

Culture and Contentment on the Golf Course

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Introduction

The flavor explodes in my mouth as the scents invade my nose and intoxicating me with their delicious smells. The roast beef and steamed broccoli and cauliflower battle for dominance for the most tantalizing flavor in my mouth. However, the fresh roasted acorn squash soup slides decadently down my throat to coerce my inners into a warm mush. The Annual Golf tournament is off to a divine start with the serving of the first meal before we hit the course tomorrow morning in a ritual that has been going on for nearly thirty-six years. For this paper I wanted to look at this ritual within an organization that I work for because of the sense of community that it brings to the organization.

The purpose of this paper is to look at how culture within an organization can impact levels of contentment, morale, and job satisfaction with the employees. While doing research on this topic I came across an article written by the Society of Human Resource Management that said that rituals build a sense of community with the employee base (SHRM Foundation, 2016, p. 20), and this sense of community can help to boost levels of contentment within the organization. I hypothesize that culture has a direct influence on employee contentment, morale, and job satisfaction within an organization. In this paper I will strive to show this relationship by first presenting a case, then I want to take a look at a theory that will then use to analysis my case, after I analysis my case with my theory I will then give two recommendations for improvement within the organization that may be of benefit to it. Now that you can see how this paper will go I want to get started with my case.

Case

Pow. We have been hit again, this is the third time and the hits keep coming. Another golf ball slams into the top of our golf cart without any warning, I turn around to see Mr. B looking anywhere but at me with an innocent expression on his face and hoping that I glare at someone else. Just because I have known him all of my life does not mean that I will let him off for nailing my cart, again. I turn back around and ignore his request for a beverage and go on to another hole where hopefully it is safer for the cart and its cargo, namely me. As I am driving off the scent of the freshly cut grass slams into my face with renewed vigor that makes my nose twitch from the smell of it. Not a cloud can be found in the blue sky of the sweltering July day and I grab a towel to wipe my face for the nth time that day. The PWI Golf Tournament has been going on for thirty-six years this year and needless to say that this longstanding ritual is on everyone's calendar months in advance just like the annual accounting trip to the casino (the irony of this is not lost on me).

PWI is an organization under the umbrella of RPI (which is just a holding company) and RPI is an aftermarket auto parts dealer that sells to the individuals and to the large dealerships. RPI includes three companies, CBCO (or BTB), PWI, and CDP (they all have names but I will just be using the acronyms) and each one has a different function CBCO is the stores, PWI is the warehouses, and CDP sell to stores and directly to dealerships. I have worked for CBCO as a delivery driver and counterman as well as at RPI in the accounting department as a file clerk, but my relationship with this organization started long before I went to work there. My mother has worked there for thirty-five years this year so I have been around all of upper management for my whole life and that is why I chose to look at the golf tournament and how this yearly thing impacts contentment within the organization. Now, I have used contentment multiple times already and you may be wondering just what it is, well Dr. Jordan McKenzie a lecturer at the

University of New England defines it as “an understanding of social circumstance that permits individuals to grasp the context of their emotional experiences, and to find fulfillment in that relationship” (McKenzie, 2016, p. 253). Now that I have defined contentment I want to move on to my theory section so that later on we can analyze my case with it.

Theory

For this paper I have decided to use Cultural Approach to Organization (CAO). CAO is a theory that was first developed by Michael Pacanowsky applying the methodology that Clifford Geertz came up with in his studies as an anthropologist going over culture with an ethnographic view. CAO looks at an organization’s culture or “webs” (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p. 245) by breaking down the different rituals and metaphors, and stories (corporate, personal, and collegial). I will be using rituals and stories to analyze my case later on.

