

Culture and the Level of Contentment

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SPCH 2311

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08 December 2016

Introduction

Cultures vary widely when looking on a macro level, for instance when looking at an eastern culture they are extremely collectivistic while western culture is much more individualistic. However, we can see differences in culture both within and without of a company. I find myself frequently marveling at all the different cultures and norms that a single company can have within itself, and trying to understand how these cultures come together in one cohesive entity that is a successful business. But what exactly do I mean by a “successful business” because it can have many different definitions it could mean that the business is profitable or it could mean the level of happiness of a customer and employees. To me, a successful business is a bit of both, because “happy moods lead workers to perform better” (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008, p. 104), and when the work is done to a higher standard this can lead to a happier customer which will bring in more profit for a company. So trying to understand the culture of a company is a rather interesting topic to study for me.

The purpose of the case study, is to look at how the culture of a company that has been open for almost one hundred (100) years impacts the people involved with the company. I believe that by getting a deeper understanding of the culture of a company it can help us appreciate the foundations that keep it running. To do this I will be applying the theory, Cultural Approach to Organization (CAO). CAO takes a look at the different cultures that can take place in an organization. While looking at CAO I looked over several different concepts related that I believe applies to this case, however, I will be focusing on rituals and personal stories. A ritual is a tradition that could cause some backlash if stopped or changed, personal stories are stories that put the speaker in a good light. For example, one ritual is the annual golf tournament in Hot

Springs Village, everybody in the company is invited to this event, this ritual. At the golf tournament there is usually a couple of hundred attendants that participate, whether it is to golf, drive the...beverage cart, go to the lakes or go shopping a lot of people go. At this event there are different stories that are being told and hashed out, like when Ms. C was speaking with us after one too many beverages and she was telling us about her life just before we pulled her out of the pool or when John is golfing with different vendors trying to secure some business deals.

Throughout this study I have done quite a bit of research outside of my interviews and observations. One article I looked at, *Does Happiness Promote Career Success?* published in 2008 was done by two (2) professors at the University of California Riverside, Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky and Dr. Julia Boehm. This article takes a look at how levels of happiness are correlated to levels of success in the workplace. They say that people that are happier in the workplace generally make more money and are more successful than their less happy counterparts (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008).

I also looked into an article that I had seen referenced in a number of other articles that I read relating to a different course. Titled *Why Your Friends Have More Friends than You Do*, written by Purdue University professor Scot L. Feld, this article takes a look at something called the friendship paradox; which states that on average if we compare ourselves to our friends then we may feel lacking because it seems they have more friends than we do (Feld, 1991). However, if we think about the potential that these friends of friends have on increasing our interpersonal linkage power and our network in general then we can see just how beneficial it is for this occurrence to happen.

A First Look at Communication Theory by Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks is an extremely popular text book used across the United States, because the authors “present 32 communication theories in a clear and interesting way” that can be put to use for first time communication theory researchers (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p. X). For this case study I have pulled heavily from this text because this is where the theory and concepts can be found rather accessibly. Even though this is a text book and it is a secondary source of information, the way that the authors interpret the different theories is really beneficial to people attempting the understand a bit about communication theories.

The last outside source that I used for this study was in a periodical published by the SHRM Foundation (Society of Human Resources Management Foundation). SHRM is a group that helps HR professionals build their network of people as well as give opportunities to gain more knowledge from different events and newsletters. This article, titled *Shaping an Ethical Workplace Culture* takes a look at how culture in the workplace influences the contentment and ethicality of employee within a company.

Methods

I have decided to do my case study from an ethnographic approach. I chose this approach because I have known most of upper management for most of my life, so I have a bit of reference as to how management structure flows with each other. I may also use a bit of a historical approach, because I am interested in how a company that has lasted for almost one hundred (100) years and has bought out several companies has remained a family company while its sociological structure has changed. This study is about Crow-Burlingame Company (CBCO)

which opened its doors in 1919 the area that I will be focusing on is how the culture of this company impacts the employees and customers of the company.

To conduct my research, I have done two (2) interviews, one with the Director of Management Information Systems (MIS), Jane, as well as one (1) of the owners of the company, John; both of these individuals have been with the company for more than thirty-five (35) years. Both of the interviews were conducted by me, and both parties have been informed of this study and their role in it. I have also been observing how the culture within CBCO impact the level of contentment with involved parties. Before conducting my observations I informed my co-workers about this case study and that I would be using some of what I saw in it, after doing so I was asked to keep some people's names confidential so all names within this case are pseudonyms.

Before I conducted my interviews, I gave all involved parties a copy of an informed consent form which can be found in the appendix page one (1). In the informed consent form, it laid out what the interview was about and how I would be using the information gained from it in my case study. While conducting the interview, I was recording the procedure and taking notes to make sure that I got everything. I found that during the interview there would be times when we would veer off from the actual bases of the case study and went into different things but I found that by doing that, I got an answer to the questions that I was asking but with a story to help benefit it.

