

Comparing How Leaders Use Communication in Developing and Maintaining Culture in Virtual
and Face-To-Face Organizations
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Abstract

A positive organizational culture is the key to success for any organization. The leader's role has been transformed from the classic overseer of a team to becoming the powerful carrier of culture to the organization's members. The leader must become even more creative by thinking outside of the box, while learning new ways of communicating with their virtual and face-to face teams. The employment setting of the members has some bearing on how the organization's culture is established and maintained. It is how the members react to their leadership. At times the leader will have to change their leadership styles, while using the communication rules, thematic and tactical, to maintain the culture of the organization. The key to success is communication. It is better for the organization to provide the members with too much information, while allowing them to be a part of the solution, then be ineffective in their communication.

Comparing How Leaders Use Communication in Developing and Maintaining Culture in Virtual and Face-To-Face Organizations

Communication is the key to maintaining a healthy workplace culture, regardless if the workplace is face-to-face or virtual. Shockley-Zalabak (2015) states that organization excellence is predicated in the communication systems of the organization. Shockley-Zalabak (2015) also stated that it is the communication between the human and technological facets of the organization that is responsible for “solving increasingly complexed problems” (p.5). When the management teams work with their members to maintain a positive organizational culture in any setting, is referred to as having a global mindset (Scandura, 2016). When a leader is able to influence their members with a global mindset, they limit common knowledge distortions and organizational biases (Burns, Shoup, & Simmons (2014). Communication between the leaders and the members, ensure coherence and coordination among its teams in virtual and face-to-face meetings (Manafzadeh, Ghaderi, Moradi, Taheri, & Amirhasani, 2018).

The management leadership is tasked with identifying a set of attributes by each member that will assist in strengthening their ability to influence others who have different cultural backgrounds and behaviors (Scandura, 2016), this is called adaption. Chang, Chuang, and Choa (2011), wrote the idea of cultural adaption will lead to perceptions of similarity, thus maintaining a positive organizational culture regardless of the organizational setting. The aim of this paper is to compare and contrast how a leader’s communication assists with maintaining a positive culture in a virtual and face-to-face organizations.

Virtual Organization. Virtual teams can be difficult to maintain a positive organizational culture. This is due the location of the members on the team and the limited or none face to face interaction. The geographic separation of the of the virtual team members, as well as the need to perform in a virtual setting, forces the leader to utilize alternate forms of communication with an emphasis on electronic interaction to develop and maintain the organization’s culture (Chang, et

al, 2011). It is the advancements in technology and information that has changed to the organizational and corporate culture among its people (Chang, Hung, & Hsieh 2014). In spite of all the advancements in information technology there is still a gap in the organizations culture and performance (Manafzadeh, et al, 2018). The leader may find themselves leading teams where their members are located in different parts of the country or different parts of the world. It is incumbent on the leader to adjust to the personal cultural differences while conveying and establishing the organization's vision and culture to all its members. Hodges and Gill (2015), stated that effective leaders define and communicate a clear vision of the future. Regardless of the location of the team member, people want to know the reason for any changes to the culture of the organization (Hodges & Gill, 2015).

Chang, Hung, and Hsieh (2014) exploring to how the information technology and communication mitigate the negative impact of cultural diversity on a team's effectiveness. The study revealed that cultural inconsistencies may be reflected in differences in communication skills, work ethics, and approaches to problem solving (p. 1320). Maintaining a positive work culture in any organization, Scandura (2016), suggest the leader should empower the team to think creatively by using the Basadur's model. This model allows the virtual team members to be a part of problem finding, problem solving, and solution implementation (Scandura, 2016).

Scandura (2016, p.190), wrote a case study titled *Building Motivation*. The problem in the case study centered around how the leadership team should build motivation among its sales team. The sales representatives who did not have contact with the retail sales team, went to the store managers to in an effort to encourage the retail team to produce sales. The case study stated the sales representative suggested the retail team go through training in an effort to boost sales. Chang, et al (2014), stated that virtual teams need leaders to communicate among all members on all levels. In order to maintain the corporate culture and organizational vision, leadership must

make sure that no one is procrastinating or falling behind due to low performance or miscommunication (Chang, et al, 2016, Anderson & Shane, 2002). In the Building Motivation Case Study (Scandura, 2016), the virtual culture was inconsistent on all levels of the organization, which reflected in lagging sales at Construction Products, Inc. However, according to Scandura (2016), leaders can motivate their members by giving them goals to accomplish and a pathway to reach those goals. This was accomplished thru the retail team going through extra training to learn strategies that will aid in increasing in sales. The virtual sales team was attempting to bridge sales culture with the face-to-face team by getting everyone on the same sales page.

Hodges and Gill (2015), suggested that engaged employees are motivated to exert effort and perform the work that needs to be done, when the leader understands what motivates people to work (p.75). It is suggested the sales representative in the *Building Motivation* case study, is not in the same location with the retail team; therefore, making it difficult to create a congruent virtual sales culture. However, if the leadership is able to establish a strong sales culture on all levels, then the extra training may be the answer to dwindling sales. Scandura (2016) wrote it is the responsibility of the leader to create meaningful workplace outcomes to improved job performance.

