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Personal Reflection Journal: Culture Module
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If someone were to ask me to define organizational culture, I would have responded that it is very difficult to define but you can see it in the way the employees in an organization dress, the way they talk, the way they conduct business, the way they carry themselves and even in the way they are perceived by those around them. When I was working as a floor nurse, you could tell when you come across nurses from either Northwestern Memorial Hospital or Rush University Medical Center because there is just a certain air around them that exudes confidence. The stories they share about their work just seems more colorful and exciting, as they recount caring for sport celebrities and political figures or being a part of ground-breaking treatment innovations. Organizational culture, to me, is something you see in the people that work for that particular organization.

In his book Organizational Culture and Leadership, Schein defines organizational culture as:

> *A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems*. (Schein, 2004)

Well that definition best articulates, in so many words, what I tried to explain how I would define organizational culture!

What were my key learning from this module?

This module helped me learn a lot about culture. The way I see it, my understanding of organizational culture was only skin deep. But after reading Schein's book, I would like to think that I have a deeper and intellectual understanding of the word…well, two words.

Characteristics of culture. That culture has *structural stability*, which allows it to survive even when some members of the group depart. That culture has *depth* and is often the unconscious part of a group and is therefore less visible. That culture has *breadth* and influences the organization and all its operations. That culture has *integration* which ties together the rituals, values, climate and behaviors into one. (Schein, 2004)

Group with stable membership and shared learning/history will develop some level of culture. This makes sense to me because it is difficult to develop a culture when the membership has a revolving door. Trust takes time to develop and if the members switch frequently, it would be difficult for the members to get to know each other and therefore create a rapport with each other.

Leaders first create cultures when they create groups and organizations. Now I know why, when an organization has a new leader, he or she tends to bring "their own people" into the organization. It is their way of creating a culture with people who share the same values and beliefs. I always thought leaders do that because they prefer to work with people they know they can count on. I did not know culture plays a part in that.

Culture determines the criteria for leadership. This makes perfect sense to me. You would not want to hire a leader who does not match the culture of the organization. I remember my organization hired this CEO who only lasted for a couple of months because he was more familiar with a smaller hospital organization and not a multi-hospital managed care organization. It did not help that our receptionist mistook his home phone number as that of the building caretaker and called him one morning to come and fix a clogged toilet! He came to work that morning with his brief case and a plunger!

Levels of Cultures: Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, Basic Underlying Assumption. I was very surprised to know that the furniture, the website, the various forms and templates are all considered artifacts. Our reception area just underwent a makeover so now we have elegant looking tiles and fancy looking furniture. Does that mean our culture is changing? As for beliefs and values, our organization believes that our contribution to the community speaks volume and sends the message out that we are here to provide quality care at a lower cost. The basic underlying assumption as an organization is that by being socially responsive and economically conscious in improving health care delivery, patients will seek out our hospitals to receive their health care needs.

Stages of Group Evolution. I thought this was interesting because despite the three years our group has worked together without anyone leaving, based on Schein's description, our group is somewhere between Group Formation and Group Building. Trust plays a big part in our group not reaching the level of Group Maturity. I wonder if the constant redistribution of roles and assignments devoid our group from developing that level of culture necessary to progress to the next stage.

<u>What beliefs and understandings were confirmed?</u>

Shared experiences will lead to culture development. This statement right here confirmed what I went through when I first began my nursing journey. Because the seasoned nurses have worked together for over 10 years, their experience working as a group has already resulted in a culture, which I was not a part of. It took a whole year before I finally was accepted as part of the group. That's when they started sharing their little tricks of the trade and inviting me to their parties. However, once I got to know the culture better, there were some things I did not agree with. Such as cutting corners when providing patient care or just being there to put in their eight hours.

Once basic assumption is formed individual members or groups new data/change could be distorted thru denial, projection, rationalization or various defense mechanism rather than to change it. As Schein indicated, one of the characteristics of culture is its depth. Because of this, most members have difficulty accepting change and will do anything to derail that change. When our organization began to implement the electronic referral management application, several old-school physicians threatened to quit or take their practice elsewhere just to avoid having to adapt to the change. What surprised me was that some of the physicians, I considered were more up-to-date with technology, were not very receptive to it either fearing that their referral habits would be monitored closely.

<u>What theories or practices did you disagree with?</u>

Bringing a Consultant in to assess the organization's culture. It's not that I totally disagree with the idea but I question how a consultant can paint the whole picture when it could be muddled by group members who just want to put on a show, or the fact that the consultant is only there for a limited period of time to gather the information. As Schein mentioned, *when human subjects are involved in*

research, there is a tendency for them either to resist and hide data that they feel defensive about or to exaggerate in order to impress the researcher or to get cathartic relief. (Schein, 2004)

What are your personal strength and challenges in this area?

Strength
Gravitate towards leadership role. "*There is always room at the top,"* is a remark made popular by Daniel Webster, lawyer and statesman. (Bartlett, 1978) This remark holds true for me when it comes being a leader. Despite being the youngest in our department, my co-workers tend to come to me for answers when my manager is not around. I find myself taking charge when situations arise.

Challenges
Lack of confidence of being a leader. Yet despite my inclination towards the leadership role, I have not been in a situation where I am fully accountable for another person's actions. I therefore lack the confidence of being a leader. When my manager is not around and I take on her role whether it is compiling reports or answering questions from other staff, I am doing so knowing that there is a safety net, of my manager's support, beneath me. My lack of confidence precludes me from seeking out a challenging role.

When I finished my other Masters program, I went to interview for a Nurse Manager's position in the city. I met the other Nurse Managers and I could tell that they were ready to welcome me into their fold. However, the only thing I could think of was, I hope they do not offer me the job because I would not know how to turn it down! Perhaps it was the thrill of going after something I did not think I could have and once I found out that it was within my reach, the thrill was gone and I did not want it anymore. Or perhaps, it just was not something that was not meant to be or my fear of being responsible beating out my desire to be a leader.

What key concepts and/or tools will I apply and how?

I actually enjoyed reading Schein's book and the following are key concepts and tools that I would be using:
Openness. DECs culture of openness gives its employees the ability to confer with others regardless of their title or rank in the company. This conveys to the employees that their opinions, no matter how small, are valued and they are being listened to.

Value on Individual Effort and Contribution. Employees whose efforts and contributions are valued are happier and satisfied in their positions. I would want to have an atmosphere where employees are proud of what they do and look forward to coming to work rather than just putting in their eight hours.

Avoiding ambiguity and dissent. Articulating what is expected, providing positive feedback and constructive criticism instead of humiliating the employees in public is very important in avoiding ambiguity and dissent.

Willingness to change when necessary. If the existing culture or practice is no longer working for the group, then I would have to be willing to foster a changing culture. Whether it is by adapting new technologies or adapting subcultures from within the company, if change is necessary then I would be open to it.

Bibliography

Bartlett, I. H. (1978). *Daniel Webster.* New York: Norton.

Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational Culture and Leadership Third Edition.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.