

John T. Jackson, Jr./8742
LEAD 706 Organizational Communication
Dr. Teresa Harvey

Case Study #2 “ Forming Dennison”

The case study “Forming Dennison” reminded me of a book entitled *Who Moved My Cheese?* (Spencer, 1999), which is quoted by Hodges and Gill (2015) explaining the populist view about change.

There are two ‘little people’ (Hem and Haw) and two mice (Sniff and Scurry). All of them live in a maze. For a time, they have an abundance of cheese to eat (whatever they want in life). Then one day, the cheese disappears. The mice instinctively understand that their world has changed and that they need to adapt and look for cheese in a different place. So, they do, and they find new cheese.

The humans are more resistant to change. Hem indignantly bellows, “Who moved my Cheese?” and refuses to accept reality. Haw too is initially resistant but comes to understand that he has to leave his comfort zone to survive and thrive. Voila! New cheese awaits him (p.7).

Not that Bob, Dan, Chet, and David in the case study are little people or mice; they still must adapt to change. The case study on page 439 revealed that each individual left their previous employer either feeling that their talent was not being utilized or that they were being disrespected, or they were underappreciated, or they had issues with authority.

Nevertheless, these individuals were able to come together and demonstrate their abilities to create a product that was capable of competing for market shares. As a result, they received start-up funds quickly. It appears that the initials employees worked with firms of the founders. If that being the case, they might have violated agreements not to poach employees. Then the work began, requiring seventy hours work week, family time was with the company drinking beer and eating pizza. There was a risk at all costs. No job had any security. Also, there was a slogan “get rich or be without work within two years.”

Why is this important? To show the type of culture that is evolving. Drennan (1992) says that culture is ‘how things are done around here.’ It is what is typical of the organization, the habits, the prevailing attitudes, the grown-up pattern of accepted and expected behavior” (p.3). Shockley-Zalabak cites that “the central to the notion of organizational culture is the decision-making processes in which organizational members engage” (p. 259). Therefore, the emerging culture of Dennison is classified as a culture of chaos.

The owners are conducting themselves as if culture can be turned on like a light switch. The founders apparently were not aware of Kotter (2012), saying “culture changes only after you have successfully altered people’s actions. Next, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for some time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement (p. 165). Therefore, a strong culture reflects the make-up of the values. And the way the employees, as well as the customers, are treated. The people get the feeling that the organization is concerned about the wellbeing of their future. (“Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture,” 2020) posits, “an influential culture is a common denominator among the most successful companies. Cultural priorities and those values focus not on individuals but the organization and its goals. Leaders in successful companies live their cultures every day and go out of their way to communicate their cultural identities to employees as well as prospective new hires.

Further, the strengths of an organizational culture lie in the beliefs, values, and assumptions of an organization (Whirley, 2014). Shockley-Zalabak (2015) described another advantage by citing “the methods and levels of participation desired for decision making and problem-solving reflect organizational values and culture. Spacey (2018) cites that there is a dark side to having a strong culture. Negative traits may become a part of the culture; such things as a

firm that suffers from extreme arrogance and indifference toward the customer. The organization may be destined to fail if these tendencies become completely normal and expected across the entire organization. Also, certain organizations that are highly paternalistic or male-dominated may tend to perpetuate disparities in promotions, compensation, and other terms of employment” (Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture, 2020).

Finally, the personnel manager may not be responsible for creating a culture, but the personnel manager should follow the recommendation of the founders and seek outside consultants. At first, this did not seem to be the correct perspective since Kotter (2012) stated that culture comes last. However, Gensing-Pophal posits “the desire to have a strong culture and the elusiveness of actually attaining the right culture can create opportunities for HR consultants. An outside perspective is particularly critical when dealing with cultural issues. External consultants are nonbiased observers that can get at feelings and perceptions that might otherwise be hidden. Employees are less likely to tell their HR person that the culture is not inclusive or that communication isn’t open and honest.”

References

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