The culture in an organization must include a high level of trust between the leaders and members and between the members and their fellow coworkers. In the virtual workplace, the trust between the leaders and members is higher than the face-to-face work places. The members in a virtual workplace need to trust the leader will communicate to them any organizational changes and cast the vision of the organization through the appropriate technological devices. Hodges and Gill (2015), listed four areas of practices where a leader's engagement is important for not only organizational change but also maintaining the culture. The areas listed by Hodges

and Gill (2015), are engagement to empower, strategic in leadership, inform members while given them a voice, and conveying and demonstrating the organization's embedded integrity in their job performance.

Leadership style. The adaptation of an organization's virtual culture is dependent on a certain type of leadership. A virtual culture is a strange dichotomy of flexibility and freedom coupled with stringent planning to accomplish the daily goals. Olson and Simerson (2015) identify this type of leadership as emergent. The emergent leader is focused on having well planned activities for their teams (Olson & Simerson, 2015). The activities include by not limited to teleconferences, virtual to-do-list, as well as team building activities. In the virtual cultural setting, the leader has to communicate strategy formation versus strategy execution all while monitoring trends in information technology and evolving as the virtual culture evolves (Olson & Simerson, 2015). This type of visionary leader is always looking for ways to bridge the gap between the face-to-face culture and the virtual culture, while communicating the vision of the organization to the member (Olson & Simerson, 2105). When working with the virtual organizational culture the communication between all parties is constantly being developed, shaped, and reinforced to create a strong culture within the organization. (Holmes et al, 2007).

Face-to-face. The workplace culture is important to maintain a healthy and thriving organizational. Effective communication by the leadership is required to not only maintain a strong culture but also communicate the values of the organization to the members on all levels. According to Holmes, Schnurr, and Marra (2007), effective leaders successfully integrates the achievements of transactional objectives with more relational aspects of workplace interaction through communication. Regardless of the way the organization "do what they do", the leader in the face-to-face setting is responsible for communicating why the organization adopted the particular type of culture.

The culture in any workplace is embedded in the DNA of the organization. Schein (2017), defines cultural DNA as the beliefs, values, and desired behaviors that launched the group and made it successful (p.7). The members in the workplace mimic the behaviors of the leaders. If the leader's behaviors are myopic, this behavior will be transferred from the executives to the lowest employees. When the negative behaviors are transferred down through the ranks of the organization, then trust becomes an issue as well as disengagement from leadership, low morale, and the adoption of poor standards (Tillott, Walsh, and Maxham, 2013).

The organizations culture can be analyzed at any level of the organization. Schein (2017) describes level as meaning the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the any member or outside observer at any time (p.17). Therefore, the leadership should always seek the most effective way with communicating with their members. In the face-to face cultural setting, the most effective way of communicating the organization's artifacts is through engagement (Tillot, et al, 2013).

Artifacts are defined as the phenomena that you would see, hear, and feel when you encounter a new group with an unfamiliar culture (Schein, 2017). These phenomena include but are not limited to products, architecture, and the physical environment (Schein, 2017, Holmes, et al, 2007). Artifacts is a way of communicating the culture and vision through all levels of the organization. Schein (2017) describes how the Nike Corporation has the Nike logo and slogan all over the organization. All members wear some type of Nike apparel daily. The cultural DNA is on display everywhere throughout the organization. The cultural branding and organizational philosophy are not limited to locations in the United States. Schein (2017) describe the same branding and artifacts at every location throughout the world.

When the company engage in this type of visual artifacts, the leadership is responsible for communicating the visions, values, and culture to new members on the team as well as reinforce the embedded culture to those employees with time in the company. Schein (2017) describes a

problem with the mass branding such as company Nike, because the mass branding could lead to assumptions, cultural misinterpretations based on the personal cultural background.

The face-to-face cultural setting allows for leadership styles that are different from virtual cultural setting. In the example of Nike (Schein, 2017), the members were engaged directly and indirectly by the abundance of artifacts. Yukl (2013) states that both direct and indirect communication engagement will have a positive effect in the organization. Tillot, et al, (2013), stated engagement is synonymous with workplace satisfaction and workplace empowerment. When the leaders communicate the vision of the organization while reinforcing the vision and culture to the members, then there is a high sense of empowerment on all levels (Tillot et al, 2013).

Leadership styles. There are several types of leadership methods that are suitable for both the virtual culture and the face-to-face culture. When leading the face-to-face culture, the leader is able to adjust to their team depending on the leader's perceived interactions. They are then able to integrate transactional objectives with more relational aspects of workplace interaction (Holmes, et al, 2007).

In the face-to-face culture of the organization, the Directive Leader is able to thrive in this culture. This leader is known as the "classic" style leader where structure and strategy execution are the most important aspects to the leader and team (Olson & Simerson, 2015). The members are able to see the organization's values and pride being exhibited in leader through their confidence (Olson & Simerson, 2015). The directive leader is hands on and engaging with their team. There is a sense of caring and family within the directive leader's team. The team members are able to align their personal values with the organization's values because they pattern their values after the leadership. Shockley-Zalabak (2015) wrote, "most agree value congruence even in a broad sense is important for allowing an individual to identify positively with the organization" (p.112). This is the shifting of values making a personal commitment to

the organization, moving their value system from believing how things are, to believing how things should be (Schockley-Zalabak, 2015).

