> Culture is an asset that can also be a liability. It is an asset because culture eases and economizes communications, facilitates organizational decision making and control, and may generate higher levels of cooperation and commitment in the organization. The result is efficiency, in that these activities are accomplished with a lower expenditure of resources, such as time and money, than would otherwise be possible. The stronger the culture the greater the efficiency.
>
> Culture becomes a liability when important shared beliefs and values interfere with the needs of the business and of the company and the people who work for it. To the extent that the character of a company's culture leads its people to think and act in inappropriate ways, culture's efficiency will not help achieve effective results. This condition is usually a significant liability because it is hard to change a culture's content.
>
> —*Vijay Sathe (1985, p. 25)*

In the first chapter, several of the broader economic and social trends behind the interest in organizational culture were discussed. The positive aspects of assembling a business through building the corporate culture leads to an interest in guiding cultural changes. This section details motives for initiating cultural change.

Realizing the Competitive Advantage of a Strong Culture

Possibly the most important reason leaders have turned to managing culture is that a distinctive and strong corporate culture can give one business a competitive advantage over another in the same industry. High-performing companies need more than a competent workforce. For a company to be "excellent," it must also have a strong company spirit, a powerful corporate identity, and employees who hold a high level of organizational commitment and identification. This is especially true in service industries where the attitude of "frontline" personnel is the actual product being sold. To realize the competitive advantage of a strong culture, attention must be given to both the strength and the character of the culture.

Leaders properly work to strengthen the culture when they are happy with the character and they wish to increase the advantages that come with increased commitment and identification. Culture is profitable when it can increase competitiveness, facilitate organizational decision

making and control, and generate higher levels of cooperation and commitment in the organization. Nevertheless, a strong culture can become a limitation when important shared beliefs and values interfere with the goals of the organization or members and the direction it needs to go to stay competitive. When a strong culture encourages people to think and act in ways that are inappropriate or not conducive to growth, a strong culture can actually hurt an organization or even lead to unethical behavior. Therefore, a strong culture may best be thought of as a balance between extremes. Managed effectively, a strong culture can lead to competitive advantage, but if the culture's character is wrong, a strong culture can lead to an organization's demise.

The competitive advantages of a strong culture often can only be realized by systematically working to change cultural character. This involves attempts to align values, assumptions, and common practices with business needs and environmental and regulatory changes. This is more difficult than changing the strength of a culture but is frequently much more important.

Building Employee Commitment, Identification, and Esprit de Corps

Managing culture may be most important when the company is experiencing difficulties with coordinating or motivating employees. This is frequently the case after business reorganizations or extensive leadership changes. In these situations both attitude and control problems may arise. A strong organizational culture can help redirect employee actions in a way that is less obtrusive and more participative yet more effective than bureaucratic rules and regulations. A strong set of values and beliefs can be more effective in shaping behavior than a long list of rules and regulations and direct supervisor intervention, especially when leader legitimacy is an issue.

A strong corporate spirit—an esprit de corps—plays a big part in motivating employees to work for collectively desired actions. When employees are highly committed to an organizational mission, they are more likely to go forward with actions that are consistent with company goals, even when these actions may not necessarily be in line with their individual or departmental priorities. When corporate philosophies saturate the organization in the form of a pervading culture, employees tend to identify more fully with the organization, resulting in increased

commitment, organizational loyalty, and employee decisions that are in line with the organization's espoused mission.

Employee buy-in seems especially important in certain situations. For instance, when an organizational situation is complex and ambiguous, a set of common values and beliefs is extremely important as a regulatory mechanism. Ouchi (1981) refers to this as "clan control" and explains that subtle values sometimes cannot be put into words. A common understanding of organizational values among workers tends to prevent opportunistic behavior. This is especially true in our changing world of work when it is sometimes impossible for managers to "look over the shoulder" of and directly observe and manage employees. Today, effective management cannot merely consist of giving orders; it must focus on creating a shared vision and a sense of direction to people working in a company. The next three chapters focus on how leaders can generate organizational identification and increase buy-in among their employees in ways that respect employee needs and insights.

Employee Satisfaction

Employees are often more satisfied when they work in a "strong culture" company. This is not surprising. Part of the definition of a strong culture is shared values. Employees are happier when they feel as though they have a part in deciding and knowing corporate values and priorities. In addition, people have a natural inclination for wanting to belong to or identify with an organization. The opposite of identification is alienation. Without identification, employees are dead to the organization, a situation that leads to neither individual satisfaction nor organizational effectiveness.

Although a high level of satisfaction is important to all companies, it is especially important in knowledge-intensive and high-performance organizations. In these businesses, both the risks and costs of employee exit are great. In many high-end businesses, a significant part of company assets "go down the elevator every night." Such employees carry significant amounts of social and intellectual capital with them. Their organizational exit is often a competitor's gain. They often expect nontangible benefits from their place of work—such as stimulation, social relations, and excitement—that traditional manufacturing employees would have expected from their family and local communities.

Cultural Integration

The regular occurrences of mergers, acquisitions, and globalization efforts heighten the need to assess cultural compatibility and to integrate organizations that may be historically different. Toyota struggled and finally succeeded in bringing parts of its auto manufacturing to the United States; the AT&T/NCR merger never quite seemed to take; no one knows yet what will happen with Chrysler and Mercedes Benz or AT&T and TCI Cable.

To merge two or more organizations, move a department from one part of the world to another, or to acquire another organization, management must understand organizational culture. If the cultures of the two departments or organizations are completely different or are in conflict with one another, management may need to wage an extensive culture campaign or possibly rethink merging or moving the groups in the first place. Organizations should be assessed as more than instrumental constructions around business opportunities; they are flesh-and-blood entities made up of humans with distinct values and ways of working.

Due to rapid internationalization, interest in cross-cultural issues has increased dramatically. Some scholars argue about whether the organizational culture or national culture is more important when merging two or more organizations. Usually, it is best to perceive the two cultures as informing and constituting each other. In some situations, national culture is more important to an organizational decision, whereas in others, corporate culture has more to do with a course of action. Issues such as these are treated in more detail later.

Corporate Identity and Image

A strong culture, infused with expressive events and retold myths and stories, can be used to market the organization internally and externally. The cultural expression of corporate idiosyncrasies can become key elements in the organization's identity and image. As increasing numbers of marketing messages saturate the media and price wars become more and more common, a company can profit from creating a distinctive niche for itself in the eyes of consumers. It is no wonder, then, that businesses ranging from video rental shops and pizzerias to car washes and airlines have created "club" programs that invite "preferred consumers" to profit through returned business. When an organization

has a strong culture, customers are no longer patrons; they are members, they are friends.

For instance, the Body Shop has used its focus on social responsibility to create employee identification and consumer commitment. The company has created a niche for itself in the cosmetics industry that many others have tried, but failed, to duplicate. Through a strong culture, Microsoft has also portrayed an image—both internally and externally—that it is at the pinnacle of computer software innovation. This image has attracted top technologically minded knowledge workers as well as millions of consumers.

Exercise 2.1

Visualize what you would desire in a culture for an "ideal" organization. How would people feel about the company? How would they treat work? What values would be most central? How would management act in such an environment?

Evaluating a Particular Culture

Many reasons exist for working to change a corporate culture. But change without careful assessment is usually misguided. Carefully examining an organization's culture provides a richer understanding of how organizations really work, uncovers the strengths and weaknesses, and shows where and why resistance to change is likely. On the basis of such assessment a clearer determination can be made regarding whether a cultural change is necessary.

Assessing the Nature of a Culture

Assessing a culture is complex and difficult. Internalized beliefs, assumptions, and values cannot be easily observed or measured. Similar values and decisional premises embedded in common routines and practices are difficult to infer in any simple way.

Researchers have developed many methods for deciphering culture. Most take significant lengths of time and are usually best done by trained outside experts. Schein (1992) provides well the details of systematic analysis, including both the type of commitment needed in the company itself and the process of study. The analysis of culture requires multiple methods of studying the variety of ways culture is produced and reproduced in organizational life. Here are a number of elements of organizational life of interest in assessment:

Employee feelings of involvement, identification, and commitment

Vocabulary and metaphors used in discussing organizational events

Stories, myths, legends

Rites and rituals

Routines of decision making and handling problems

Types and processes of conflict

Physical layout of the business

Espoused values in company documents

Company histories

Socialization processes

Strategies of justification

Emotional expression and tone

In exploring these elements observers must ask questions, make observations, read documents, and trust their gut feelings. Initially, an observer must try to understand the world as understood by organizational members. But ultimately, the observer must infer the more deeply held ways of seeing and thinking about the world and the values and assumptions used in making decisions and judgments in it. Only with this type of insight can change engage the more fundamental aspect of culture and its impact in the organization.

A number of self-administered cultural analyses are also possible. Generally, the understanding gathered from these is not as rich but may still provide useful insights. Repertory grids and focus group discussions have both been used with some success. Perhaps the easiest to administer and most sensitive instrument is based on the 20-statement test.

With this test organizational members are asked to anonymously write 20 statements completing the phrase, "My department (organization) is . . ." Members are asked to write these as if they were writing to themselves and to put them in the order as they occur, not reflecting on importance. Q-sorts or other forms of theme analysis can be used to fairly quickly tap into basic shared perspectives. After that it is usually not too hard to infer basic values and assumptions (see Locatelli & West, 1996).

Exercise 2.2

Complete a 20-statement test for your own culture. Identify three themes that characterize the culture (themes that would sum it up for an outsider). What are the everyday life events, structures, stories, and activities that you would use as evidence for the descriptive statements you made?

Determining That a Cultural Change Is Needed

Many types of cultural changes may be desired. Generally, these aim at changing either the character or the strength of the culture. Of the two, changing the strength requires much less effort. Character changes are much more difficult. Whenever possible a character change should be accomplished slowly through the gradual development of relationships between the existing culture and new perspectives and ways of thinking. In some cases a major transformation is desired. Usually, these are a result of a major transition in the organization or environmental or regulatory change. In these cases more attention must be given to demonstrating the need for change, justifications for interventions, and consequences for failing to change.

Changing the Culture's Strength. The general corporate culture may be well aligned with business objectives but still not generate the type of intensity desired. In these cases the attempt needs to clarify the existing values and culturally based activities and work to extend them to new arenas and get more people to buy in more completely. This may require

intervention in nonsupportive subcultures and providing more activities that highlight and celebrate positive cultural elements.

Recall, however, that strong cultures are not always positive, even when they support business objectives. If innovation is important or the business environment is fairly turbulent, the weaker culture provides opportunity for planned diversity and the ability to foresee and respond to changes.

Changing the Culture's Character. Cultural character needs to be changed when the dominant culture promotes behaviors that are inconsistent with business needs and member relations. Compliance with objectives may be very weak in such cases. The need to change the culture's character is most pressing when other means of monitoring and directing behavior are especially costly or difficult.

Since changing cultural character is difficult, careful evaluation of the existing culture is important. With creativity desired results often can be achieved by methods of behavioral change or through extension and adaptation of the existing culture. In the case of a major upheaval in the business environment, one must reasonably ask whether sufficient time is available for a transformation of the culture or whether less enduring but more rapid changes or temporary arrangements are possible.

Leading the Cultural Change

Intentional culture change efforts, like any change, begins with a strategy. The strategy reflects both a desired future state and a process for getting there. Generally, in today's complex business situations the desired future state of affairs has to be clear and compelling but sufficiently ambiguous and adaptable that the company can learn during the change process, seize emergent opportunities, and be ready to recognize that futures look different when you get there. Positive direction can be given that still allows space for specific interpretations and employees adding their own meaning. This will be explored further when vision statements are discussed.

Here the attention will be directed to the process of change. Discussion includes the motivation for and resistance to cultural change, where

leaders can intervene in normal cultural reproductive processes to create change, and steps to achieve a major cultural transformation.

Motivation for Cultural Change

Motivation for change can be intrinsic, extrinsic, or both. Intrinsic motivation for change tends to be highest when the present culture is weak and organizational members genuinely feel change is needed. Usually, people only feel the need for a change when there is clear and undeniable evidence that organizational survival and people's chances for success are at stake. When the existing culture is strong, such a need must be established and felt within existing values and assumptions. This is difficult, since it is often those same values and perspectives that kept organizational members from perceiving the need earlier on. Establishing need is critical to internal motivation. With a weaker culture, mere demonstration of the advantage of a new way of approaching problems may be sufficient.

External motivation may be provided through a variety of traditional inducements. Reward systems can be developed that advantage new ways of handling organizational choices. Change in such systems often can have far more influence than espousing and justifying new values, especially if the values are advocated without tangible rewards for acceptance. Symbolic inducements can also be used, visibly providing acknowledgment and advantages to those more allegiant to the new cultural principles.

Resistance to Cultural Change

Business leaders rarely anticipate the extent of the resistance to planned changes. One reason for this is that the leaders have had more time to think about the change and more fully understand the reasons for it. But equally important, leaders often have less to lose from it. It is their plan; they are protected in it. Employees, on the other hand, are often surprised, do not understand the reasoning, did not participate in the choice, and see themselves as having much to lose. Overcoming these differences between leaders and other members is possible, as discussed below and in later chapters. Essentially, fuller communication, participation in choice and implementation, trust, and genuine protection reduce resistance.

Most leaders enter change efforts motivated and even excited. The change is fresh and new for them, but many employees have a different experiential history. Often, they have been reorganized and developed to death. They have been through every change effort imaginable. They are understandably cynical. They know most are talk and are rarely carried through. Employees hear change as more work without more pay—work that rarely makes a difference, advocated by people who do not know what their job requires. They have developed a system of shortcuts and standard expectations that have given them efficiency and a measure of autonomy. At least temporarily, all that will go away. For a while the rules will be up for grabs. They have learned to play along without making real change until the next management initiative comes along and removes the need.

To a large extent, the leader has no choice but to try to make this change effort different, a claim all employees have heard before. In a sense, the leader has to really, really mean it this time (Can Lucy get Charlie Brown to try to kick the football one more time?) and make it real.

Furthermore, most resistance is unintentional. Old habits and automatic responses are hard to recognize and change. The deeper the changes, the more likely they will enter realms of life invisible to employees. As with riding a bicycle, one's early learnings never quite go away. Most people carry about thousands of social recipes for handling routine life events. They have used these over and over again for most of their lives. And most have worked reasonably well or they would have gone away some time ago. When ways of responding become entrenched, even repeated failure rarely leads to change. Many people assume if they just do what they usually do only with more strength and tenacity they will succeed. Only focused attention can make these automatic response patterns visible, let alone provide a motivation to change.

Finally, fear is a key element in most resistance. Some fears are well founded and some are not. Most can be reduced by taking into account the sources of the fear and reducing the potential negative impact on employees.

