

People and Organizations

Deciphering and Using
Organizational Culture

Organizational Culture: Basics

- A Working Definition: “The way we do things around here”
- Or, in a word: “Tradition”
- Cultures are:
 - Passed on generation to generation, usually by stories and word of mouth
 - Sometimes unstated—have to be learned by immersion (anthropologists, ethnographers)

Layers of Culture

- ***Artifacts***
 - Observable features of a setting—things you can feel, see, smell, touch, hear, etc.
 - Symbols
 - Surface clues but often multiple meanings
- ***Values***
 - Deeply held norms, ideologies—traditions
- ***Assumptions***—taken for granted factors that shape behavior

MIT Artifacts & Their Meaning

Using Culture in Organizations

- Beware--The Iron Law of Change
 - Failure to understand the culture means you will get burned by it if you try to change things
- Using Culture to Achieve Change
 - How can I use the culture to achieve change?
 - The Case of MIT Women in Science
 - Interning at Harley Davidson

Counter-Cultural Change

- “Outsider on the Inside” (aka, an intern)
 - Breaking the “rules” and pretending not to know any better
 - Using temporary status—not going to be here anyway so who cares?
- In on-going relationships
 - Be Explicit about it
 - Takes a long time—cross generations
 - Often requires changing people
 - The “greenfield” site strategy

Making Change Happen at MIT

- If Susan Hockfield came to you and said...

“Our tolerance for student hacks on the Dome has to end. Our lawyers tell us the risks are just too high and these pranks obviously take time away from students’ academic work.”

- a. How would you convey to her what hacking means to MIT?
- b. How would you convey the significance of the Dome to hacking?
- c. Assume she is determined to proceed. What should she do to make this change happen?

Summing Up

- Analyze the Culture—get to know it
- Test interpretations—find an insider
- Test ideas—know if your ideas will bump up against cultural values, assumptions
- Develop change strategies that use the culture
- Consider if changing/challenging the culture is
 - Necessary to the success of your idea
 - Possible
 - Worth the risks
 - And keep your resume up to date!

Schedule Notes

- Wed class:
 - Meet here—20 minutes for teams to work together on:
 - Group project
 - Scheduling team meeting to prepare Lincoln Electric Case
 - 4 p.m. Go to Kirsch Auditorium for MIT Symposium on “Big Questions after the Hurricanes: How can Cities, Communities, and Regions Recover?”
- Following Wednesday (10/12) Deliverables:
 - Team Project proposal
 - Team Presentation on Lincoln Electric Case