Discussion. The positive culture in a workplace is vital for the organization to survive. It is easy for the culture to evolve into a mass of negative energy that will have a profound effect on the team and leadership. Organizational culture is so broad, that covers the face-to-face culture as well as the virtual culture. Both cultures have their own subculture based on the personality of the team. The leadership of the team is tasked with not allowing the subculture to become the dominant culture as well as communicating the organization's culture to all levels of the team.

The key to maintaining a positive culture in the workplace is the communication between leaders and the members. The workplace setting does not matter as long as there is effective communication. Therefore, as a major part of communication is the leader needs to learn when to employ the thematic rules versus the tactical rules of communication (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015). Thematic rules reflect the values and beliefs of the organization. Whereas the tactical rules reflect specific behaviors related to general themes (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015).

The face-to-face culture allows the leader to be able to reinforce the thematic rule through artifacts and personal engagement. If there are individuals that have not fully bought into the culture of the organization then the leader is able to use the tactical rules to address the areas where the leader feels the member may need assistance. The proper influence strategies used by the leader with the individual that may need assistance could aid in the individual assimilating into the broader organizational culture.

The problem that may arise with in face-to-face workplace culture is the spread of negative subculture. An individual or small group that form their subculture, while not buying into their organization's culture could open the door for others to share their beliefs (Schein, 2017). However, subcultures can be a benefit to the team and organization, but it is the leader

who is responsible for casting the vision, communicating and executing the plan while keeping the member engaged (Olson & Simmerson, 2015).

In the face-to-face setting, the leader is able to demonstrate effective leadership and the organizational culture by setting the example. This is a type of artifact where the members see and experience the culture of the organization (Schein, 2017). When branding of the organization logos and vision statements around the workplace, this reinforces the culture through direct and indirect communication (Schien, 2017, Shockley-Zalabak, 2015).

Virtual workplace. The virtual work is much more difficult to maintain a positive organizational culture. Unlike the face-to-face workplace, the virtual workplace does not have the embedded artifacts reinforced to them daily. Most members of the virtual workplace have a large degree of freedom. They may not be involved in daily briefing where complaints and grievances are presented. In the virtual workplace, members are given a task and deadline to achieve the goals. The key to a successful virtual culture is communication. Effective communication is one of the key factors in the success of managers. It not only provides the basis for the development of the organization, but the continuity of life in any organization depends on it (Manafzadeh, et al, 2018).

Ashton (2012) summed up the challenges of the virtual workplace by highlighting the challenges of an adjunct professor. The study stated that many adjunct professors feel they are out on an island. Other than the brief face-to-face interactions with some students and other professors, the adjunct professor is virtually on their own. Ashton (2012) wrote about the added pressures of being an adjunct professor when the class is solely online.

The adjunct professor relies heavily on technological communication to remain informed of the changing culture at their university or college as well as to feel a sense of connection to the organization. For the adjunct professor, communication is a dynamic and transactional

process involving at least two parties and the success of the interaction is dependent on the communication skills of everyone involved (Müller, Evans, Frasché, Kern, & Resti, 2018).

In the virtual workplace, the member is required to solve problems on their own. Ashton (2012) stated that in the university setting professors would come together to share resources and solve problems. However, with the adjunct professor they fail to adapt to the university's culture because they are on their own, they are given a task, deadlines, and a class.

In the virtual workplace, the members do not see the hands-on engagement from the leadership. Without video conferencing, the members are not able to see their leader's emotions, see their work ethic, or be a part of the family structure. The issue that may arise are communication misinterpretations and no sense of team that a member will find at a face-to-face organization (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015). This could lead to a lack of motivation from the member a disengagement as well (Scandura, 2016).

The virtual place leader has to try and build the gap between the organization and virtual team. The leader has to make every effort to be a combination of several different types of leaders at once. The virtual needs to be one that strategizes, develops, support, inspire and team build all at the same time (Olson & Simerson, 2015). The leader need to somehow build organizational citizenship in the virtual community. The organization citizenship is a type of culture where the behaviors includes behaviors for the formation of a job and requires that these behaviors contribute to the overall success of the organization (Manafzadeh, et al, 2018).

Conclusion. If the workplace is face-to-face a virtual workplace, the establishment of a positive organization culture is the key to success. Leaders are considered to be the “most powerful carriers of their organization” (Holmes, et al, 2007). The “power” is ineffective if the lead cannot communicate an effective message across all platforms. As the company continues to grow, the leadership will have to evolve. The need to tap into all their resources to be effective (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). They should always position themselves to learning everything

about their job to perfection (Scandura, 2015). Conveying to the members the leader cares about their problem, issues, or life events creates a connection and sense of belonging. These sentiments can be relayed through email, teleconferences, telephone calls, or face-to-face interaction. The leader has to become creative when maintain the organizations culture while engaging the members.

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