The most basic fear is the fear of the unknown. Employees reasonably ask what the new culture will look like. Are they likely to be able to succeed in it? How will the rules change? They fear failure. Even, or perhaps especially, the most successful can reasonably question whether they will enjoy the same levels of success. New cultures lead to the possibility of embarrassment and awkwardness in learning and handling situations. And employees fear possible rejection by those still advancing the old culture and by those working in the new.

These fears are exacerbated by a sense of the loss of control. One is not just entering the unknown, one is entering it as a changing person who does not know fully how he or she will respond in the new situation or even what he or she will be. Fears can be reduced by providing time, protection, information, and personal control.

Exercise 2.3

During a family Thanksgiving dinner, one of us asked a cousin how things were going at work. The cousin replied with rolled eyes that the company's management had started this new program. They wanted to empower people and a lot more of the decisions would be made in teams. Mostly, no one knew what they were doing and it was taking a lot of extra time. He was not sure what they wanted from him but knew that new systems of accountability were going to be in place. He was doing a lot of guessing and felt that his skills were not being used well. Most people like him had assumed that personnel would be cut along the way, and he just hoped to ride this out until management came up with another new idea.

- Why do you think that this new program was met with this type of reaction?
- What might management have done to make this less likely?
- Have you ever felt like the cousin?
- What is the piece of this that the cousin seems to have missed?
- What are the values the cousin appears to hold? How could these be brought into a relation to the new program?
- What would you do now if you were a manager of this company and had overheard this story?
- Recall a time when your unit was reorganized, you were asked to make a significant change in your way of working, or your job requirements were altered. What did you fear most in making the change? What most motivated you to stick with it? In what ways did you resist the change, if any? Why might others respond to similar events differently?

The Change Process

Despite the difficulties of change, change does happen. Change is possible partly as a function of the nature of culture itself. Culture does not reside somewhere like a balloon or building; it must be constantly reproduced in the activities of people. As shown earlier, culture is better thought of as the reoccurrence of specific meanings, personal identities, and activities than as the cause of them. Culture is an endless negotiation by organizational members. Activities and interactions are part of the development of shared interpretations and common assumptions.

Intervention in Cultural Reproductive Processes

Culture is reproduced in a number of organizational processes. These processes include at the minimum (a) hiring and new member training; (b) the advocacy of values, principles, and visions and the telling of stories; (c) the justification of choices through reason giving, accounts, and explanations; (d) the physical artifacts, nature of the work process and performance appraisals, and decisional routines; and, finally, (e) the systematic defection or removal of employees from the unit or organization. Intervention is possible in each, or better all, of these processes.

1. Systematically hiring employees who already share the desired cultural qualities is often easier than changing older employees. Such a choice should be done with care to ensure the adequate diversity and variety necessary for innovation, organizational learning, and adaptation to a changing environment. Early socialization processes are often more lasting than later interventions.

2. Chapters 3 and 4 look much more closely at explicit "cultural communication" through value advocacy, storytelling, and visions. Clearly, as shown later, leaders must "walk the talk," but they must also clearly "talk the talk."

3. All reason giving, accounts, and justifications carry implicit values and assumptions. During normal processes of cultural reproduction, the values and assumption remain invisible. Only occasionally will an activity appear so lacking in sense that explicit questions of values and assumptions are raised. Such communicative acts may be rare, since the members fill in the reasoning on their own. As cultures change, uncertainty and ambiguity increase. Questions like "What was meant by that?" or "Why was that done?" become more common. And it is increasingly likely that organizational members will provide their own explanations that may be quite different from those that organizational leaders desire. Activities and events needing explanation provide an excellent opportunity for leaders to direct member interpretive processes.

4. Culture is reproduced through the physical arrangements of offices and the innumerable ways that day-to-day work and decisions are handled. Values are more convincingly communicated through actions than through words. This is not to diminish the effective use of words. Actions are always subject to interpretations, words frame interpretations, and interpretations influence cultural reproductions. But creating clear behavioral objectives desired in the new culture and providing good measures for achievement are critical to the new culture's development. Try investigating standard practices everywhere to assess the ways they hinder or support the new culture. Culture will not change if reward systems and decision-making practices stay the same.

5. Inevitably, some employees cannot or do not wish to be part of a new culture. Old cultures disappear partly from the voluntary or encouraged departure of these employees. Cultural change is helped by systematic procedures for early retirement, transferring, or other means of removal.

Steps to Achieve a Major Transformation

John Kotter (1995), a professor in the Harvard Business School and major contributor to understanding change processes, suggests an eight-step process to achieving a major transformation in a business. Most of these are relevant to more minor attempts to shape culture.

Establish a Sense of Urgency. As already indicated, internal motivation to change is based on a clear understanding of threatening external conditions or competitive advantage to be gained. Evidence for a crisis, potential crisis, or major opportunity must be presented clearly to the

members who are asked to change or the aggressive cooperation necessary for change will not occur.

Kotter (1995) estimates that over 50% of all change efforts fail because of the lack of felt urgency. The type of evidence necessary to be convincing is heavily dependent on past experiences of personnel and the existing culture. For example, members of a paper company who are used to wide market fluctuations in pulp paper prices are not likely to be motivated by an extreme one-quarter loss. Many managers prefer to give orders rather than collect and distribute evidence. They are not likely to lead change efforts.

Urgency also suggests moving fast. Change should be initiated on all fronts at the start with phase-in coordinated in a timely fashion. Slow changes are not more comfortable. They often allow resistance to consolidate and contradictions to exist in the company. Fast changes do not mean that care cannot be taken to understand fears and provide meaningful transitions. But these should be anticipated and planned for from the very outset. Response should not wait for actual presence of a problem.

Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition. Change processes of all sorts across different aspects of life are usually lead by a cluster of early adopters who become critical parts of the diffusion to others. Organizational change is little different. It is not sufficient for upper management or the upper management team alone to support a change. Early adopters exist throughout most organizations. Others watch them for ideas and how they are treated. As T. J. and Sandar Larkin (1996) have shown convincingly, frontline supervisors are especially important to change efforts.

A change team has to be developed that is sufficiently diverse, motivated and powerful to influence the variety of people to be effected in the change process. If the team members can work together, they can also learn from and give support to each other, especially during the early months. Retreats and other activities can aid this group in preparing for the opposition it eventually will face.

Create a Guiding Vision. Plans and directives lack force unless accompanied by a clear and easily understood vision. The urgency of change can create diminished motivation and even exit by key members if not matched by a compelling notion of what can be. Important qualities of visions are the focus of the next chapter.

Communicate the Vision. A vision without the voice of a prophet can neither inspire nor guide. Visions are often undercommunicated and communicated in an ineffective manner. Undercommunication usually occurs when the vision remains a property of upper managers. They may be clear about where they are going, but the various instructions and directives they send out do not carry the vision. These often make little sense and fail to inspire. The larger the change, the greater the need is to explain and demonstrate at every possible occasion.

Poor communication occurs when upper managers preach the values but do little to get directly involved in the change effort. The negative effect is compounded when management actually continues to operate in ways that contradict the new vision. Videos, email, publications, coffee cups, and large meetings rarely help. Communication should be face to face whenever possible. Presentations and publications should contain facts and analyses rather than slogans. Meetings should answer real questions rather than be used to spin the line. A vision needs to be written into the day-to-day interactions. Rewriting policy materials and appraisal processes presents a new vision much more clearly and honestly than posters.

Furthermore, as discussed later, a presentation is not communication. Communication takes two—one to have meaning and send a message and another to hear it and decide what it means. People respond to the vision that they hear, not the one that was meant. An upper manager's vision to increase customer satisfaction can be heard by the supervisor as another job to add on top of an already heavy workload and having to change several work processes to customize products for different customers. The heard vision is hardly inspirational. People reasonably ask, "What's in it for me?" A well-articulated vision must provide a way for employees to answer that positively. Generalized values and slogans rarely do that.

Empower Others to Act. Often managers try to overmanage change. They want to control everything. But change processes are very complex. No one can orchestrate the process all the way. Furthermore, change requires an internal change by organizational members. Internal changes do not happen by people being told or required to comply. People must embrace such changes for themselves, make them their own. People model their changes on others they perceive to be similar to themselves. They must be enabled to make the vision over as their own within the

broad parameters for coordination. Get people involved as soon as possible. Trying things out that succeed provides encouragement for further change.

Once a positive process gets going, the most that upper management can do is simply not let things get in the way. This requires removing obstacles to change. Job categories and standard work expectations often continue to undermine the vision. Changing hearts, minds, and souls cannot be sustained when people are put back into the same constraints. Appraisal and other systems or structures need to be changed when they work against the vision. And finally, upper management has to encourage risk taking and remove penalties for failure in the short term as new things are tried out.

Create Small Wins Along the Way. Cultural change is a slow process even when aggressively pursued. Initially, one might even expect lower morale and some decline in performance. Significant changes, even when positive, disrupt easy automatic processes. As an analogy, learning to dribble a basketball with the left hand may be frustrating for a right-handed person, even if he or she knows that no serious player can play with the right hand alone.

An important way to avoid frustration and loss of momentum is to build in small wins that can be shared and celebrated. Try to imagine a significant weight loss program or fitness program without reoccurring measurements that show progress that can be shared with others. Especially the guiding coalition will need progress checks and means of celebrating accomplishment. Coalition members will need it for themselves, and others will be watching.

Consolidate Improvements and Create More Change. Even the best change effort grows tiring after a couple of years. It is to be hoped that some success has been achieved by this time and people have other things to attend to. It is easy to think that the process is done or can be put on the back burner. This is usually a mistake.

Resistance usually resides under the surface for some time waiting for the opportunity to return. Many in the company may still be imitating the new without having internalized it. It is amazing how quickly some people revert to old patterns the first time a crisis hits. And all changes gradually become routinized in ways that obscure the vision. The prophets often become priests. Ideally, a leader of a change effort can consolidate small wins and use them as a basis to go after even more entrenched structures and perspectives. Changes in process can truly become changes in deeply held values, but that takes years.

Institutionalize the New Culture. Without a grounding in everyday routines and members' value systems, all changes in attitudes and ways of talking will gradually pass away. Change efforts are often connected to charismatic leaders. When they leave, only firmly grounded changes will remain. As conditions of urgency now seem at bay, motivation for continued improvement may wane. People continue to need to be shown how the change really made the performance difference. And new managers need to be selected that will continue to champion the vision and the cultural changes needed.

Exercise 2.4

Recall your vision of a positive culture for an organization of which you are a part. Sketch how you would accomplish each of Kotter's (1995) eight steps.

Review Questions

- When would an explicit cultural change process be most valuable?
- What are some of the things you would look at when trying to determine the character of a particular culture?
- What might you do to enhance the strength of an organization's culture?
- When might a strong culture be a problem?
- What factors influence the internal motivation of organizational members to engage in a cultural change?
- Why might employees fear and resist a cultural change effort?
- What are the sites of cultural reproduction? How can you intervene in each?
- Why is a sense of urgency important in initiating a cultural change process?

- If you were building a guiding coalition for the change effort, how would you induce or enroll members?
- What is the best way to express the vision for change?

Discussion Questions

- In your organization, which organizational members have been most accepting of change? Why do you think they are different from others?
- What are the leading forms of resistance to change in your organization? What types of messages would most likely reduce the resistance?
- What do you think of Kotter's (1995) eight steps to change? From your experience, which have been least followed?
- When a change process was attempted in an organization of which you were a part, how successful was it? Where did it most succeed and most fail? What might you do differently now?

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3

Vision and Cultural Development

Overview

Developing and acting on a strong vision is vital to an organization. Vision is one of the key elements that distinguish a manager from a leader. To be effective, however, a vision statement must be collaboratively constructed and "owned" by members across organizational levels. Unless the vision is clearly communicated and integrated into organizational practices, it is likely to have little effect. No matter how often strategic plans are revised and mission statements revisited, without a strong commitment to these guiding principles they cannot strengthen an organization. This chapter outlines what a vision is and shows how some of the world's premier organizations have turned a commitment to a strong vision into unparalleled success.

To be useful, a vision statement must be integrated with the cultural value systems of the organization. The path toward vision achievement must be followed every day and enacted in routine interactions and communication. Vision helps build identification with the core purpose of the organization, and identification gives employees a sense of accomplishment in the work that they do, which in turn drives them to strive toward accomplishment of organizational and member objectives. A strong, shared vision is good for the organization at all levels.

Key Objectives of the Chapter

- To explain the importance of a long-term vision
- To illustrate how to develop a powerful vision statement
- To explore means of reinforcing culture and building employee identification
- To help in the building of shared visions
- To provide a rationale for involving organizational members in developing and implementing a shared vision

Questions to Consider

- Think of an organization of which you are a member. This may be a workplace or corporate organization, but might also be a student organization, religious group, sports team, or community service organization. Wherever people "organize" their activity through communication, organizational work is being done. Does this organization have a clearly articulated vision?
- What are its core values?
- What is the value of the product or service that it produces or provides?
- Are organizational members strongly identified with the organization? Why? Why not?
- What can you do to ensure that the daily operations move the organization toward fulfillment of its vision?

Building a Vision

> Unless company objectives are in harmony with your [employee] objectives, unless our corporate way of life is compatible with the way you want to work and what you want to achieve, there is no way we can succeed, no chance to excel. But how do we make sure the goals of the corporation are consistent with the goals of our employees? How can we get everyone working together to push this company out front? The answer is simple. Start talking. Define the rules by which we will play the game. Start talking about our philosophy. Write it down, criticize it, change it if it needs changing. Then let it stand out there so we can be measured and challenged to make it even better.
>
> —*Joseph D. Williams, CEO, Warner-Lambert (quoted by Hebert in Goodman [1998] p. 73)*

Most organizations have a mission statement that articulates the overall purpose that the organization was founded to accomplish. Such a statement is generally contained in the governing documents of the organization, such as a constitution, bylaws, policy manuals, or employee handbooks. It may also be communicated informally through stories that articulate "what we are about here." A mission statement generally reflects what the founders of the organization hoped to accomplish when it was created.

Similarly, many corporate organizations spend a great deal of time and money on meetings aimed at strategic planning. These sessions are frequently designed to identify what the organization is currently doing and what are its strengths and weaknesses. A strategic plan generally outlines how the organization intends to fulfill its mission.

Although each of these elements is related to the development of an organizational vision, they differ from each other. A mission tells you where the organization wants to go; the strategic plan tells you how it intends to get there. A vision, however, helps you see the importance of getting where you want to go and understand why some paths there are better suited to some organizations than others.