Rituals

In a lecture on culture in Organization Communication, Dr. Gerald Driskill (Spring 2017) defines rituals as, “Formal and informal events that are carried out through social interaction with explicit and implicit purpose that carry multiple social consequences” (Driskill). Rituals within an organizations can have a large impact on how the employees perform, because they can act as a boost for morale with the employees; which can produce better results for the customer and incoming revenue base. An example of rituals would be the annual warehouse inventory (WI), this event has been going on for well over sixty years and it is most definitely a ritual. WI is where all of the employees of each warehouse, all of the store managers from the state, and even some of our vendors come and do inventory on the selected warehouse. This

allows for different sets of eyes to do inventory instead of the people who stare at it every day and it also allows for the “volunteers” to see what it is like in the warehouse.

Stories

There are three types of stories, and they are not the bedtime stories that we were told as kids or that we tell our kids, these stories are the things that help to get information spread. Each of these three stories server a different function, professional stories are defined by Dr. Driskill in the video lecture as, stories about “management, ideology and policies.” Personal stories from the same lecture are defined as the way “individuals would like to be seen,” and the third is collegial stories and these are “positive or negative anecdotes about others” that are “unsanctioned by management” (Driskill). Within one of the places that I have volunteered at I have seen firsthand how these stories can impact the culture of the organization. If Susie tells me (a new volunteer) a professional story it will show me the culture of the organization which might make it feel more welcoming. When John is telling me about the time he raised ten percent of the organization’s total net worth at a single fundraiser that would be a personal story; because he is trying to put himself in a better light and increase his face with me and the other volunteers. The time that I overheard Jackson and Jennifer talking about their supervisor Ms. S would be a collegial story because that story may have been negative and unsanctioned by management. For this case however I will mainly be using personal stories and now that I have gone over my chosen theory I want to apply it to my case to break it down in the next section.

Analysis

In this section of the paper I will be making two claims; the first is that rituals can have an impact on the levels of contentment within an organization, and the other will look at how

personal stories impact contentment and your network. First up is rituals and contentment, if you will recall I earlier defined contentment as “an understanding of social circumstance that permits individuals to grasp the context of their emotional experiences, and to find fulfilment in that relationship” (McKenzie, 2016, p. 253). A study done in 2008 shows that “happy employees have more engaging and autonomous jobs... and they show superior performance in the workplace than less happy employees” (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008, p. 105). When we are looking at an organization, we can see that there is a correlation in “increased customer service, productivity and sales” when we look at employees that have a higher job satisfaction level (Entrepreneur, 2014). Increased sales are good for the business regardless of field or industry because that means more revenue. We can tie in contentment to rituals because of an article released by the Society of Human Resources Management that says rituals help to create a sense of community and connection in the workplace (SHRM Foundation, 2016, p. 20).

Now then, looking at my case of the golf tournament there is this sense of community with the participants. At the golf tournament, you get to meet new people and grow your network of individuals that you know; I met someone that turned out to be business owner of one of the largest engineering firms in the States. It is apparent that if it were stopped, then there would be a considerable backlash towards the organization because this is one of the few long lasting rituals that everyone is invited to which helps to boost the morale of the employees. An example of a ritual that goes on within the ritual of the golf tournament would be Mr. DC. Mr. DC is an older gentleman and one of the employees of RPI and every year he somehow winds up on the team with the highest score. Now if you are unfamiliar with golf, the team with the highest score is the losing team, and Mr. DC seems to stay on that team. At the end of the tournament there is an award banquet and one of the “awards” given is the title of “Dead Ass

Last” and it is really just a joke that everyone can be in on. Mr. DC, since first getting this moniker, uses it as part of his email signature for internal emails for several months after the tournament and it is just a good way to lighten then mood of the employees.

