

Framing Culturally Sustainable Organizations

A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

A common criticism of human resource management research is the lack of a shared conceptual definition of organizational culture. In spite of a historical variation in its definition, organizational culture is increasingly defined as refer to as a frame or a set of psychological commonalities shared by a group that that prescribes behavior. Granting that individuals have shared experiences with members of several groups, they share, to different degrees, the cultural characteristics in each of several groups. Thus, we are all multicultural to the extent that we belong in various cultural groups within organizations.

This empirical research explores the differences between organizational culture dimensions and the individual values of employees in different kinds of organizations. Main research question is about the significant gaps between their ideal and actual values of all sampled employees regardless of cultural differences of their organizations. Two surveys are conducted for about 150 employees in three organizations: A questionnaire on organizational culture and another questionnaire for employee attitudes which are both based on Schwartz's universal dimensions. My anticipation is that the ideal levels of individual values will be higher than actual levels due to high level of "social desirability". Meanwhile, the cultural differences between different kinds of organizations (e.g., multinational versus local organizations) will be highlighted.

Overall, societal and organizational culture as well as our values is changing with then impact of both increasing globalization and development of the information and communication technology. Because of the increasing fragmentation, interdependence of social life, and increasing generation gap often the advice that parents should treat their children as belonging to another culture does not sound strange to us any more. The same is valid for authority relationship among managers and employees. Often intracultural conflicts are also intercultural conflicts within and among organizations. A deep-rooted conflict can be transformed in a way that both parties may perceive as fairly affirmative, only if approached with an intercultural eye regardless of the organizational culture, conflict management style or the gaps in ideal and actual values. Further, diversity management demands probing into differences of in priorities at workplace.

After analyzing the empirical findings of both cultural and attitude differences at different levels of analysis (e.g., organizational and individual), I aim at going beyond the quantitative results and question the search for universals in such an empirical study. The links between knowledge management and conflict management along with the gaps between corporate cultures and personal values as studied, by scholars like Barbara Gray and Mikhail Bakhtin and Chris Argyris whose concept of "double-loop learning" and "framing" are

similar to learning to learn. The ability to change deeply the rooted habits of perception and evaluation require creativity and sensitivity to the context and meaning demands a social constructionist approach paving the way for “mindfulness”, i.e., a willingness to create new categories, an openness to new information and an awareness that more than one perspective exists.

Both Edward T. Hall’s definition of high and low context cultures and Clifford Geertz’ distinction between thin and thick description, one might talk about two schools of thought about active learning: The first one is based upon “empathy”, and the second requires going beyond empathy towards “exotopy” (Bakhtin). Empathy is sufficient when you are in a position similar to that of a person who is in control of the situation; whereas, exotopy is adequate when you are part of a conflict, you are offended and ready for a fight or flight reaction and still you displace yourself in order to be able to displace the mediator. Such a double displacement is aimed at creating a situation of reciprocal recognition and a context for a meta- communication.

The attitude to adopt as an active listener is the direct opposite of what is conventionally expected on the part of a good observer or the third party: impassive, neutral, unmindful. In intercultural communication to get things into perspective, we need to learn something that pushes us out of our “comfort zones of certainties” or “comfort zones of convenience” and enables us to view things in a way not previously foreseen. The convenient gratification of labeling others is replaced by an acceptance of vulnerability, together being someone who changes with others instead of opposing them.

On the whole, an intercultural dialogue is not primarily concerned with behavioral patterns, but with perceptive and evaluative habits. While mainstream socialization promotes an attitude that equates “context blindness” with the engine of future growth as a consequence of which criteria of “objectivity-neutrality” and a search for “universality”, analyzing unique contexts, patterns and subjective cultural differences pave the way for multiple readings of facts and behaviors with more focus on the past and/ or present. However one does not have to replace the mainstream thought, which is perfectly adequate when the context is not complicated and the implicit premises can be taken for granted. Instead, one may enhance it with a more thorough framework of reference. That is why, I start with a quantitative inquiry and then based on the findings, contextualizing and framing of specific intercultural issues at workplace might be possible either with hindsight or with foresight.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Values, Framing, Conflict Management, Learning.