Since most organizations perform a multitude of different tasks to arrive at their end goal or product, a vision can also serve a coordinating function. It can provide a framework that allows organizational members to make sense of the particular tasks that they are responsible for performing in the context of the larger purpose of the organization. In this way the vision helps contextualize the purpose of everything that

gets done in an organization. The vision inspires, motivates, and creates a sense of purpose that organizational members can buy into.

In short, a good vision is realistic enough to create a recognizable picture of the future, powerful enough to generate commitment to performance, coherent enough to provide coordination, and open enough that others can make it over into their own. If this is done the vision can inspire and motivate, provide direction, and enable benchmarking of progress toward the future.

Exercise 3.1

- Richard Allen (1995) suggested a vision is formed by asking basic questions. Address each of these in relationship to an organization that you belong to:
  - What is our purpose?
  - What is our driving force?
  - What are our core values?
  - What do we do best?
  - What do we want to accomplish?
  - What do we want to change?
- Articulate your vision for your organization. Is the current culture conducive to achieving it?
- How might others' visions for the organization differ?

Why a Long-Term Vision?

A vision is always just out of reach. It gives organizational members something to strive for. As such, a clear vision statement must be future focused. By developing a clear sense of where you want to go, you move the organization beyond immediate preoccupations with product design, time to market, and even staying ahead of the competition. By focusing down the road, day-to-day challenges can be addressed in the context of whether they move the organization toward its goal.

Organizations that set the standard by which others measure themselves do so by focusing more on where they want to go than on where their competition is going. This is not to say that an awareness of current circumstances or markets is not important. What this does mean, though, is that as long as your goal is to stay ahead of the pack, you are only measuring yourself against that pack. Companies that follow those principles may be successful. They may even make a great deal of money. They are unlikely to be trendsetters, however.

There is a good reason that CEOs like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Lee Iacocca, Sam Walton, and even Walt Disney were considered *visionary*. Gates still runs Microsoft with the goal of "putting a computer on every desk, and in every home, all running Microsoft software" (quoted in Lewis, 1997, p. 10). This vision says little about how day-to-day operations are conducted, but this guiding principle is part of what helps determine how changing market conditions are responded to.

When an organization has a clear sense of purpose and knows where it wants to go, that gives meaning to what happens day in and day out and helps avoid common "process-improvement" pitfalls. Total quality management (TQM), quality circles, teaming, and benchmarking, among countless other trendy activities for organizational improvement, will repeatedly fall short of their goal, as long as process is examined devoid of context. A strong long-term vision gives cohesion to the work of an organization. With this sense of purpose in mind, quality improvement takes on new life.

Qualities of a Strong Vision

In an organization with strong vision, quality improvement is not something that only takes place when market share drops or when serious problems are identified. Organizations with a strong vision consistently rise to the challenge of outdoing themselves. This is not to say that they do not recognize or reward successes, but rather that each success is viewed as a milestone along the route to fulfilling a larger purpose. Although every organization must set its own vision and develop its own standards, there are certain characteristics that can provide guidelines for thinking about an organization's vision.

The Vision Provides a Sense of Direction for Organizations

A vision articulates where the organization is headed and what it is trying to accomplish. A vision projects an exciting future and is realistic. It is a direction toward the future based in both possibilities and desire. Things like a 5-year plan may help provide focus and give some sense of direction, but a task-oriented plan is not a vision. The vision clearly takes into account the cultural values of the organization and articulates what the organization aims to achieve. The day-to-day performance objectives at Microsoft may vary widely, but the long-term vision continues to guide the organization forward.

A Clear Vision Provides a Context for Decision Making

Although a long-term vision may not be about day-to-day decisions, it does help to shape and guide them. A vision statement should be the backdrop against which all choices and decisions can be measured and assessed. Many good and interesting ideas emerge in a market environment. Successful organizations are able to choose between them and act on only those that move them toward the accomplishment of their vision.

At Ford, the vision of "Quality is Job 1" allows managers and executives to make clear-cut decisions about product models. Increased performance or sleeker body designs are considered if they collectively contribute to creating a higher quality product. Alone, they do not serve the goals of the organization. When important decisions have to be made, an organization with a clear vision of its future can ask, "Will this help us accomplish our goals?" "Does this move us in the direction we have committed to follow?"

A Shared Vision Must Reflect Organizational Values and Culture

For a vision to serve its function and guide the organization surely forward, it must be believed and acted on by members at all levels of the organization. For this to occur, the organizational mission and the day-to-day culture and practices of the organization must be well matched. A vision for the future of an organization must arise out of its present

circumstances. The cultural framework in which organizational members make sense of their work experience must be attended to in the process of developing a vision for the organization's future.

As the vision aims to move the organization forward and prepares it for change, it must also provide a sense of direction and give focus for organizational members. At the same time that the articulation of a vision should take these concerns into consideration, the ultimate implementation of processes to achieve the vision must be congruent with what members are being told. If the messages that they hear in training seminars and read in company documents do not reflect members' daily experience, not only are they less likely to be motivated to work toward fulfillment of the organizational vision, they are more likely to be distrustful of management. Obviously, neither of these conditions leads the organization in a positive direction.

The vision-culture link can be thought of as cyclical in nature, with the vision both arising out of the larger organizational culture and helping to shape and focus the evolution of that culture. The time during which the organizational vision is defined is a good time to assess the nature of the organizational culture. If the culture is not conducive to carrying out the vision of the organization, changes may be required at other levels.

Throughout this process it is important to keep in mind that organizational members often have a significant amount of themselves invested in the day-to-day routines and practices of the organization. Making sweeping changes without their input is likely to lead to dissatisfaction and alienation, not to increased identification. This is another reason why it is so important for the organizational vision to be co-constructed by members all across the organization.

A Clear Vision Recognizes and Responds to a Pressing Need

For organizational members to feel that their efforts are useful and meaningful, the product or service that the organization is committed to providing must meet a need that is both real and perceived. Federal Express is a prime example of an organization that was founded and has thrived on the continuous fulfillment of a felt need. When first founded, the company recognized the difficulties faced by organizations in which the members could converse and reach agreements very rapidly by elec-

tronic means of communication but were then often forced to wait several days for the delivery of official documents that would allow them to finalize agreements already reached informally.

The company was founded with a vision of providing guaranteed overnight delivery of letters and small parcels. To achieve this ambitious goal, it built in quality control measures very early on that would both provide accountability and allow organizational members to see the effects of their success more readily. Allowing customers to call or use computer software to easily track their shipments increased organizational members' incentives to ensure that the vision of the organization was fulfilled. It also allowed members to more easily observe how their contributions helped to meet real needs by fulfilling the vision of the company.

A Vision Helps Create a Strong Future by Acting in the Present

Although the function of a vision is to enable the organization to focus on the big picture and see a future for itself, knowing where one is headed allows one to take decisive action in the present to move in that direction. Being future focused will not help the organization to move forward unless steps are taken every day to move in that direction.

Managers become leaders when they are able to enact the values and principles embedded in the organizational vision in their day-to-day interactions with employees and in the approach that they take to their own job performance. Once a vision for the organization has been articulated, it must become an integral part of day-to-day routines for it to lead to increased identification or play a significant role in shaping the future of the organization. It is the responsibility of individuals in leadership positions to communicate the vision.

This involves more than managers' reciting the organization's vision statement to their subordinates, however. Sometimes understanding at a deeper level what the accomplishment of that vision involves and using that framework to shape everything from job descriptions to performance evaluations can have a more powerful impact. Conveying the underlying goals that the vision aims to accomplish is what will ultimately help shape the direction of the organization.

Many companies have invested a great deal of time and energy in the development of mission statements and the articulation of a vision. Far too frequently, however, the outcome of the planning stage gets carefully

written up into policy manuals or annual reports without ever having a significant impact on the day-to-day operations of the organization. This is not a vision. This does not lead to inspiration. This does not strengthen organizational culture or enhance member identification. This is an expensive way to spend a great deal of time and money while accomplishing little, if anything, of any real value to the organization.

If, however, a vision is used to help coordinate the activities of subcultural groups within the larger organization, it can have a powerful unifying effect. A vision cannot be applied uniformly across subunits in a corporation in most cases. For this reason, developing that underlying sense of where the vision is directing the organization and being able to help members across the organizational system see the relevance of its focus to their functions can often be more helpful than any number of formal seminars or campaigns for increasing the commitment of multiple organizational members to the future direction of the organizational system.

How Do These Characteristics Combine to Create Strong Vision?

We have seen that to create a shared vision, the vision must provide an overall aim or direction for the organization. In doing so, as the vision shapes the way the organization thinks about its future it also guides the choices that are made about how to act today. For this to lead to increased employee identification, the vision must reflect organizational values. If it does not, members are less likely to be highly identified with the organization and more likely to be skeptical of management.

When a true, shared vision is developed, organizational members have something to believe in and feel a sense of purpose in their work. It is this belief that the work that they do serves a purpose and has meaning that leads employees to develop a strong identification with the mission of the organization and take action to help accomplish it. They are increasingly encouraged to do so to the extent that the product or service provided and the overall aim of the vision respond to a real and pressing need.

All of these factors must be complemented by day-to-day enactment of the values and principles articulated in the vision. This daily enactment involves the clear communication of the broader sense of vision to organizational members. A vision statement does little good on a shelf or even on a wall. Simply reciting the vision statement without accom-

panying action is not sufficient either. Leaders must "walk the talk" and demonstrate their continued and unwavering commitment to fulfilling the organizational vision. Unwavering does not mean unquestioning, however, and successful organizations regularly assess the extent to which their vision responds to the changing needs of the environment.

Adapting to Change

We have already mentioned that to remain successful, an organization must remain flexible and adaptive to change. It is important to recognize, too, however, that even the most well intended visions can turn out to have been misguided or not lead the organization in productive directions. The wisest leaders expect to encounter failures on the road to success. Although difficulties are never exactly welcomed, leaders with a strong vision for the organization are able to look at failures and mistakes as opportunities for unparalleled learning and organizational growth. Sometimes mistakes are able to provide us with insights and point us in directions that would have been invisible otherwise.

Visions are about recognizing the opportunities in setbacks and rising to meet new challenges. Those who see errors as someone's fault typically spend valuable time reorganizing human resources, without ever fundamentally altering the circumstances that led to the negative outcome in the first place. Those who are able to see obstacles as the by-product of poor planning, of misguided vision, or of unforeseen circumstances are better able to make rapid reassessments and use temporary setbacks to catapult the organization more surely toward a more desirable outcome. For these changes in direction to take place, however, it is critical that leaders secure the support of organizational members, for they are the ones who will be responsible for the daily activities that move the organization in particular directions.

Building Identification

What exactly does building identification entail? What is an "identified" employee? How does building identification both strengthen the organization and enhance the work experience for organizational members?

Building identification involves developing systems in which organizational members are inspired, encouraged, and motivated to take action. An identified employee is one who shares core values with the mission of the organization and feels a sense of gratification and accomplishment by helping to achieve organizational objectives. Such identified individuals help build a strong organization, because those that work there are committed to achieving the overall goals that it seeks to accomplish.

When employees identify with an organizational vision, they feel increased degrees of satisfaction from the performance of tasks when they are able to see how their work helps to create an outcome of which they are supportive. A clearly articulated vision and the incorporation of its underlying principles into daily activities may help to create the necessary conditions for identification, but unless members take personal ownership of the process of achieving the goals of the organization, such identification will be tenuous at best. For an organizational member to develop a deeper sense of commitment to the organizational project, Paul Strebel (1996) suggests that they must be able to answer questions such as

- What is my role in achieving the goals of the organization?
- How does my job or role fit into the bigger picture?
- How will my task performance be supported by the organization (materially, financially?)
- What forms of assessment will be available to help me gage my contributions?
- How is my compensation related to my performance of organizational objectives?

Although many of these questions are typically answered in policy and procedure manuals, having such questions answered personally on a case-by-case basis may lend greater support to the project. The development of individual agreements with organizational members can provide an opportunity to clarify explicitly how the tasks performed by particular organizational members help to move the organization in a desired direction. This can be beneficial both to employees/members and to management.

Employees may develop a deeper sense of the importance of their job to the organization and feel more compelled to help the organization

achieve its mission. This can be both intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. From a managerial perspective, developing a deeper sense of the importance of the many interrelated tasks that must be performed to achieve objectives may be useful later on in making decisions about organizational change. Entering into such a process creates an environment in which employees are encouraged and inspired to engage in innovative activity that helps move the organization toward its desired goals and then sets up a reward structure for recognizing the contributions that are ultimately made.

Exercise 3.2

- What leads members to identify with an organization? What increases and lessens the strength of identification?
- Complete the sample organization identification questionnaire at the end of the chapter (Appendix 3.1). How might organizational culture be managed to increase identification?

Developing and Implementing a Vision

For an organizational leader or someone who may find himself or herself in a leadership role in the future, understanding how to develop and implement vision in an organization is an important skill. Once you understand the importance of shared vision, are able to see its connection to the strength of an organization's culture, and have identified the key players in the process, you must devise a strategy for facilitating the development of this vision. The following steps provide a general overview of what to do in the process of creating a vision. As with any activity of this importance to an organization, however, enlisting the assistance of trained professionals is important to the success of this endeavor.

The Importance of a Qualified Facilitator

Having an individual or small team of individuals who can assist in the structuring of the visioning process is critical to its success. This individual should have a relatively small stake in the outcome of the visioning process in order to be better able to act in such a way as to encourage the representation of a broad range of perspectives and challenge the status quo. Whether the facilitator is an organizational member or not is generally a matter of preference, but he or she should have the experience and expertise to keep the discussion focused and be highly motivated to help the organization develop a shared vision.

Assessing Where You Are and Have Been

Before beginning to look forward it is important to have a clear sense of the status quo. Understanding where you are starting from is critical to developing a vision that fits with the culture of the organization. In this phase, leaders should identify a plan for vision building and develop a process to assess the activities that the organization currently engages in. Benchmarking during this phase allows organizational members to compare their current processes to those of competitors and provides a framework in which to think about the future goals of the organization.

Contemplating a New Direction

Once a clear understanding is developed of current practices and processes, the organization should begin to think about where it is headed. By this phase, key stakeholders should be identified and their input should be sought to determine how the organization is currently working to meet their needs. An analysis of this input, in light of current practices, should begin to point to areas that might benefit from change.

Building a Vision Together

Once the ideas have begun to emerge for a new direction, the vision must begin to be clearly articulated. The outcome of this phase should be a concise statement of the future direction of the organization. This statement will help organizational members articulate what they do and develop a sense of pride in their work and identification with their organization. This process must include multiple stakeholders, and the final product must be clearly communicated across levels of the organization.

