Organizational Learning:
The Exploration of Work Culture

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INTRODUCTION

It is the year 2016, society has integrated the ability to connect with people around the world in formal and informal means. There is Snapchat to gain a visual glimpse, virtual meetings for discussions, Facebook to maintain friendships, LinkedIn to build professional networks. We can google an event or idea to find people of like minds. Are we becoming a society with common values and thoughts? Are we one culture? No, one could advocate that we are as unique in our many cultural groups today as centuries ago. Interestingly, it could be said that we create our own bubbles or silos by excluding others based on our experiences, memberships, groups, and contact lists. One forecast of our future is "the concurrence of postmodernism and digital media may, ironically, hold out the potential for a second age of Enlightenment (Gardner, p. 196)." In this global era, international organizations develop their organizational culture to cut across various nations. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that "cultural differences are especially exacerbated when accompanied by extreme religious and ideological viewpoints (Gannon & Pillai, 2016, p. 22)." As an overwhelming amount of information is available, extreme views have a clear voice for communication networks to grow. Based on definitions of culture being shared values and experiences, people developed a shared culture through work, referred to as, work culture (Anderson, 1964). For leaders, the question is since our reach has broadened how have we expanded our understanding of workers and their work culture? How can organizational culture learn from within? This essay poses more questions than recommendations seeking to open minds to a deeper level of appreciation for the culture of a group of workers, work culture.

BACKGROUND

The climate of the political landscape for the 2016 American presidential campaign illustrates how differences divide. As of March 2016, the Democratic leaders head to head are Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders facing a group of Republicans with an unexpected lead from Donald Trump and hopeful to close the nominations Ted Cruz. There are four very diverse individuals having various communication styles, philosophies, ethnicities, socioeconomic histories, and educational experiences. Each candidate has a mix of supporters both culturally and multi-generational. When referring to culture, a common thought is placed on beliefs, traditions, foods, and language. Yet, this political campaign highlights how groups of people closely identify with a certain ideology and culture. As the 2016 political campaign is spotlighted in social media, the different sides clash in various spaces, Twitter is a hot bed of opinions, claims, and insults. How might politics influence cultures? Just consider the range of cultures that influence our values and perspectives, how might these cultures impact our behavior? What unconscious assumptions might influence our conversations and decisions?

Conversations and decisions are making impacts across the globe. Meta-analysis research has discovered that global conversations through social media supported protestors to step out to the streets for democracy across the Arab Spring, covering Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Algeria, just to name a few (Seeberg, 2013, Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Maziad, 2001). Monarchies and religious oligarchies profoundly influence followers and direct ideology. Although these ideologies may influence how people think and behave, history has documented time and time again that the working class rise up against the establishment. "Imposing cultural values and political structures, history teaches us, can lead to centuries of repeated conflicts (Casmir, 1995, p. 319)." Take into consideration that these thoughts and experiences are packaged in our mind as mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1983). When people with shared mental models band together, how might this unity affect their decisions?

Focus on the Working Class

Within the last two generations (roughly 50 years), there have been major political shifts from dictatorships and communist regimes to democracy. Open source learning, social media, and black market information play a role as "…the process of global encounters cause us to rethink both national and local identities and cultures (Phillips & Reyes, 2011, p. 8)." There are several reasons to focus on the largest employment group, the working class, and to understand how their shared mental models impact the organizational culture through their work culture. Analysis of occupational changes within Europe due to technology and immigration suggests a "greater capacity to substitute for mid-range jobs in clerical work and industrial production than for low-end personal services (Oesch, 2013, p. 148)." Over the past fifty years, the main workforce was manufacturing relying on a low to middle-skilled labor force. With the information age and outsourcing of production, expectations for highly skilled workers has been the demand within the United States and Europe (Oesch, 2013, Polavieja, 2013). Additionally, research has found that diversity in the workforce adds to innovation (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Moreover, global corporation could be thought of as groupings of multiple work cultures. Hence, the mid-range jobs or working class continue to have a vital role in the workforce. What happens when the majority of the workforce is not highly skilled, but unified within work cultures?

From a different perspective, Duncan Gallie (2013) accounts the European Union being under much scrutiny, as countries seek to stabilize after the economic crisis. There is a dualistic pattern of bargaining groups and collective institutional norms throughout European countries. During the crisis, a service area cut was staff training and few opportunities for development. "Liberal institutional contexts would operate with a common logic that gave priority to the protection of managerial prerogative, tight control over work performance, and a reliance on a relatively low-skilled and insecure labour (Gallie, 2013, p. 304)." Should leaders place more awareness on the working class during these political and economic changes? If the greatest number of employees within an organization use their collective voice, consider their impact to the organizational culture. Ignoring culture can affect an organization's bottom-line (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). Therefore, it is important for leaders to explore the work culture within an organization. Consider the following vignettes and how those experiences influence the shared mental models of the workforce. Specifically, imagine the work cultures that developed.

Often the bottom line for business success is defined through growth and financial profits. Even in the information age, workers are necessary to generate growth and profit. Therefore, leaders must develop connections to respectfully comprehend their workforce and their work culture. As a means of examining their workforce, leader may turn internally to learn about the framework of their organization through organizational change models.

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