My Second claim is that personal stories can impact levels of contentment as well as your network as much as rituals can within an organization. While at the golf tournament I got to meet up with a lot of long distance friends and we could frequently be found sitting outside around a large table and just shooting the breeze. At my table there was variety of people from upper management, vendors, former co-workers, store managers, and customers and we are all on relatively good terms with everybody at the table. While we are talking one of our independent store managers comes up to our table to talk about her son’s soccer tournament that he was in, she would also mention how tight her schedule was but that she was still managing to get her job done and stay up with her son’s tournament. This would be a personal story, because she (Ms. C) was attempting to put herself in a better light with a group of people that she may not have been familiar with. That would have worked great if Ms. C had not had a few too many beverages and started to bash some of the people there; it could have ruined her chances at building up her reputation but the impact was lessened considerably by us having to pull her out of the pool that she fell into after walking away from our table. Ms. C was able to leave a lasting impression on everyone at the table and we eventually became Facebook friends.

We can assume that Ms. C was trying to expand her network so that she would be able to have more interpersonal linkage power which is a power currency (Poole, Folger, & Stutman, 2013, p. 168). Building this stronger network of people that she can connect with will allow for her to expand her knowledge base as well as her range of influence within the various organizations that she told a personal story to. There is something called the “friendship

paradox,” it was developed by a professor at Perdue University and it states that 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), now that can be a bit confusing because you are friends with the same person so that would mean that you have more friends than them but I suppose that is why it is called a paradox. By having more friends or acquaintances in your network this will allow for you to have more sway within some of the groups that you are in because you will be able to have more backing. In my experience a person with stronger backings generally have a higher level of job security which may correlate to job satisfaction, which again helps with the bottom line. In this section I used to concepts from Cultural Approach to Organizations (CAO) to look at my case with two different concepts, rituals and stories, now I want to move into my implications and give two recommendations for improvement within the organization.

Implications

By getting a deeper understanding of the rituals of my organization I was able to see the connection between contentment and rituals. Without these rituals in place, the morale of the organization would be considerably lower than what it is now with them in place. When the morale of the organization is low, there will be a higher turnover rates and lower job satisfaction overall, which can lead to a lower grade of work. A lower grade of work can lead to a lower customer satisfaction rate which is not good for the bottom line (a slippery slope fallacy but still an important point to consider). However, with these rituals in place, it can help and prevent a drop in morale and you can keep a decently high level of customer satisfaction. My first recommendation for this organization is to maintain the current rituals that are in place to allow for a continued level of contentment. If the golf tournament were to be stopped after so many years it would be sorely missed and that could cause a drop in morale with the employees

because it is one of the things that employees look forward to every year as a pick me up. Since I have known most of the upper management for most of my life if I were to catch wind of them thinking of stopping the tournament or any other ritual; then I would set a meeting to talk with them individually to see why they think it will help the organization to stop it. My stepping in may not do anything other than just get them to see things from the employee stand point but by me be more proactive with this kind of thing it might be able to impact their thinking enough to reconsider.

My second recommendation would be to allow for more opportunities to tell personal stories not just during rituals but also in the day to day life of an employee. By allowing for more personal stories this will let the employee show management, co-workers, vendors, and customers that they are doing their best and putting them in a better light. For myself I would recommend to be more available to hear these personal stories that put the teller in a good light and relay them to the appropriate party so that recognition can be given. If I were to start passing on the personal stories that were effective in putting the teller in a good light then I would be able to increase their contentment and possibly their desire to stay with the organization, which will also be good for the bottom line. Those were my recommendations for both the organization and myself I now want to bring it to a close.

Conclusion

In this paper I discussed how culture within an organization can impact levels of contentment, job satisfaction, and morale. I did that by going over a case, then I looked at a theory (CAO) and used it to analyze my case by looking at a ritual and stories that happen within the golf tournament. Finally I gave two recommendations for both the organization and myself to keep up or improve levels of contentment within the organization. Through my research on

this topic I have found many things to be apparent such as, rituals play a direct role in contentment within an organization and that stories can impact these rituals to a certain degree.

To me it is important to realize that culture does not just vary between countries but they can also vary between organizations and even within the same organization. These difference are not always apparent or a bad thing but they do impact the feelings of contentment that go on within the country, organization and within the department.

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