Identifying Roadblocks

After clearly articulating where the organization wants to go and developing a statement that stakeholders can buy into, it is important to recognize where challenges may be encountered. To the extent that potential stumbling blocks can be identified, development of the strategic plan can help to address how those will be dealt with. Taking the time to do this at this stage can help reduce the likelihood of serious setbacks that can be discouraging and demoralizing for organizational members down the road.

Realizing the Organizational Vision

After investing the time and energy into this process, it is important that action be taken immediately to capitalize on the enthusiasm and motivation generated by the process. When a shared vision is created, organizational members may be inspired and optimistic about the new directions that the organization is taking and excited about the role they will play in the process. If implementation of practices designed to move toward fulfillment of the mission is not forthcoming, however, demoralization may set in rapidly.

A clear strategic plan should be developed outlining the goals for vision implementation, and meaningful discussion should be had at all levels of the organization about how such implementation can most effectively be integrated into current systems. As this discussion evolves, the vision for the organization should become more deeply integrated into daily communicative practices in the organization. Job description, performance evaluations, and routine discussions and decision-making practices should reflect the underlying values that are embedded in the organizational vision.

Developing a Self-Monitoring System of Vision Adjustment

We have already addressed the importance of continuously assessing the effectiveness both of the vision and of its implementation. You must, however, establish a clear time frame for assessment at the outset. After a specified time, workshops and performance review sessions should be held to assess the effectiveness of the organizational vision. Identify the questions that are most salient for the particular organizational situation and be prepared to revise those aspects that have not lived up to expectations. Assess realistically how long it should take for new programs to be put in place and be given a chance to be effective. At the review point it should be relatively easy to assess which programs are taking hold more slowly than expected versus those that are not taking hold at all or are producing undesirable results.

Exercise 3.3

- How receptive/resistant to change is the organization that you belong to? What factors influence this cultural attitude? Does this lend strength to your organization or weaken it? How can this help move you toward articulation of a clearer vision?
- Look at this organization and consider the following questions:
  - What is unique about us?
  - What values are true priorities for the next year?
  - What would make me personally commit my mind and heart to this vision over the next several years?
  - What does the world really need that our organization can and should provide?
  - What do I want our organization to accomplish so that I will be committed to, aligned with, and proud of my association with this organization?

Review Questions

- What is a long-term vision and why are such visions important?
- What are the principal qualities of an effective vision?
- What does it mean for a member to identify with the organization? What influences identification?
- How would you go about developing an effective vision?

Discussion Questions

- Many vision statements seem vague. Even Dilbert makes constant fun of them. What do you believe is "wrong" with most of them or the process by which they are developed?
- Think about a vision statement that has been effective. What made it so?

References and Recommended Readings

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Appendix 3.1

Sample Organizational Identification Questionnaire

While filling out the following survey, please think of your daily work routine at your company. For each of the following statements, please circle the response that best describes your belief about, or attitude toward, your company. The possible responses are:

YES!	I agree very strongly with the statement.
YES	I agree strongly with the statement.
yes	I agree with the statement.
?	I neither agree or disagree with the statement.
no	I disagree with the statement.
NO	I disagree strongly with the statement.
NO!	I disagree very strongly with the statement.

1. I am proud to be an employee of my company.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

2. I'm very concerned about the success of my company and work group.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

3. When making on-the-job decisions, I consider the consequences of my actions for my company.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

4. I am bothered when other people criticize my company.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

5. I like where I think my company is going.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

6. I would be quite willing to spend the rest of my career with this company.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

7. The people at my company are different from others in our industry.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

8. I am willing to put in extra effort in order to help my company be successful.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

9. My values and my company's values are quite similar.
   YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

10. I tell my friends that my company is a great organization to work for.
    YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

11. I usually agree with my company's policies on important matters.
    YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

12. My job with my company is an important part of who I am.
    YES! YES yes ? no NO NO!

To score, give 7 points for each YES!; 6 for YES; 5 for yes; 4 for ?; 3 for no; 2 for NO; and 1 for NO!. A score about 60 indicates a fairly high degree of identification and employees that are more than willing to contribute to the company's success. Scores from 36-60 indicate that it is just a job and motivation will usually come primarily from work incentives. A score under 36 indicates a major morale/legitimacy problem that is probably contributing to low performance.

SOURCE: Adapted from Cheney (1982).

NOTE: Used with permission.

4

Guiding Interpretations and the Art of Framing

Overview

People respond to the meanings they have for words and events rather than to the words and events themselves—the statement made is rarely the statement received. This basic communication principle appears obvious but is one of the most frequently overlooked principles in organizational life. The mediation between words and events and the meanings individuals have for them can be well described as a cultural process. The produced meanings in turn circle back to influence what is said and done and the cultural interpretation of these meanings. The management of meaning is the ultimate goal in the choice of specific words and actions.

The most basic process of managing meaning is called *framing*. Framing refers to the ways leaders can use their language to shape or modify particular interpretations of organizational events thereby directing likely responses. Whereas visioning involves the shaping of formal mission statements and espoused values, framing focuses on the everyday communication of organizational metaphors, stories, artifacts, and myths that shape interpretations.

Although these discursive devices are less formally articulated than are their visioning counterparts, they nevertheless play a crucial role in creating

and normalizing organizational members' experiences. Like most communication skills, the ability to frame situations in a certain light is a learned process.

This chapter outlines the importance of the interpretive process, shows how language socially constructs interpretive frameworks, and explains how managers can use the process of framing to reinforce and modify an organizational culture and member's experiences and responses.

Key Objectives of the Chapter

- To understand the relationship between visioning and framing within the larger cultural model
- To understand how language creates, shapes, and reproduces interpretive frames
- To gain the ability to use effectively discursive instruments available for framing, including metaphors, stories, traditions, vocabulary, artifacts, contrast, and spin
- To identify several framing dangers, including exaggeration, mixed messages, and the way language can marginalize and hide discursive options
- To identify and evaluate framing opportunities

Questions to Consider

- Have you ever had a discussion where you thought the other person understood you, only to find out later that this person thought something different was meant? Why do you think you had different meanings?
- Can you think of a time when two alternative descriptions of an event or decision were possible and one was chosen over the other? What most influenced the choice? How do you see the relation between who said it and what was said?
- Have you ever been in a meeting where people's stories seem to have far more weight than the available information? Why are stories sometimes listened to more than data? What makes a story especially effective?
- Can you think of a group or organization you are familiar with that uses jargon? If you look carefully at the jargon used, what does it tell you about power relations in the company or the worldview of members?
- Try to think of an example where you have heard someone (possibly in the media) attempt to promote a positive "spin" to the understanding of an event. What happened? Why do you think this happened?

The Centrality of Interpretations

The ways we talk about work environments are connected to the way people think about and act in the workplace. As Mawhinney (1998) notes, wording a situation in different terms can elicit different ways of understanding solutions. For example, the statement "Absenteeism causes inefficiency" will most likely elicit questions about how the organization can devise punishments to drive down absenteeism. In contrast, the statement "High attendance is correlated with efficiency" is more likely to evoke discussion about how the organization can devise positive reinforcements to motivate higher attendance. Consider the following dialogue we heard on the street the other day:

Young Man *(after sitting down next to a young woman with an ice cream cone):* "Nice night, isn't it?"

Young Woman: "This isn't a bar!"

Young Man: "Sorry, must be tough being so attractive and having guys hit on you all the time."

Young Woman: "Look, I have a boyfriend."

The dialogue is both rather obvious and straightforward and easily understood by nearly anyone familiar with North American culture. On the other hand, it is quite complex and requires a fair amount of sophistication in hearers for it to be obvious to them. No statement is a direct or a literal response to the one preceding it. In fact, the replies could be interpreted as nonsense, but we did not so interpret them, nor did they. Each statement must be understood or interpreted within some frame of what is being said or done.

Interpretation is deeply cultural. An interaction like this one requires standard social interaction scripts and ways of making statements fit those scripts. And any particular interpretation is always held against competing interpretations worked out in time. One could imagine a number of statements the young man could have made to convince the young woman that this was intended as a casual conversation. And we might never know whether she was deflecting an advance or merely exploring how interested and tenacious he was.

All statements and actions are subject to interpretation and a continued process of struggle over the appropriate frame to be applied.

Even the clearest statement cannot escape this intrinsic quality of human interaction. But careful attention to interpretive processes can aid the management of the process.

When people talk there are always two conversations that can be displayed. The first records the explicit use of words and expressions. The second is the inferred interaction between what people meant and thought the other heard. These are called the "left-hand" and "right-hand" interactions, respectively, because that is how they appear on paper.

Consider the following interaction from a real workplace. Here the so-called right-hand dialogue (the interplay of interpretations) is also displayed:

Says	Means
Joe: "Eric, how long will it take you to do that project?"	*Eric has the information and should participate in this decision.*
Eric: "I don't know? How long should it take?"	*Joe doesn't make any sense. He's the boss. Why doesn't he tell me when to finish it?*
Joe: "You're in the best position to estimate the time requirements."	*Eric won't take responsibility. It's time he learned. I can't work with anybody who does not take responsibility.*
Eric: "Ten days, I guess."	*This is crazy. I don't know. I haven't thought about it, but he's expecting an answer. I'll guess, maybe this is close.*
Joe: "Take fifteen. Sure you can get it done in that time?"	*He'll never get it done in ten days, probably not even fifteen. He doesn't seem to have the ability to estimate time, but we have an agreement.*
Eric: "Okay."	*These are my orders, fifteen days.*

The project actually should have been given about 20 days. So Eric worked overtime and on the weekends. But on the 15th day he still needed another day to finish.

Says	Means
Joe: "Are you done and ready to move on?"	*I'll make sure that he fulfills our agreement.*
Eric: "I'll finish it tomorrow."	*I hope he appreciates how hard I have worked to complete his orders.*
Joe: "But we had agreed that it would be ready today."	*I knew he could not get it done. I hope he learns a lesson in responsibility.*
Eric: "I can't work in a place like this."	*What a stupid, incompetent boss! Not only did he give me the wrong orders, but he does not appreciate how hard I worked. I can't work for a person like this.*
Joe: "Huh?"	*Boy, is he temperamental. What's going on here? He must be having problems at home.*

Interactions like this one happen all the time in organizations and usually remain undetected or are written off as the effects of a bad day or a personality problem. Such differences are not the result of ignorance, bad will, incompetence, resistance, or personalities. They are often the result of smart, dedicated people using their competence with the best of intentions. They are using the most basic values and assumptions to make sense. But the basic values and assumptions are different. Similar interactions are especially prone to happen during transitions and cultural change processes, since normal rules of interpretations may no longer be shared and fear and distrust may be higher.

Most people manage the left-hand dialogue with little thought to the right-hand one. Leaders aware of interpretation processes manage the right-hand one with careful selection of words and expressions. Framing is the process of presenting things in such a way as to shape interpretations in a particular way. When framing is successful, meanings are more closely aligned and people are able to see events in new and more interesting and useful ways.

Exercise 4.1

Choose a recent discussion, especially one where you felt misunderstood. Record the left-hand statements as close to literally as you can. Now try to write the implicit right-hand discussion. What meanings were missed? What type of assumptions appear most responsible for the nonalignments?

Why Framing?

> Leaders do not have a choice about whether or not to communicate. They only have a choice about how much to manage what they communicate.
> —*Edwin Schein (1992, p. 253)*

Organizational leaders operate in turbulent environments that are partly of their own making. Although leaders do not and cannot completely control all events, they nevertheless influence how events are seen and understood. Arguably, the most central tool of influence is language. Most leaders spend nearly 70% of their time communicating, but few pay close attention to how their language influences the interpretive frameworks of those around them. Managers who are highly skilled in language can easily produce words and sentences that highlight some values while masking others. Sometimes language is so smooth that it seduces people into believing that many of the so-called facts in our world are objectively, rather than socially, created.

Framing is a quality of communication that leads others to accept one meaning over another. It is a skill with profound effects on how organizational members understand and respond to the world in which they live. It is a skill that most successful leaders possess, yet one that is not often taught. Nevertheless, managers can learn how to manage meaning through framing.

According to Gail Fairhurst and Robert Sarr (1996), framing consists of three key components: language, thought, and forethought. *Language* is the most obvious part of the skill. Through language, managers place focus on aspects of situations that are ambiguous and vague. Language helps to categorize topics in an organized fashion. Through the creation

of vibrant stories and metaphors, language helps us to remember information and acts to transform the way in which we view situations. To put language to use, of course, people must first have *thought and reflected* on their own interpretive frameworks and those of others. In the absence of a clear idea of the desired values to be instilled, language cannot work to communicate goals. Last, for framing to be successful, leaders must learn to frame spontaneously in myriad situations. Being able to do so has to do with having the *forethought* to predict framing opportunities. In other words, one must plan in order to be spontaneous.

The Relation of Framing to Visioning and Culture Change

As a part of the change process, leaders can most effectively modify or change organizational culture through the communicative behaviors of visioning and framing. Leaders use vision statements to articulate the organization's goals. Visioning is essential to creating the norms, mission, and rules of an organization, components that make up the organization's formally espoused goals. Thus, we can understand vision to be an organizational *ideal.* Nevertheless, as any experienced manager understands, it is one thing to formulate official goals; it is an entirely different (and possibly more difficult task) to communicate these goals so that they are inculcated in and acted on by employees on a daily basis.

This is where framing comes in. Whereas visioning pertains to the organization's articulated goals, framing involves the everyday behavioral and communicative processes that organizational members use to reach, contradict, or avoid these goals. Leaders frame events through the use of language choices and techniques such as metaphors, artifacts, stories, and myths. Framing helps align everyday understandings with the organization's mission. Leaders can use myriad framing devices to modify interpretive frameworks that are not in concert with the organization's vision.

The Social Construction of Interpretive Frames

When we think of excellent speakers of our time, invariably names like John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Maya Angelou come to

mind. These three speakers have in common a mastery of the English language, a seemingly effortless ability to make pictures from words, and the capacity to mesmerize their audiences with endless streams of rhetorical devices. In addition to being wonderful to listen to, these societal visionaries have literally created a new reality based on their words. When King said in his "I Have a Dream" speech, "America has given the Negro people a bad check—a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds'" (quoted in Cook, 1985), his words created a reality that needed to be acted on. Through his metaphor, he pointed out the bleak situation that America had created for African Americans. This metaphor, along with many others in the speech, created the urgency needed to set the civil rights movement into action.

Through language, today's managers can also create and fundamentally change people's interpretive frames. When we think of an articulated organizational vision, therefore, it is not so much of a mental conception put into practice as it is a discursive instrument that simultaneously shapes organizational members' behavior and mental activity. Thus, the organization's espoused values are largely self-referential and self-reproducing. Through repeated discourse, the vision becomes an imaginary object and the apparent referent. Thus, the power of language instruments (missions, metaphors, stories, etc.) lies not only in their rhetorical ingenuity but also in their power to constitute and normalize reality.