In the process of this study I have listened to the recordings multiple times so that I can be sure that I have gotten all of the information possible for when I transcribed parts of the interviews. Transcribing the recordings took longer than I expected, I would have to pause and

rewind multiple times to make sure that I got each statement written correctly; this is especially important because I have used direct quotes from the interviews in my paper.

While doing this case, I have seen several instances where the different cultures, whether it is different generations or after an acquisition, have clashed with each other. For instances when speaking with John he said that after we buy out a company or a buy a new store that “the old guys in the stores pretty much give up and by the time we get in there they are just winding down” (Doe, 2016). However, when I look at this store, I might see someone who just needs a bit of motivation not someone who is ready to quit. These differences could be chalked up to generational differences or we could say that since the acquisition the employees truly have given up. By looking at my notes and transcript I can see several different ways to tie back what I have learned with what I understand of CAO.

Results

Rituals

If we take a look at CAO there are several concepts in there that can be tied back to the culture of a company, however, for this case study I found it most useful to look at two (2) of them. The first (1st) of the two (2) that I will cover is ritual. A ritual in a company is like a tradition that if it is taken away can have some negative impact on the business, like the annual golf tournament that I mentioned earlier. Rituals like this are an integral part of what helps the company stay stable and running with content employees, at least for a little while. When a company goes through a merger and/or an acquisition it is important that some of the rituals from all companies are still done. This is because rituals “celebrate and punctuate meaningful

moments in the life of an organization and its members, thereby creating a sense of community” (SHRM Foundation, 2016, p. 20). The golf tournament for instances has been going on in Parts Warehouse, Inc. (PWI) for thirty-five (35) years but when PWI and CBCO came under the same holding company, Replacement Parts, Inc. (RPI), both companies began to participate in it. This golf tournament has been an integral part of helping with employee moral as well as a good chance to network with different vendors and other customers. By keeping this ritual within the culture of these two (2) companies, it shows that though some situations demand a change in culture to meet the needs of the employees, the need to change is not an absolute thing when companies change and grow.

Personal Stories

Another aspect of culture that is important is the need for stories. Personal stories are stories that help to put the person in a “good light” (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p. 249)Ms. C, at this past golf tournament was attempting to put herself in a “good light” with the people at my table when she was telling us about her life as well as how her business was doing, the beverages she had consumed did not help her case much though. Looking at personal stories that are told within an organization we can see that this is an attempt to strengthen that person’s interpersonal linkage power (i.e. their social network). This network of people is important to consider when looking at a company’s culture, because if we can see who that person surround themselves with we can more easily assume what kind of things that attract them. Additionally, within a company who you know is extremely important because then you can use their connections to form new connections because on average your friends have more friends than you (Feld, 1991, p. 1468).

Discussion

During the course of this study I have learned how culture can help shape the lives of the employees and customers involved with CBCO. By taking a look at CAO (Cultural Approach to Organization) we can see that rituals and stories play a large role in the level of contentment shown by involved parties. I have found that there is a direct correlation between the culture of a company and how happy the employees and customers are.

Remembering that CAO takes a look at the different cultures within a company/organization, we can look its different concepts and apply them to our own research. Rituals or traditions within the company can be carried over even after a coming together, like with the golf tournament being picked up by CBCO after it and PWI came under the same holding company. Personal stories are stories that try to put the person telling them in a good light to help and boost their network. My results show that by maintaining a steady culture that has rituals and allows for different stories to be told promotes for a successful business. As I mentioned in the introduction a successful business to me is one (1) that is both profitable as well as one (1) that has an environment and culture that allow for happy employees and customers. As I have discussed, when employees are in a better mood their work performance is higher than if their moods were not happy. When the employees are performing to a higher level this allows for a better quality of product and/or service that is provided to the customer, which in turns makes them happy and hopefully a return customer helping to establish a long lasting income.

Recommendations

CBCO is doing a lot of good things when looking at its communication. Their willingness to adjust to differing cultures is apparent to anybody that is willing to look. After CBCO and PWI came under the same holding company, there was a large amount of head butting that went on, however, both companies stuck it out and worked through their issues in differing cultures allowing for both businesses to remain open and profitable. After a company is brought together with another one there are going to be issues that just a fact, but the CBCO management team has made a very strong effort to allow for these different shifts to occur with minimal effort when possible.

However, while doing my observations, I did notice a few things that I think could be improved on. To me, it seemed like in some situations where things are more freely accepted in my generation the older generation of the company is more conservative in their thinking. I believe that if in these situations the older generation would step back and think about things from a different perspective then these differences in culture could be more palatable to them. If a step is not taken back every once in a while then this could lead to some conflict between the generations which has the potential to escalate into a larger problem.

