

Chapter 12

Understanding Organizational Culture and Group Dynamics: Reframing the Normative Orientation of the Role of Information Professionals within Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The field of library and information science will benefit from a greater understanding of the function of individuals in relation to organizational culture and group dynamics, including how individual experiences underlie the culture of an organization. Understanding how these factors can shape successful human resources management will help today's information science and management organizations in their recruitment, development, and retention efforts. It is suggested here that, while MLIS curricula and library organizations have traditionally focused on leadership as a function of management, a reorientation towards development of leadership skills at all levels of the organization will have a positive effect on organizational culture and group dynamics. In development of this concept, this chapter provides an overview of traditional approaches to understanding organizational culture and group dynamics and how these are applied in the information and library science literature and curricula; explores an alternate normative orientation towards the understanding of organizational culture and group dynamics as a function of all individuals in an organization and not just management; identifies ways in which information professionals and organizations can use this knowledge to recruit, develop, and retain employees in the information sciences profession; and explores future research directions in these areas.

INTRODUCTION

The library and information science profession has a history of addressing organizational culture issues in its graduate curriculum, through the literature,

and within organizations themselves. Understanding organizational culture is traditionally focused in the areas of management and leadership, as is evidenced in the literature and in the library and information science curricula. A shift in normative orientation – or the assumption of what ought to be the norm – from managers as experts to individu-

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als as equally responsible for the work environment – will help create an organizational culture that encourages the recruitment and retention of employees who are well-matched to the needs, values, and goals of the organization. It is important to recognize the value for anyone, at any place in the organization to have an understanding of organizational culture. Ultimately, the culture of an organization has an effect on everyone in that organization, regardless of position or level of responsibility. Likewise, each individual has the potential to influence his or her organization. Several approaches exist which libraries should consider to reframe the understanding of organizational culture and group dynamics from a management function to a function of every individual in the organization. The approaches proposed here include *Distributed Leadership*, *Job Embeddedness*, *The Bad Apple Concept*, and *Positive Relationships at Work*. While the concepts in this chapter are just some examples of how to apply this different normative orientation, it is hoped that these concepts help merge theory with praxis – or practical application – for use in information organization settings.

BACKGROUND

Organizational Culture and Group Dynamics Defined

Understanding the field of organizational culture requires a background introduction into a broader field of study: organization theory. According to Tompkins (2005), “organization theory is the study of how and why complex organizations behave as they do. Specifically, it is the study of formal structures, internal processes, external constraints, and the ways organizations affect and are effected by their members” (p. 1). This broader field of study has three subsets: the branch of organization theory, the branch of organizational behavior, and the branch of management theory. The organiza-

tion theory branch uses a macro perspective which looks at the organization itself and its structures. The organization behavior branch of study uses a micro perspective approach and looks at individuals and groups and how they interrelate. Management theory focuses on the subset of management in organizations (Tompkins, 2005). Each of these branches of organization theory provide different insights into how organizations and the individuals within them operate and mutually influence each other. The primary focus of this chapter is on the organizational behavior branch which emphasizes an understanding of how individuals and groups within organizations have an influence on each other and on how organizations function.

In addition to looking at organizational culture, this chapter addresses a closely-related concept: group dynamics. Macgowan (2009) defines group dynamics as “the internal and external forces that affect processes and outcomes in groups” (§5) and it consists of four groups: “(1) communication and interaction, (2) interpersonal attraction and cohesion, (3) social integration (power, influence, norms, roles, status), and (4) group development” (Macgowan, 2009, §5). These aspects of group dynamics mutually influence organizational culture. Understanding these relationships helps inform approaches information organizations can take in adjusting their practices to work most effectively within these cultures.

History of Organizational Culture and Group Dynamics as Areas of Study

Organizational behavior cuts across disciplines using ideas from such fields as the natural sciences, sociology, anthropology, business, economics, psychology, and public administration. In the field of library and information science, much of the study into organizational culture and group dynamics is found in the management literature (Stueart & Moran, 1987; Evans, 1983; Lynch, 1985). This section explores the focus of organizational culture and group dynamics as a management function

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