For instance, let us analyze the concept of *sexual harassment*. For most people today, sexual harassment is conceptualized as a specific object or behavior; namely, it is defined as unwanted and offensive sexual advances or sexually derogatory or discriminatory remarks. Indeed, it is difficult to remember a time when sexual harassment has not existed, but the term itself was first used less than 20 years ago.

Before the term existed, the *object* of sexual harassment as we know it also did not exist. Victims of unwanted sexual advances had only phrases such as "overly friendly" and words such as "uncomfortable" to describe their situation. As one might guess, victims did not have an easy way of explaining their predicament. In the absence of words to describe the situation, most perpetrators were not held accountable for their behavior. Who could be ostracized for merely being "too friendly"? Only since the emergence of the actual phrase, in a late 1970s court case, has the behavior been understood as a concrete legal infraction worthy of punishment.

But establishing a term and various technical definitions does not do away with the contest of meanings, the various ways people struggle over what things mean, in fact what things are. As Robin Clair (1993) has shown, organizational stories about potentially harassing statements and events sometimes dismiss the events as trivial or based in misunderstandings. Other stories shift responsibility to the victim. And still others display hidden sources of power relations questioning what might otherwise be seen as consensual. As Clair showed, these are all cases of framings and the attempt to reach shared interpretations.

As is true in the phrase sexual harassment, sometimes the use of new words or phrases can be helpful for describing a "going-on" that was not previously articulated. Through the normalization of the words, however, it is easy to forget that the concept itself is not a naturally occurring "object." Rather, like all concepts, it is produced through language.

As illustrated in a case study of knowledge-intensive workers (Deetz, 1997), concepts of work ("integrated" and "smokestack") are not simply the naming of different things. The naming creates an important difference, highlights ways things can be seen as unlike and provides more or less favored interpretations. The move of treating these produced objects and their discontinuities and preferences as if they were a property of the world seals the system off from discussion, since it is treated as natural rather than as produced.

Ideas that may seem absolutely normal, real, and unquestionable—for example, business concepts such as productivity, consultancy, and total quality management—are actually produced through language. Close analysis of these concepts by managers can reclaim the constructed quality of these productions, and through framing, leaders can use discursive constructions to produce and change the cultures of their organizations.

Discursive Instruments for Framing

Leaders can have a tremendous effect on the interpretive frames of organizational members. What a leader simply pays attention to can have a huge impact on how a program or department functions. If a certain value or program is deemed important, managers can increase its value in organizational members' eyes by consistently asking employees questions about it or including the topic or program on meeting agendas.

Managers should be aware that their emotional blowups send a memorable message to employees. For instance, if an organizational president reacts to a product failure by immediately firing the employees in charge of the product, a message will be sent to others that it is not wise to take risks—a message that the president may not have intended. Behavior speaks louder than words. If leaders want to ensure that their values are inculcated into organizational members, then they must also provide organizational systems that correlate with their espoused goals. One way they can consistently communicate their vision is through framing.

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) overview many of the important ways to frame situations. In this section, we describe several different discursive framing tools, including metaphors, stories, traditions, jargon and slogans, artifacts, contrast, and spin. Some culture researchers go so far as to conceptualize organizational cultures as *consisting of* these symbols. Although we understand the merits of viewing discursive elements such as stories, metaphors, and myths as constituting a culture, we feel that it is more worthwhile to view these things as *discursive instruments* that actively create, shape, and modify organizational culture. These discursive tools can be viewed as holding a symbolic function, in that they always represent something different or something more than what they are.

Table 4.1 outlines the purpose of each discursive framing tool, offers recommendations about when these tools should be used, and gives a brief example of each.

Metaphor—Comparing One Thing to Another

Metaphors are the most complex and important framing tools for organizational leaders. Like all framing devices, a metaphor is a form of symbolic, rather than literal, expression. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1992) defines a metaphor as, "A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in 'a sea of troubles'" (p. 1134). Metaphors are pleasurable and surprising to listen to because they help us see the ordinary in a new way. In addition to creating vivid word pictures, however, metaphors serve as the essential bridge between the literal and the symbolic, between cognition and

TABLE 4.1 Discursive Framing Tools and Their Use

Discursive Tool	*Purpose*	*Example*	*Potential Pitfalls*
Metaphor	To give an idea or program a new meaning by comparing it to something else.	I think of our office as just one big family. We have our squabbles but that doesn't keep us from working with each other.	They can mask or discourage significant alternative meanings.
Stories (Myths and Legends)	To frame a subject by anecdote in a vivid and memorable way.	In our business, tragedy happens, such as when . . . (story) You can't take it personally.	They can become overused or send mixed messages.
Traditions (Rites, Rituals, Ceremonies)	To pattern and define an organization at regular time increments to confirm and reproduce organizational values.	Annual holiday parties; daily performances such as saying hello to every employee.	They may be nonmeaningful or trite or make it difficult for new meanings to emerge.
Slogans, Jargon, and Catchphrases	To frame a subject in a memorable and familiar fashion.	Calling passengers "punters."	A word or phrase can become loaded, misunderstood, or overused.
Artifacts	To illuminate corporate values through physical vestiges (sometimes in a way language cannot)	Layout of a board room; design of offices/cubicles.	Sometimes they contradict corporate mission.
Contrast	To describe a subject in terms of what it is not.	Our new business plan is nonhierarchical and unobtrusive.	It may do little to define the concept.
Spin	To talk about a concept so as to give it a positive or negative connotation.	"That was a good speaker. She hesitated some, but that just shows she really thought about her answers."	Do not use if the difference between reality and the spin is excessive and unbelievable.

affect, and between the conscious and the unconscious, according to many psychologists. Thus, metaphors are often used to present new ideas and insights in a way not always available within the processes of analytic reasoning and discourse.

Through the use of metaphors, people come to understand and experience one thing (program, concept, idea) in terms of another. Organizations can be metaphorically discussed and thought about in terms of machines, organisms, armies, teams, or families. Each comparison draws attention to certain aspects of organizational life and tends to hide other aspects. The metaphor also can direct decision making and the interpretation of events. An organization that thinks of itself in family terms—produces a family culture—has a very different response to layoff pressures than a culture framed as military or mechanical.

Managers can think of metaphors as figurative analogies that draw comparisons between two dissimilar things. We use these analogies so much in our everyday talk that it is sometimes difficult to identify them. Consider the following examples:

- The introduction of a new product is a *baby step* in the right direction.
- The impending layoffs are just a *Band-Aid* on the problem.
- This office is just one big *family.*
- If we don't upgrade our computers soon, the company will *miss the boat.*
- The institution of paternal leave *levels the playing field.*

Through figurative analogies, speakers compare unfamiliar situations to those people understand and can identify with.

Likewise, business leaders can use metaphors to explain their corporate vision. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) discuss how a small group of managers in a public affairs program tried to envision a more productive future for their company. After a concentrated analysis, the managers decided that their mission was threefold: (a) to continue the general information-dissemination activities of any public affairs department, (b) to get buy-in from senior management they needed to responsibly communicate with the public, and (c) to engage in more two-way communication with the public by having employees become members of various stakeholder organizations.

As the public affairs managers surveyed this threefold mission, they realized that their three goals seemed equal and interdependent, yet the overall vision of all three goals was the same: to win public trust. They were struck by the vision's similarity to a three-legged stool. From that point forward, whenever managers discussed their vision, they began with the complex metaphor of the three-legged stool. The metaphor was critical in helping to clarify their thinking and their ability to manage and frame the meaning of their departmental vision.

Stories and Myths

As an organization develops a history, values can be packaged and performed through corporate stories and myths. Myths can be defined as unquestioned, shared beliefs about the benefits of certain routines, techniques, or behaviors that are not supported by demonstrated facts. Stories are often seen as closely linked to the myth (and are often the expression of the myth). Stories, which are often considered to be "gossip," say a lot about how employees believe the organization "really" works. In addition, storytelling performances typify certain experiences as being worthy of emulation or deserving of caution and thus call attention to possible future organizational experiences. The retelling of stories provides insight into the organization's culture and thus its operations. Therefore, stories are a powerful tool for reinforcing organizational assumptions and teaching these assumptions to organizational newcomers.

Managers obviously do not have complete control over the stories passed along in their organizations. Nevertheless, they can strategically use stories to "put a face" on their corporate goals and vision. In addition, stories are memorable and vivid and create rapport. Many times, after people forget organizational rules, regulations, and articulated goals, they nevertheless remember the story or anecdote that illustrated the point. Like all good stories, corporate myths usually include hero and villain characters, a conflict, and a resolution that teaches some type of lesson. Stories can also be humorous, which is often accomplished by making the story familiar to or consistent with the audience's lives.

Consider the following story relayed by a senior 911 operator to another, less experienced operator. As told to us, the story is gruesome, even shocking. It nevertheless illustrates how a story can teach an organizational lesson in a vivid and memorable fashion.

> Once a woman called me who found her husband hanging, and was sure he was still alive because when she cut him down, she heard him throw up. [But] that was because when the noose was around his neck [it] had blocked the fluids, so when she took it off, his body was emitting the fluids. Well, she assumed that was a sign he was still alive. You could hear her trying to give him mouth-to-mouth and you could hear him gurgling in the background, and to me, that just completely grossed me out for one, but number two, I felt so bad. . . . Some of the things she was saying, you knew he was dead, but she wasn't, hadn't accepted it. But you have to stay on the line and listen to it whether you want to or not. . . . There are call-takers here that I think go a little too much into personal aspects of the caller or getting too much information. . . . [But] you can't get involved. You just kinda put those things in perspective.

Through the telling of this story, the senior 911 operator does several things. First, she conveys the tragedy inherent to the business. Second, she puts a face on the issue and creates a vivid picture with her words. Last, she conveys the lesson that 911 call takers cannot get too personally involved if they want to survive in the job. In telling a story, the operator made the lesson interesting and memorable to the trainee.

Traditions: Rites, Rituals, Ceremonies, and Celebrations

Based on their collective values and beliefs, organizations also have recurring collective action patterns that symbolically pattern and define organizational life. Rites are collective activities in which employees initiate or conclude a given phase of events. An example of a development rite is when General Motors initiated the Saturn project and hundreds of employees from all different levels met for several days in an off-site area to strategically study the future of the company.

In contrast to the rite, managers use rituals to reproduce and confirm common organizational traditions. The best example is a common meeting. Mike Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) categorize rituals as personal, task, social, or organizational (see Table 4.2). Personal rituals, performed by individuals within the organization, serve as "trademark" performances. They solidify employees' organizational identity as well as inform others about their identity. They are also the critical incidents that employees draw on when they attempt to make sense of particular organizational members and the culture to which they belong. Task rituals can be individual or collective. These types of rituals

TABLE 4.2 Types of Rituals

Type of Ritual	*Example of Ritual*	*Symbolic Implication*
Personal	Each and every weekday morning, Jenny, owner of a local real estate office, walks around the office and says, "Good morning" to each employee.	Shows employees that management keeps in touch with and cares about what employees are doing.
Task	At the end of each month, Cathy Clavin, account executive at Stanley Public Relations, meets with her account assistants to go through their date books and time sheets to figure out how much time they collectively spent for each client. Depending on the hours and the work actually produced, Cathy figures out how many hours the client should actually be billed for.	Indicates to subordinates that they should keep detailed records about the time spent servicing clients, but when it comes to billing, there is flexibility beyond solely the hours spent. Quality of work is also important.
Social	Every Thursday night, a group of the ramp servicemen at City Airport go for a beer at one of the airport bars. Talk revolves around sports, women, and union politics.	Upholds a network among the workers outside of work. Identifies membership and status level within a particular organizational subculture.
Organizational	Each summer, the tenured sales people at ABC Marketing invite the new sales recruits to a golf match. Competition is severe and the new recruits have never won.	Represents a status hierarchy between new recruits and tenured employees. Teaches new employees that they should learn from and respect the longer tenured sales people.

continually reveal the day-to-day routines that "get the job done." Social rituals, such as eating lunch outside on the company's patio, are carried out without explicit connection to the organization but nevertheless have the effect of solidifying organizational identification and a sense of belonging to subcultures. Organizational rituals, such as company picnics, board of directors meetings, or executive meetings, are largely analogous to organizational rites. These performances reveal global features of an organization's culture.

Two other more formal events that establish time patterns and traditions in organizations are ceremonies and celebrations. The ceremony is

a formal event that usually expresses a sense of organizational tradition and history. Examples of ceremonies include initiations, graduations, anniversaries, the formal launching of a product, and the opening of a new branch. The celebration is a less formal ceremony where more mundane activities take place. An example would be a company's annual holiday party.

Through rites, rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations, organizational leaders can maintain consistency and tradition in the organization that communicates corporate vision and goals.

Slogans, Jargon, and Catchphrases

Every organization has its own special vocabulary that is peculiar to its particular profession or organizational culture. In this vocabulary, we find jargon (words unfamiliar to people outside the culture), slogans, and colloquial catchphrases. They are popular word choices because, like the metaphor, they bring a unique "insider" meaning to the concepts they represent.

As is the case with all discursive instruments, managers cannot always completely control the vocabulary of their employees. In fact, jargon is often specifically used because its meaning is obtuse and indecipherable by outsiders. For example, on a commercial cruise ship, employees referred to passengers not as "guests," as management would have liked, but rather as "punters." Through the use of this term, employees were able to depersonalize their association with the passengers and treat them as faceless consuming robots. We see a similar type of depersonalization occurring when doctors refer to their patients as "ringers" (as in hanging around the ring of the drain, since they are almost "down the drain"), and when 911 call takers refer to callers as "schizoids."

Through framing, however, management can help modify the interpretations of others. In one example, a new beauty salon owner wanted to create a sense of high-class style in her salon. She did so, in part, by requiring all of her employees to speak of their patrons as "clients" rather than as "customers." The word "client" is traditionally associated with important, long-term, business transactions, whereas "customer" brings forth the image of a transitory supermarket patron. Through the use of the word "client," employees were inculcated with the value of building long-term, mutually respectful relationships with the shop's patrons.

A catchphrase or slogan can also do a lot to frame or summarize a group of ideas. One of the most popular conceptions in the 1990s has been "change." Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) discuss how Bill Clinton capitalized on this trend in thinking when his campaign team devised his 1992 campaign slogan, "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow." Through the use of this slogan, Clinton was able to portray a theme of a brighter future. The slogan also created an environment where change could only be thought of as good. The American public was presented with two possibilities: Be a part of progress by voting for Clinton or be a part of stagnation by voting for George Bush. This dualistic choice, of course, was merely an illusion of the slogan. Nevertheless, it was an illusion that helped win Clinton the presidency.