Overall, the communication between the different generations as well as the different companies that have come together is pretty solid. It can be seen easily that this is a family company and the usage of different communications tactics displays an interesting relationship between the employee and customer. In most situations that I have observed or have been a part of, these differing communication tactics are part of what helps make this company operate as at its current level.

Limitations

While conducting this case study I was faced with a couple of limitations, the first of which being that I only interviewed two (2) people. Since I only interviewed these two (2) people who are of an older generation, I only got their perspective on things instead of having someone else from a younger generation other than myself. This could have limited what information I was told since John and Jane may have seen it as not relevant to this study. I chose these two (2) because both of them have been with the company for more than thirty-five (35) years so I assumed they would give me the answer that I needed for this study, I did not consider that they could be omitting information that I was going for but thought it was not relevant. Additionally these two (2) people signed on with CBCO and not PWI or RPI so I did not get a sense of how the PWI people felt after the two (2) companies came under the same holding company. Additionally, this is the only company that I have worked for and I have known this company pretty much since I was born so I may be biased to see only what I want to see and not mention the not so hot stuff.

Another limitation is that I did not look at any other companies for this study I mainly focused on the culture of CBCO and how the culture impacts the involved parties. This limited my data pool that I looked at which to me kind of makes it seem less reliable because of this. For future research I will be sure to extend my searching to outside of just one (1) company, perhaps I will even spread it to multinational companies. While I was speaking with John he gave me another idea for future research which is to look at how the vendors and customers interact with a company that has been around as long as CBCO. I think that by looking at these two (2) ideas then I will be able to form a stronger case to help show the relationship between

culture within a company that has been open for almost one hundred (100) years and the levels of contentment.

Understanding how culture can impact a company can influence how the company interacts with their employees and customers. If we apply this knowledge of culture and how it effects the level of contentment, the company can adjust their communication styles to better suit the needs of these people. Understanding culture is important in all settings because not only do cultures change from hemisphere to hemisphere they can also change from company to company and even department to department. Though some differences are subtle, these subtiles can be a deciding factor in whether a company will remain successful.

Bibliography

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Appendix

Consent to Participate in Study of Crow-Burlingame Company

This consent form applies to _____

The following information is provided to inform you about the research about Crow-Burlingame Company and how the culture of this company impacts the level of contentment of the people involved with the company. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and have your questions answered. In addition, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

- 1. Purpose of the study.** This study is being conducted by Zachary Jones of the Department of Applied Communication at the University of Arkansas-Little Rock in order to better understand Crow-Burlingame Company. This research will hopefully help the aforementioned company understand the sociological changes that take place within a company that has been around for almost a century. Your responses in the interview are confidential and only available to Zachary Jones and his instructor, Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter.
- 2. Description of the procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study.** Participants in the research will participate in one-on-one interviews, which will focus on Crow-Burlingame Company. This interview process for each person(s) will last approximately a half-hour to an hour of your time. The interview will be audiotaped, with your permission, to assist in note-taking.
- 3. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study.** There is no anticipated risk for participating in this study, except for the time it will take for you to do the interview.
- 4. Description of how confidentiality will be assured and the limits to these assurances, if any.** Confidentiality will be assumed throughout the interview process. All audio tapes will be deleted from the recording device immediately following the transcribing of the recording. All files will be kept on a password-protected drive. Only myself, Zachary Jones, and my supervising instructor, Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter, will have access to the files. If I quote anything from the interview, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) in referencing you, in order to maintain your anonymity.
- 5. Anticipated benefits resulting from this study.**
 - A. The potential benefits to you from participating in the study will be the provision of information about how the culture of Crow-Burlingame Company impacts the level of contentment of employees and customers. This study may be helpful to increase employee/employer relationships thus gaining the appreciation of the involved parties.

B. The potential benefits to science and humanity that may result from this study are to understand more about the impact that the culture of a company has on the levels of contentment within and outside of the company. Additionally, it will show how the different communicative practices have evolved to help the company prosper as it has.

6. Alternative procedures. There are no alternative procedures to participation in the interview.

7. Contact information. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact the person(s) below:

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8. Your rights as a volunteer. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time with no penalty to you. Your responses will be confidential. If the results of this study were to be written for publication, no identifying information will be used.

STATEMENT BY PERSON/PARENT AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT

Please check both boxes, sign, and write in today’s date.

I have read this consent form, and all of my questions have been answered. I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in the research interview, and it has been explained that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

The information contained in this consent form has been adequately explained to me. All my questions have been answered and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate. It has been explained to me that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

_____ Date

_____ Signature

Consent obtained by (signature): _____

Print your name: _____