Artifacts

The concept of artifacts is generally used to describe the physical vestiges of an organization, for example, the organization's building, equipment, products, and so on. Artifacts are commonly the most concrete symbolic elements in an organizational culture. The architecture, interior design, and physical layout of a building say a lot about how the organization values creativity, control, and hierarchy.

For instance, the setup of a meeting room often symbolizes the nature of business conducted therein. A round table and comfortable chairs symbolize that the people in the meeting are equals and that the meeting is informal. In contrast, a long thin rectangular table with a "head" chair that is bigger or different than the others indicates a more formal hierarchy and a more serious gathering. Managers are wise to consider how the physicalities of their organization reinforce (or contradict) the goals and vision of their organization.

Contrast

The use of contrast allows managers to describe a program or subject by explaining what it is *not*. In vague situations it may be difficult or impossible to describe what the current situation is. Contrast allows managers to use opposites or alternatives to frame a situation. For instance, the current culture may be indecipherable, conflicted, and confused, so a person may describe it as *lacking* organization, enthusiasm, or vision.

Consider the following hypothetical manager/employee conversation where the manager uses contrast to describe the new participative type of management style the organization is working to develop:

Employee: "I just don't get it. I don't know what I'm supposed to do anymore. No one tells me and then I get frustrated when I do it wrong."

Manager: "Well, that's all part of the new participative management."

Employee: "What's that all about?"

Manager: "Well, we're not going to be telling you exactly what to do anymore. No direct orders, no getting in trouble if you don't do it exactly how we want it. Now you're going to have to use your own initiative."

Employee: "So we're not going to have the weekly goal meetings anymore?"

Manager: "We'll still have meetings, but there won't be a set agenda. Instead it will be more like brainstorming, with everyone involved."

In this example, we see how an ambiguous concept, such as participative management, can be made clearer by contrasting it with something it is *not*.

Spin

Spin, defined as the ability to portray a certain person, program, or idea in a positive or negative light, is probably the riskiest of framing tools. Managers can responsibly use positive spin to frame a program (such as their vision) in terms of its strengths, and negative spin to frame other programs (such as competing subcultures) in terms of their weaknesses. Nevertheless, spinning can create a negative response when the amount of spin begins to depart substantially from the reality of the situation at hand. In other words, when the difference between spin and reality becomes large, credibility is lost.

Usually, when we hear the word spin, images of velvet-tongued publicity people come to mind. Indeed, we speak of people who are especially good at the art in a derogatory manner, calling them "spin doctors." Washington of late is filled with them. Journalists who covered the Lloyd Bentsen-Dan Quayle debate spoke of the excessive amount of spin taking place. As the CBS reporter Leslie Stahl said, "We reporters were more than just spun tonight, we were twirled, we were Cuisinarted" (Brydon, 1989, as cited in Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996, p. 115). Although spin can be used in a responsible and helpful manner, it can easily become a detriment when it crosses the line to blatant exaggeration.

Exercise 4.2

- What discursive instruments (e.g., stories, myths, metaphors, etc.) do you currently see working in organizations or groups in your life? Are the framing tools consistent with articulated goals? Do these discursive instruments make it difficult for alternative conceptions to emerge?
- How can discursive instruments promote one line of thought over another? Provide an example, real or hypothetical, to illustrate your answer. How, if at all, could this benefit the interests of one organizational coalition over another?

The Dangers of Framing

We have already briefly discussed how managers do not always have direct control over how discursive tools are used. We have also explained how managers can lose credibility if they exaggerate a positive or negative spin to the point of not being in touch with reality. In this section we discuss two other dangers of framing.

That Which Highlights Also Marginalizes

In this chapter we have focused on how managers can use different discursive tools to manage the way others see the world. As discussed, language can fundamentally create or modify the way people view reality. This can be a good thing in business when leaders use language to create a reality that keeps their business competitive and is fair to employees. Nevertheless, as much as language can highlight one way of viewing the world, it simultaneously makes it harder to see other, possibly more valid, ways of viewing it.

For instance, if we take another look at Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign slogan, "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow," it obviously highlights

the importance of the future. Nevertheless, as Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) note, it also pushes aside the importance of learning from our past. It may also have also discouraged voters to investigate Clinton's personal past. Likewise, although the aforementioned metaphor of the three-legged stool does a good job representing interdependent support, it does little to speak of innovation or the need to take care of oneself.

As discussed, myths and stories serve as core beliefs that are rarely questioned or tested, and as such, they function as a powerful, sometimes insidious type of control. For instance, a popular myth in Western organizations is that people can "pull themselves up by the bootstraps" and can make it "to the top" if they just try hard enough. Yet the data do not support the fact that everyone has the same statistical opportunity for organizational success. Because the bootstrap myth is so pervasive in Western society, however, people take it for granted that any person—despite that person's race, class, or gender—can succeed if he or she only tries hard enough. According to the myth, if a person does not succeed, he or she just did not try hard enough. This type of silent assumption can lead to continued discriminatory structures in the workplace. Myths and stories, although powerful framing tools, can serve to obscure important realities in organizations when they are unquestioned or unexamined.

In Deetz's (1997) case study of knowledge-intensive workers, we also see several framing dangers as well as benefits. The descriptors of "consultancy" versus "funded" and integrated" versus "smokestack" services were normalized in the workplace studied. Through their repeated unquestioned use, the contrasts became taken for granted and obscured discussion options. Admittedly, the concepts of consultancy and integrated solutions had clear values and considerable rhetorical power. Nevertheless, as with all language, the terms were partial in what they highlighted, what they covered up, what they misrecognized, and how they seemed neutral yet favored particular interests and groups of people.

Framing instruments are important tools for communicating organizational vision, but they can also close off certain discursive options. In choosing framing tools, managers should analyze how their language both accents and marginalizes different ideas, values, and groups of people.

Avoiding Mixed Messages

Although organizational leaders have the time to work and rework formal organizational visions until they sound exactly right, the same

advantage is not available for the practice of framing. Because framing is often a spontaneous process, managers must be extra careful to avoid sending mixed messages. Managers must ask themselves whether the metaphors, stories, vocabulary, rituals, and artifacts they use in the organization are consistent with each other.

For example, if participative management is the vision, the leader may want to replace closed-door offices with open-air cubicles, rethink the ritual of top management eating out at restaurants while middle managers eat at their desk, replace the use of competitive sports and war metaphors with those that refer to family and teamwork, or quit labeling a certain group of people in a way that shuts them off from high-level strategic planning decisions (such as calling computer people "techies").

If different framing tools contradict each other, employees can become confused and disillusioned about the organizational vision. Of course, it may not be possible for managers to plan out every framing opportunity so it is perfectly in line with vision. An important first step, however, is just being cognizant of all the framing opportunities available and analyzing how those opportunities are used, abused, or ignored.

Recognizing Framing Opportunities

Through the creation of a vision, organizational leaders can map out for themselves the goals and values of their organizational ideal. A vision, however, is only truly effective when it is communicated to others, and this is done through framing. When do opportunities for framing present themselves? Gaps in understanding from employees can be used by leaders to instill or reinforce company vision. Unfortunately, many managers view these gaps as problems rather than framing opportunities. The most natural time to clarify organizational goals, however, is when employees are confused and seeking direction from management.

Using Knowledge Gaps as Framing Opportunities

For employees to identify with a company's vision and culture, they must not only understand new ideas, but they must also see how new programs and ideas relate to the job. It is important that employees

understand how new programs fit with old structures. Corporate leaders can encourage enthusiasm and buy-in to new programs by asking employees to devise future steps in implementing goals. Together, these tasks can be accomplished in large part through management communication and framing.

For instance, through vibrant stories and metaphors, leaders can spread enthusiasm about a new program; when employees display confusion about how new goals affect their department, leaders can take this time to reinforce the company vision and explain directly how the employees are an integral part of it; when employees ask about future organizational systems, leaders can frame these projects in terms of future vision.

Understanding the Interpretive Frames of Others

To help others expand their interpretive frames to encompass organizationally espoused values, managers should take the time to understand and be sensitive to others' interpretive frames. In other words, like any persuasive speaker, leaders must know their audience. By taking the time to understand others' interpretive frameworks, employees' knowledge gaps can be seen as opportunities and the occasions for framing become endless—whether they occur during formal meetings, in the elevator, or at the company softball game.

Planning to Be Spontaneous

One of the most common dilemmas about framing is that it cannot be completely planned out. Nevertheless, with some practice and forethought, managers can get into the habit of framing. Managers should envision future situations that are likely to recur in their organization. They can do this by using past incidents, meetings, and conversations as models of probable future ones. Through paying attention to recurring communicative situations, managers can see where linkages can be made between everyday conversations and the organizational vision. The following questions, suggested by Schein (1992) and Fairhurst and Sarr (1996, p. 164), can be used as a guide by leaders to plan for "spontaneous" framing opportunities:

1. What types of situations continually recur in my organization?
2. Where do employees get their information, and how can I shape this information source?
3. In what areas are employees confused or misinformed, and how can I clarify issues?
4. When and why do employees complain, and what do they complain about?
5. When do employees tell exaggerated stories or offer fallacious reasoning? How can I counter this?
6. How can I provide critical socialization opportunities for new employees?
7. What types of rituals and organizational crises punctuate the organization? How can I frame them in a way that promotes organizational vision?

After asking themselves these questions and analyzing their framing opportunities, managers should trust their gut instinct on framing opportunities. As with any new behavior, when people first prepare for framing opportunities, they may seem awkward and anything but spontaneous. This force of habit, in turn, makes it possible for managers to respond as if they had time to prepare. The only way to become skillful at framing is through trial and error and the continual communication with each other to figure out new ways of understanding organizational concepts or programs. Through continuous planning and communication, framing will become more natural and spontaneous.

This chapter has detailed the many different ways language can create and modify interpretive frameworks and how framing is the integral counterpart to organizational visioning. We have explained the different discursive tools managers can use to frame situations so they are consistent with corporate goals and warned of several dangers of framing. Now the question is, where do we go from here? Although every leader finds his or her own way of going about the art of framing, the following exercise provides some general tips for getting started.

Exercise 4.3

- What framing opportunities present themselves on a regular basis in an organization or group you're involved in? Do you believe the leaders in these organizations make use of framing opportunities?
- Choose a recent situation in a company or group you are involved in where meaning was contested. You might choose a particular problem and pair it with a goal or organizational ideal (e.g., maybe an organization is having a problem with regular attendance and the ideal is that at least 90% of members attend each meeting).
  - List key elements that are necessary for others to understand the present problem and the desired ideal. Create word images you could use to describe the events to ensure clarity, consistency, and comprehension.
  - Formulate a parallel list of discursive framing tools that correlate with the descriptions for the "ideal."
  - As part of this list, attempt to devise a complex metaphor that will illustrate the ideal you are reaching for. Brainstorm on ways that other discursive tools, such as stories, slogans, rituals, spin, and contrast, can be incorporated in the metaphor.

Review Questions

- Why is the process of interpretation so critical to communication?
- Why is framing an important leadership tool?
- How does framing relate to visioning and to the larger cultural concept?
- How does language help to "socially construct" people's ways of thinking about events?
- What is the value of considering framing tools (e.g., metaphors, stories) as "instruments" rather than as components that "constitute" culture?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of different framing tools?

Discussion Questions

- Given that people often interpret words and events differently, what are the possible costs of not taking into account the interpretive frames of others?
- If the message sent is often not the message received, who is most responsible for aligning meanings, the sender or receiver? Explain.
- How are the meanings of events and decisions shaped in your organization? What do you see as the benefits and costs of this way of doing it?
- Think of a time when the meaning of an event or decision was not managed well in an organization or group you belong to. What were the consequences? How could the meaning have been managed differently?

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Suggested Case Study

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5

Employee Participation and Cultural Change

Overview

Up to this point much of the discussion has focused on the direct activities of the leader in building a business and changing or shaping a culture. But increasingly, business leaders have come to understand the value of widespread employee participation in decision making and in change processes. Commanding visions are often best achieved through discussion processes involving organization members from several places and levels in the organization.

Furthermore, the most common changes taking place in organizations today include increased employee participation. The move to most versions of TQM and teams requires a culture of participation where management functions differently and decisions and responsibility are diffused in the organization. Wider participation in creating a culture of participation may seem an obvious need but is often not the case. Management direction alone of cultural change or of participation and empowerment rarely succeeds.

This chapter discusses the reasons for the move to greater employee participation, introduces management philosophy changes necessary in a move to increased employee decision making, considers the situations where participation appears most important, introduces core issues in empowerment from a cultural perspective, provides methods of joint visioning and change, and discusses communication skills necessary for effective participation.

Key Objectives of the Chapter

- ▼ To understand the forces pushing organizations to wider participation by members and external stakeholders
- ▼ To recognize the differences in management philosophies when governed by hierarchical control or when governed by participation
- ▼ To identify situations where participation is of value and who should be involved
- ▼ To understand the nature of empowerment
- ▼ To be able to foster greater initiative from others
- ▼ To be able to use various form of participation in cultural change efforts
- ▼ To develop basic interpersonal and collaborative skills to enhance organizational dialogue

Questions to Consider

- ▼ When have you felt that your ideas really mattered to an organization of which you are a part? What did others do to let you know that? How did it change how you felt and acted during your involvement?
- ▼ Under what circumstances do you feel organizational members take initiative? What hampers the taking of initiative?
- ▼ Who do you feel is most invested in the well-being of an organization with which you are familiar? Why are they invested in this way?
- ▼ What do you think of empowerment? When has it been real? What were the consequences?
- ▼ Do you feel most meetings in organizations are productive? Why or why not?
- ▼ Do you feel most meetings are primarily directed toward discussion where people express or advocate their point of view or inquiry where people attempt to acquire a greater understanding?

Employee Participation and Cultural Change

Greater employee participation in all aspects of running organizations seems to be ensured in the future. No single quality of management practice is more highly correlated with success. When done well, no single management change has more consistently led to improved performance. Nonetheless, motives for the move to greater employee participation are often mixed and implementations have not been uniformly successful.

Successful initiation of a culture of participation and participation in cultural change requires some understanding of (a) the forces leading to participation, (b) challenges to dominant values and assumptions, and (c) the characteristics of situations where participation is especially important.

Forces Leading to Greater Employee Participation

Many of the forces leading to advantages for greater employee participation are similar to those leading to managing culture. Markets are more turbulent. Creativity and innovation are more important. Traditional surveillance and control are more difficult and costly. Additionally, the following are of special interest:

Globalization. Companies often design, manufacture, and sell in several different countries. In such a context, the need for both independence and interdependence increase while the time available to coordinate activities decreases. Hierarchical structures are too slow and cumbersome to meet the situationally specific needs for a decision.

Information Availability. In traditional workplaces managers were often primarily collectors, sorters, and diffusers of information. Much of their time was spent providing interpretations of data. Information technologies allow instant sharing of relevant information, making possible more context-specific interpretations. With available information, employees can better manage their own activities if guided by shared cultural interpretative processes.

Worker and Work Process Changes. The presence of a highly skilled workforce usually means that employees are more desirous and capable of making good decisions. Today, individual qualities account for a greater part of the value added in a work stream. As technologies replace manual labor, time and talent can be better used for decision making.

Consumer Demand and Customization. As the consumer has acquired a greater variety of offerings and greater ability to shop around, the need for quick, customized responses to customers is greater. Often only the frontline person has the capacity to provide that. Such an employee must be empowered to be able to respond.

Employee Commitment and Loyalty. As shown earlier, the new social contract at work has produced an employee who has to look out for his or her own interests. At the same time the value of key employees and the costs of self-serving behaviors have become greater. Nothing increases commitment and loyalty like participation in decision making. To be listened to and to have a stake in the outcomes are powerful forces.

Payoffs. No force has been more powerful in the move to employee participation than the payoffs companies have received. Product quality, productivity, reduced absenteeism, and satisfaction have consistently correlated with high levels of participation. In many cases, employees simply make better decisions than managers. They are often closer to the factors influencing success, they represent greater decisional diversity, and they are often more willing to put the health of the company ahead of personal interests.

Changes in the Conception of Governance

Despite the payoffs and pressures for higher levels of employee participation, business leaders have not been uniform in the degree or manner in which than have embraced it. Many have implemented programs of greater involvement hoping for greater loyalty and commitment without seeking genuine input. Such an approach finally breeds cynicism and diminishes the value of employee insights.

Patricia McLagan and Christo Nel (1995) have shown convincingly that if participation is to truly pay off it cannot be partial. The successful move from bureaucracy and authoritarianism to participation requires

TABLE 5.1 Differences in Hierarchical Control and Participation

Hierarchical Control	*Participation*
Managers think, employees do.	People in various roles think about the same things from different perspectives.
People in senior positions manage.	People self-manage wherever possible. Senior managers coach and facilitate.
People at the top matter most. Many systems serve them and their information needs.	Everyone's rights, accountability, and dignity are supported and honored.
Knowledge is an important asset for personal power. Teaching moves downward.	Learning and sharing knowledge are key values. People teach each other in all directions.
Shareholders are primary or exclusive stakeholders	Customers, shareholders, employees, and future generations are stakeholders.

SOURCE: Based on McLagan and Nel (1995, p. 25).

a deep change in concepts of governance and assumption regarding the management process. These impact on nearly every activity in the workplace. Table 5.1 captures the fundamental differences.

Exercise 5.1

- Describe places in an organization you know where member participation has increased. What do you feel were the dominant motives for increased participation? How did underlying values and motives influence how participation was practiced and received by members? Were important benefits received by the organization? What type of benefits?
- Describe the places where hierarchical control and participation exist in your organization. Does one dominate? What are the underlying values or assumptions about people and the world that keep each in place?

Times and Places Where Participation Really Pays Off

Although participation clearly has general payoffs, the payoff is optimized under certain situations.

Need for Diverse Insights and Forms of Knowledge. Member participation is especially important when successful choices require diverse insights and forms of knowledge. Such insights and knowledge forms are often acquired experientially and are hard for the management to know or understand fully. Cross-functional teams have been very successful in these contexts. Cultural change efforts nearly always require such diversity. Specific understandings that exist in different parts of the company can only be well represented by those there.

Need for Innovation and Creativity. Innovation and creativity are highly dependent on diversity. As much as leaders encourage others to think outside the box, they and those close to them are not often the best at it. Their ways of thinking and shared sources of information often produce a type of groupthink in even the best intentioned. Thinking out of the box requires others who really think differently. Diverse individuals may each have his or her box, but synergy often arises as different boxes collide. Not all organizational problems require innovative, creative thinking, but those that do require participation.

Need for High Levels of Commitment. During the development of new products, transitions and crises, and cultural change, high levels of commitment are needed. When organizational members participate, they are able to take ownership of the processes and activities that help them play a role in fulfilling the vision. Most members have a need to get more out of work than a paycheck. We all want to feel that we are accomplishing something important, that we are making a difference. When members of an organization feel a commitment to the goals of the organization, they feel as though by helping the organization succeed, they are able to not only be a part of a successful enterprise but also help accomplish something important.

Exercise 5.2

Describe some decisions in your organization that would have benefited from greater participation. Who would you have involved? How would you have ensured adequate diversity of perspectives?

Who Should Participate?

Most of the discussion in this book has focused and will continue to focus on selecting employees who should engage in change processes. Identification with the mission and goals of the organization is increased when the vision is co-created with organizational members. Different members of the organization have key insights and contacts that aid vision formation and change. But individuals who are not formally organizational members also have a stake in the organization's direction. Including them in development of and identification with the vision increases the support the organization receives from a broader constituency and the broadened knowledge base from which decisions are made.

Beyond those who have an economic stake in the success of an organization, there are many others who benefit from or are harmed by the organization's activities. The products produced or services provided affect a wide range of people. Identifying who is affected by the daily operations of the organization helps identify other individuals whose perspectives should help shape the organization's development. One can ask, how do production processes affect those that live in the communities where the organization's sites are located? To whom are services provided? What effect does the organization have on local environments? How do development plans stand to impact different populations?

Exercise 5.3

Think of an organization with which you are associated and consider the following questions. By answering these questions you can begin to assess who might have a vested interest in helping to shape the direction of your organization. Once you have done this, the challenge becomes the development of a realistic plan for including them in the visioning process without irreparably sacrificing the efficiency of the process.

- Who has an economic stake in the success of your organization?
- How is the local community affected by your operations?

- What is the scope of the company's impact (local, national, global)?
- Who is affected by the humanistic activities engaged in?
- What is the environmental impact of organizational activities?
- Who may benefit or suffer from that impact?
- How do company policies impact the families of employees?

Identifying key stakeholders is important for several reasons. On the practical front, stakeholders such as stockholders, local communities, and contracting partners have an economic interest in the success of the organization. These stakeholders want to know that the vision that the organization has for the future is worthy of a financial investment and is likely to bring them dividends of some sort. The more identified they are with the vision of the organization, the more stable a resource they will be. Some stocks are bought and traded daily based on market trends with the sole intent of making profits. Some stocks, however, are held over the long term because the stockholders have an enduring faith in the vision of the organization. They are willing to weather those times that are not as strong or lucrative because they have faith that the long-term vision is one that will bring rewards in the long run.

Today, more and more public policy decisions are being made at the corporate and organizational levels. When these decisions bear on community life, economic systems, and environmental health, those who stand to be affected by the outcomes must be involved in the decision-making processes. Although it is generally unrealistic to expect to include all such stakeholders in every decision that is made without sacrificing great degrees of efficiency, initial involvement in the development of the vision can provide valuable insight into the wants, needs, and concerns of a broad stakeholder constituency. When stakeholders help to shape the direction of the organization and that organization is true to its commitment to use its vision as a framework for effective decision making, awareness of a range of perspectives is brought to bear on each decision made.

This can, in turn, further enhance the commitment of organizational members. Although employees have a financial stake in the success of the organization and want to feel that the work that they are doing is

meaningful and important, they generally have a broader stake in the organization as well. Members typically live in the communities in which the organization is located, and their lives and those of their families are affected by organizational decisions. Members who feel that they are working for an organization that is helping to contribute to the growth, stability, and health of the community in which they live are more likely to take pride in the work that they do. This can also enhance feelings of pride in and commitment to the organization in which they are employed.

When key stakeholders are considered and consulted in the process of developing a vision for the organization, it is reflected in the culture of the workplace and manifest in the commitment of members. When vision is lacking or the vision is not shared, the organization may often struggle with lack of focus, frequent turnover, or quality assurance problems. (See Table 5.2.)

Questions Regarding Empowerment

Few doubt that the time of command and control hierarchies is past. Members are being asked and allowed to take initiative, be creative, and accept direct responsibility for their decisions. Discussion of these changes often goes under the broad term *empowerment*. What empowerment means, however, is anything but consistent across organizations or people in organizations. Implementation has often been difficult and met with resistance at all levels. Many of the problems and lack of payoff arise from the different concepts of and motives for empowerment.

The presence of a strong culture aids the move to empowerment. Widely shared values and assumptions aid coordination of independent decision making and help upper managers trust other employees to fulfill organizational objectives. But a strong culture, especially if conformity is expected as a cultural feature, can undermine the innovative and diversity values of empowerment, hence reducing organizational adaptation and learning. Empowerment can aid cultural change and the move to a more innovative strong culture. How all this works out is largely based on answers to central questions. Robert Quinn and Gretchen Spreitzer (1997) develop the following questions of concern:

TABLE 5.2 Employee Participation In Workplace Decisions

What Are the Payoffs?

- Higher quality decisions (the biggest benefit), especially in situations where creativity and innovation are critical.
- A reduced need for directly supervising and monitoring work behavior.
- Reduced turnover due to the increased commitment of employees.
- Increased product quality and customization of products for customers.
- A greater sense of well-being among employees, who usually take better skills and attitudes home to their communities and families.
- An emergence of working arrangements more sensitive to the needs of women and culturally diverse groups.
- An increase in the total organizational learning and skills of employees and management.

Signs of Partial or Incomplete Participation

- There's no connection between participation activities and reward structures.
- Management talks a lot about empowering people as if this is something that can or needs to be done to people.
- To justify participation activities, managers stress the need for buying into the corporate ideology or increasing employees' loyalty or commitment. Increasing the quality of decisions is not used as a justification.
- Workers only participate in decision making regarding minor issues or those involving the plan for executing higher-up decisions.
- Participation groups lack diversity or are "safe."
- The company uses participation forums primarily for letting off steam rather than decision making.
- Decisions—but not responsibility—are assigned downward.
- Key information for decision making is not shared.
- Participation programs are suspended during change and crisis.

Before Committing to Participation

- Make sure you really want it!
- Commit to the long-term. It may well take 18 months or so to see a payoff.
- Make sure everyone gets appropriate training. Every person in the company has to overcome years in authoritarian-style training. Training displays management's commitment to a participatory workplace.
- Participation skills are not natural; they are acquired over time.
- Have your program regularly assessed by outsiders.

What Do You Mean by Empowerment?

Leading executives clearly differ on what they mean by empowerment. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) found two distinctly different positions in their interviews with executives. They are characterized in the five contrasts shown in Table 5.3 for mechanistic and organic models.

TABLE 5.3 Mechanistic and Organic Approaches to Empowerment

Mechanistic	*Organic*
Start at the top	Start at the bottom with employee needs
Clarify the organization's mission, vision, and values	Model empowered behavior
Clearly specify the tasks, roles, and rewards	Build teams to encourage cooperation
Delegate responsibility	Encourage intelligent risk taking
Hold people accountable for results	Trust people to perform

SOURCE: Based on Quinn and Spreitzer (1997, p. 38).

Both approaches to empowerment have their time and place, but the organic approach is more likely to create a culture of innovation and deep commitment. Cultural change processes practiced organically are less predictable but are more likely to create conditions where members have integrated their own values with larger values shared by the organization. And such cultures are more able to withstand latent resistance. Much of the popular literature on empowerment works from the mechanistic model. This popularity is based more on catering to managerial fears and identities than careful reasoning or data.

The combination of a communicative leadership articulating a powerful vision and an organic empowerment process enable both leadership and members to make the vision their own. Open discussion rather than the expectation of compliance is key to successful change and empowerment. Many managers have difficulty making a distinction between *leading* the organization and *controlling* it. Empowerment requires such a distinction.

> One group feared empowerment would create "loose cannons." A person from the second group retorted, "When was the last time you saw a cannon of any kind around here."
>
> —*Quinn and Spreitzer (1997, p. 39)*

What Is an Empowered Person?

The popular management literature argues for empowerment based on information sharing, a participatory structure, team building and team-based decision making, relevant training opportunities, and rewarding employees for risk and initiatives. All of these are clearly part of developing an empowered employee, but they retain a concept that empowerment is something that managers do to employees.

In contrast, as Alan Frohman (1997) showed in his studies of personal initiative, meaningful empowerment arises from self-determination and internal motivation. These are likely to be reduced by the values implicit in typical empowerment programs. The assumptions made about people embedded in most empowerment programs have more consequences than the activities. Empowerment requires that leaders help build a culture of initiation and remove barriers. Recognizing initiators helps.

Frohman (1997) argues that in most companies the people who bring about changes are relatively easily recognized, if somewhat unexpected. Most initiators are not on the company's "high potential" list, a list that often represents game playing and conformity. Instead, they are people who perceive organizational needs and take it on themselves to go beyond their jobs. They are action oriented and sufficiently motivated to make a difference so that they often engage in learning focused on meeting organizational needs. Initiators were energetic and independent and openly questioned the status quo but were loyal and respectful.

Do You Need Empowered People?

The reasons for empowerment in a general sense are clear in the reason for moving to participation at all. If employees are desired who are more effective, innovative, and transformational, empowerment is important. Empowered employees do their jobs better, they create new ways of working, they help the organization adapt to changing environments, and they ignite change in those around them. Despite this, many leaders are themselves resistant to empowerment.

Do You Want Empowered People?

Despite the rhetoric not all leaders who advocate empowerment want it. Some are like parents who want their children to make decisions for themselves but want them to make only the decisions that the parent otherwise would have made. Such an approach is often worse than no empowerment at all. It invites mutual distrust and cynicism and cannot achieve the value of employee-based decision making and responsibility. The end result is a workforce of people who ask just to be told what to

do and managers who have their beliefs confirmed that employees cannot, will not, or do not want to do it.

Part of the reason for this situation is that bureaucratic cultures are very powerful in many organizations. They are based in deeply held values and assumptions and perpetuated in virtually all talk and practices in organizational life. The thinking and information leading to a desired change is undermined by the larger culture. Expectations of conformity and narrowly defined and highly constrained conflict are common. Lowering these barriers to change is difficult and has to be based in a genuine desire for change. A cultural change process that does not practice the very values desired in the end is not likely to succeed.

How Do People Develop a Sense of Empowerment?

People develop a sense of empowerment and internalize new values incrementally over time. Doing so demands a willingness to embrace uncertainty and trust people. Trust requires trying and testing.

Change is initiated with reframings that allow individuals to visualize themselves and their environments differently. This begins to show up in new interpretations of situations and new solutions to old problems. Initially, this may be done tentatively and with much attention to others' reactions. Habits are being broken, but even with success, experience has taught many employees to be cautious.

If these actions are reinforced, self-confidence increases and the new patterns become more automatic and comfortable. Commitment to the organization increases as does trust of others, which in turn leads to satisfaction and higher levels of effort. And the cycle continues. Frustration or perceived punishment early in this cycle stops the process quickly and leads to demoralization, leaving the employee more cautious than before.

What Organizational Characteristics Facilitate Empowerment?

Many qualities of organizational life can facilitate the development cycle. The most central quality is a powerful vision based in the member's own understanding of the challenges facing the organization, one

that provides critical internal motivation. Equally important are a group of practices that identify and reward reframing and initiative. Teamwork can provide a circle of people who support each other's efforts. Identifying and expressing stories of accomplishment helps. Tying reward systems to initiative makes the message clear.

The right kind of guidelines can also help. If employees know clearly the situations in which they have discretionary control and where they do not, uncertainty and insecurity are reduced and managers may be more willing to let go of control.

What Can Leaders Do?

Leaders can do much to create organizational conditions that encourage and reduce barriers to initiation and a sense of empowerment. Initiation is often stifled by time pressures, time to get approvals, number of approvals required, inadequate resources, shifting priorities, and complex organizational structures. Leaders have some control over each of these.

But as the work of Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) demonstrated, most importantly leaders must feel empowered themselves; unempowered people rarely empower others. They suggest a list of eight questions for every leader. These "hard and harder" questions serve as an important point of reflection at this point in the chapter.

Exercise 5.4

Think of an organization in which you are a member or imagine yourself as a member of one with which you are familiar. Carefully think through Quinn and Spreitzer's (1997) hard and harder questions.

Hard Questions for a Leader

1. If a sense of a clear strategic vision is a characteristic of an empowering environment, am I continuously working to clarify the sense of strategic direction for the people in my own stewardship?
2. If openness and teamwork are characteristics of an empowering environment, am I continuously striving for participation and involvement for the people in my own stewardship?

3. If discipline and control are characteristics of an empowering environment, am I continuously working to clarify expectations regarding the goals, tasks, and lines of authority in my own stewardship?
4. If support and security are characteristics of an empowering environment, am I continuously working to resolve the conflicts among the people in my own stewardship?

Harder Questions

1. To what extent do I have a sense of meaning and task alignment, and what can I do to increase it?
2. To what extent do I have a sense of impact, influence, and power, and what can I do to increase it?
3. To what extent do I have a sense of competence and confidence to execute my work, and what can I do to increase it?
4. To what extent do I have a sense of self-determination and choice, and what can I do to increase it? (p. 47)

Methods of Participation in Change

In most cases, methods of participation in change efforts differ little from methods for participation in general. Most of these are familiar and need not be repeated here. A great deal of the literature focuses on building effective teams. Deborah Harrington-Mackin's (1994) work is recommended as especially helpful. Other methods more directly connected to joint visioning and developing cultural change are less familiar. Here two will be considered: *appreciative inquiry* and *future and search conferencing*.

Appreciative Inquiry

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivasta (1990) have developed appreciative inquiry as a way to look at what gives life to an organization. It uses a form of positive questioning to develop a database out of which members can envision more provocative and positive futures. The process is developed out of questions related to discovery, destiny, dream, and design:

Discovery: What is it about the organization that should be appreciated and valued? What gives life to the organization? What in the organization is exceptional?

Destiny: What can be learned in the process of inquiry that can lead to sustainable change and growth? Who would be involved? Who shares in the organization's destiny?

Dream: What are the possibilities for the organization's future? What would we like? What would we like to be doing?

Design: How would an organization look that meets that future? How can we remake the organization to prepare for reaching our dream?

In such an approach, data gathering, development of future possibilities, and building commitment to those possibilities are combined. As a group participates in the inquiry process, the ordinary problem-solving mode of thinking that often stymies change and strips groups of their energy is redirected toward making futures rather than getting by. Groups that focus their energy on their preferred futures exhibit more energy and commitment than groups that discuss their past and present problems. Systematic questioning can provide reframing that is difficult to advocate or would otherwise be met with resistance.

Future and Search Conferencing

Future and search conferences are based on a similar logic but use the focus and energy generated in retreat settings for an organization to move from exploration to commitment more quickly. Future and search conference methodologies have been around for some time but recently have been heralded as new social innovations in the field of managing large-scale change.

Conferences of this sort use the energy involved in intense systematic discussion to help organizations find a course to the future and adapt to turbulent environments. They are normally two-to three-day events away from the work site. Participants are selected based on knowledge and insight, diversity of perspective, ability to engage in open communication, and potential for taking responsibility for implementation. More details are provided in the review by Ronald Purser and colleagues (Purser & Cabana, 1997) of such a conference with Xerox.

Developing Principles of Dialogue

Participation that makes a difference is based in a very different form of communication than that common in command and control management and debating societies. This form is best described as dialogue. Peter Senge (1990) described dialogue as the capacity of a group to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine "thinking together." He does not mean "thinking alike," for which one person would do, but a type of interaction where prior stances are let go and individuals engage in productive explorations and conflicts that push beyond the thinking of any one person.

This is clearly different from talk in most organizations that emphasize advocating particular choices without exploring underlying intents and assumptions and usually do not pursue win/win decisions. Dialogue requires both particular qualities of interpersonal communication and a collaborative orientation.

Interpersonal Communication Qualities

Even face-to-face communication is often more a simultaneous monologue among several people than a dialogue. Even when there is a genuine effort to understand the other and considerable trust and openness, without appropriate skills, dialogue cannot happen. Here four skills are highlighted: immediacy, concreteness, ownership, and acknowledgment. The discussion is followed by a dialogue demonstrating the use of the skills.

Immediacy. Immediacy refers to the sense of being present, focusing on paying attention, listening, and perceiving the emotional content of messages. In many discussions people are not really present to each other; they are simply waiting for their turn to respond rather than understanding and being responsive.

A successful leader understands that most people have a fairly high need to be really heard and taken seriously. Employees do not want to hear your experiences, to have you fix their problems, or to be treated like a representative of a class of people. They want their feelings and their immediate circumstances responded to. They want understanding and the power to act responsively and responsibly. Interaction characterized by immediacy involves much eye contact and supportive gestures. It is patient and careful and filled with requests for further understanding.

Concreteness. Concreteness refers to expressions that avoid abstractions by providing meaningful details. An expression is abstract whenever it provides a generalized conclusion or evaluation without providing the descriptive information from which such a conclusion or evaluation was reached.

Abstractions create problems because they (a) overgeneralize, making problems appear larger and more difficult to solve; (b) provide listeners with little information on which to base their own evaluations and responses; and (c) tend to evoke responses to the words themselves rather than to what the speaker has actually experienced.

The statement, "John is irresponsible," includes all these qualities. The more concrete statement, "I was disappointed last month when John did not meet his quota," provides a much better opportunity for dialogue, whether the conversation is with John or others.

Concrete expressions help clarify the content of the interaction, provide more and more useful information, reduce emotional intensity, align interpretations, and increase change options. Abstractions are so natural to many people that mutual commitment to exploration and clarification may be necessary for improved communication.

Ownership. Ownership is the process of explicitly assigning and expressing appropriate responsibility for feeling and actions. Unowned statements shift responsibility by taking on too much responsibility or too little, leading to defensiveness, guilt, and inability to correct.

The statement, "You make me so angry," inappropriately shifts responsibility for one's own feelings to the other. Although the other's actions leading to the feelings of anger are important and must be owned by the other, the person feeling anger contributes also. Anger requires both the actions *and* the unmet hopes, desires, expectations, and anticipations of the one having the feeling. Both are appropriately open to discussion.

A lack of ownership is also often present in claims of objectivity and facts. All claims and facts require agreed-on processes or procedures for their formation. Even the accountant's report requires the acceptance of "general accounting procedures" for its claims. Often these processes and procedures remain implicit, making discussion of them impossible

and consideration of their products incomplete. Responsibility is pushed to some invisible realm.

Responsibility is also often shifted to rules and generic shoulds and oughts. Questions like "Whose oughts?" "Why are they applicable in this situation?" can be undiscussible. Responsibility is shifted to an absent authority.

Owned messages explicitly demonstrate responsibility for self, thoughts, feelings, knowledge claims, and actions. They often begin with an explicit "I think" or "I want" rather than appearing without an origin. To produce an owned message requires (a) knowing what you are really feeling, thinking, or doing; (b) honestly determining what you have to value, anticipate, or want to think or feel this way when confronted with the other's statements and actions; and (c) determining which are the thoughts and feelings that you wish to share with the other. Most owned statements begin to make explicit the deep values and assumptions that are embedded in an organization's culture.

Acknowledgment. Acknowledgment is the process of making explicit your understanding of the other person's message prior to responding to it. In the absence of acknowledgment the following sequence often results: Important messages from one or both are overlooked, denied, or only partly understood; participants respond to different messages as the interpretations misalign; a bogus issue arises on which the participation partly aligns, thus justifying the heightened emotions; and interactants leave the interaction feeling misunderstood, undervalued, and suspicious.

Acknowledgment can help draw out the underlying interpretations (the right-hand dialogue) that is the real life of interaction and meaning assignment. Acknowledgment increases the possibility of greater understanding, eases distinction between misunderstandings and genuine disagreements, and increases feelings of immediacy and trust. Each participant is affirmed as valued and meanings are clarified.

An Example. Mary is Bill's supervisor. Bill had turned in a lengthy report on a project being considered. Working on it has put him behind on other duties. Mary was quite disappointed with it and still has to prepare her own presentation.

Mary: "Bill, I need you to do that report over."

Bill: "Really?"

Mary: "Yeah, I need it back as soon as possible."

Bill: "What do you want?"

Mary: "More development and more direct answers to their questions."

Bill: "I thought it was pretty good."

Mary: "Well, it doesn't show any drive or initiative—that you have things under control."

Bill: "I know my stuff pretty well."

Mary: "Well, you have to show it if you want to get ahead."

Bill: "For some people, it's all show."

Mary: "I don't make the rules, just get the report in."

The dialogue is not too lengthy or intense but shares characteristics with many attempts at dialogue that fail, often in a much grander way than this one. The interaction grows more difficult and abstract. By the end, little understanding is present, the issues are bigger, neither party feels appreciated, and future interactions are likely to be less frequent and more difficult. Bill does not feel his situation is understood and Mary hides her own frustrations and lack of information in generalizations and blame.

Exercise 5.5

- Identify places in the interaction where the statements lacked immediacy, concreteness, ownership, or acknowledgment.
- Rewrite portions of the interaction demonstrating more productive skills.

The following is a hypothetical rewrite demonstrating interpersonal skills leading to a different end.

Mary: "Bill, John needs more details on projected material costs and time requirements before he can consider approving the project."

Bill: "Ah! I was hoping it was done. I'm so far behind."

Mary: "Yeah, I know you have worked hard on the report at a bad time. But they will meet on Friday. For me to get my part done, I'll need it Thursday afternoon, sooner if possible."

Bill: "You mentioned both the material costs and time requirements. Do you know exactly what they need?"

Mary: "I'm a little frustrated myself. John was not very clear himself. I know they want more on the specific timetable for each phase and some comparative figures for considering suppliers. Maybe we should sit down together and talk it out in detail so that we know what we can say. I'll see if I can find out more."

Bill: "I hope a meeting won't be necessary. I appreciate your help, I want it to go well. I think I know better what is needed, but I may need some help to collect everything before Thursday without messing up the GS project."

Mary: "I know you are pretty pushed, but this is important. I need it to go well, too. Maybe Joe can help on the GS project."

In the rewrite meaningful details are added. Abstract, but concrete-sounding, terms like "do it over," "their questions," "taking initiative," and "showing it" are replaced by details of when and what and by criteria for judgment. Unowned feelings expressed as generic frustration and negative reactions become specified and owned. And each feels better that he or she is understood as explicit attempts are made to play back an understanding of the bases for the feelings and thought of each.

Each of the interpersonal skills is more important when the continued relationship is important, information needs are high, change is desired or occurring, the issues are emotionally laden, or social and cultural differences are great.

An Orientation Toward Collaborative Problem Solving

Most organizations have lots of meetings. Most probably have too many. One of the fears of organizational members as more participative approaches are suggested is that the number of meetings will increase. This need not be the case. In fact, a reduction in the time in meetings is possible.

Most meetings are filled with discussion but not dialogue. Two key characteristics separate discussions from dialogues. First, discussions tend to focus on the airing and advocacy of known positions rather than the exploration of unknown ones. Second, discussions often focus on saying rather than doing. At best they may end with a vote, but often the

TABLE 5.4 Comparison of Adversarial and Collaborative Communication

Adversarial	*Collaborative*
Members are adversaries.	Members are joint problem solvers.
Speaking comes from a position or preferred means of accomplishment.	Speaking comes from an outcome wishing to be accomplished.
Discussion becomes polarized around positions.	Dialogue focuses on complex underlying interests.
Discussion narrows options.	Dialogue broadens field of options.
Facts are used to support positions.	Joint search is used to discover the facts.
Seeks winning arguments.	Seeks workable options.
Problems defined before meeting.	Problems mutually defined in meetings.
Final responsibility for the decision rests on others.	Final responsibility for the decision rests with the group.

SOURCE: Based on Gray (1991, p. 50).

discussion ends with simply the need for more discussion. Dialogue focuses on the reaching of a common understanding and mutual commitment to a decision.

From the standpoint of practice, various forms of collaborative decision making provide the context for dialogue. Collaboration requires a different attitude going into meetings and a different form of interaction in meetings. These differences are well characterized in the differences between adversarial and collaborative communication summarized in Table 5.4.

Exercise 5.6

- Describe a recent conflict situation in an organization with which you are familiar. Identify instances of both adversarial and collaborative communication.
- Think of a situation where two individuals appeared to be fighting over the same resource. Identify why they wanted that resource, or the "end" for which this resource was a "means." Can you identify ways both could simultaneously achieve their ends without using that resource?

Review Questions

- Why have more companies turned to increased employee participation in decision making?
- What are the differences between governance based on hierarchical control and governance based on participation?
- When is employee participation in decision making especially important?
- Why might a company chose to involve external stakeholders in decision making?
- What are the differences between a mechanistic and an organic conception of empowerment?
- Why might greater employee empowerment be of value?
- How might organizational members participate in visioning and change processes?
- Why would immediacy, concreteness, ownership, and acknowledgment contribute to more productive discussions?
- What are the major differences between adversarial and collaborative approaches to discussion and problem solving?

Discussion Questions

- What have been your experiences with participation and empowerment programs? When have they succeeded and failed? What might you do about the cynicism that frequently comes with these programs?
- Do you feel people can significantly change interpersonal skills and their basic orientations to interaction with others? Under what circumstances are such changes more likely?

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Suggested Case Study

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