

CHANGING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE: LEADER'S ROLE IN CHANGING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

It has been generally agreed that in order to change the organisational culture it is best, first to change the people in the organisation. Since people are those who make the organisation works and lives. In this case the one who initiate change is the leader of that organisation. This paper will argue that leader is playing an important role in changing the culture of the organisation, and that there are some qualities of leaders needed to enable him/her to change the culture of the organisation.

Keywords: *Organisational Culture, Leader's Role*

INTRODUCTION

To begin with, in order to change the culture in the organisation, it is essential for the leader to know what the current culture is applied in his/her organisation. Current culture will influence the expected culture that the organisation wanting to move in to. This is in harmony with Handy, which suggested that before leaders change culture of the organisation, he/she has to know what the form of the current culture in the organisation is. He suggested at least four forms of culture.¹ Those cultures will be described as follow:

The power culture, this culture looks like a spider web. The leader is the centre of this organisation, or the spider in this web. This kind of culture often found in a small organisation like non-governmental organisation. Organisation with this kind of culture tends to be very adaptable towards the change in the internal or external environment. However, this organisation relies too much on the quality of the leader. What is the web

without its spider? Sustainability of this organisation is at stake once the leader leaves.

The role culture or the bureaucracy culture, this culture pictured like a Greek temple with its strong pillars. The pillars here like a units in organisation, which work based on its Standard Operational Procedures (SOP). There is no need for people in this organisation to achieve more than what has been stated in their SOP. In a stable environment, this type of culture will most likely to survive, but not in the time of crisis. Because it is hard for the leaders to move the pillars, since it is not what he/she is assigned for.

Task culture/job oriented culture, this culture looks like a net. The task culture is a highly adaptable culture, where leader here is someone who has and perceived to have expert power. Organisation who applies this culture aims to bring appropriate people to the appropriate level in the organisation. It uses the power of all the people in the organisation to improve the efficiency and align individual with the objective of the organisation. The down side of this culture that it is only effective for the small organisation which enables the organisation to move quickly from one situation to another situation, while in big organisation, bureaucracy tends to rise and this culture tends to be left behind.

¹ Handy B., Charles, (1976), So you want to change your organization? Then first identify its culture, *Management Learning*, 7. Retrieved March 27, 2010 from <http://mlq.sagepub.com>

The people culture, this culture viewed everyone in the organisation as equal and same. It symbolises as dots in a circle. Everyone in this culture assumed to work together without leader to strive the organisational goal. However, it has to be acknowledged that this kind of culture does not exist anymore. Since once organisation is formed there has to be a leader and follower who share the beliefs and values that can provide meaning to the organisation.

Why leader is important in changing organisational culture?

Organisation is formed because a group of people have the same vision and values that they want to share, and by getting together in a form of organisation, they believed they can achieve their goals. Leader arises from the organisation because he/she believes and people in the organisation also believe that their leader can lead them toward the change that they wanted to see happen in the organisation. Along with this, Dubrin, stated that leaders are those who produce change and transform the organisation.² To add to this, Daft, mentioned that leaders are those who:

Create vision and strategy,
 Keeping on eyes on the horizon
 (looking at the external environment,
 opportunities and threats),
 Creating shared culture values,
 Helping others to grow,
 Reducing boundaries,
 Focus on people- inspires and
 motivates followers,
 Based on personal power,
 Acting as coach, facilitator, servant,
 Using emotional connection (heart),
 Open mind (mindfulness),

² Dubrin, A. J. (2004). Traits, motives, and characteristics of leadership. In A. J. DuBrin (4th Eds.), *Leadership: Research findings, practice, and skills* New York: Houghton Mifflin, (pp. 31-61).

Listening (communication)
 Nonconformity (courage),
 Insight into self (character),and
 Creates change and a culture of
 integrity.³

It is then can be summed up that leaders are important in changing organisational culture because they are the one who have the qualities to transform the organisation, have ability to see the inside and outside environment of the organisation, using his ability to help his followers to achieve the target, and emotionally coaching people in the organisation, while trying to implement change, and have self integrity.

What kind of leaders needed to change the culture in the organisation?

There are many theories out there about style of leadership that can be used to transform the organisation. Some people believe to transformational leaders as the best way to approach the change, since it is reflected by its definition as ability that enabled leaders to change the needs, personal interest, and morale of one person into a group needs, group interest, and moral value to be shared among the group.⁴ However some argue that visionary leaders is the best, since this person can see the beyond the horizon, and has a vision of what he/she wants to change in the organisation. And the debate goes on which style is the best, transactional leader, charismatic, or others?

Regardless to the debate above, Handy urged that there are several qualifications that

³ Daft, R. L. (2005). What does it mean to be a leader? *The Leadership Experience*, 3rd Eds Mason, Ohio: Thomson South-Western, (pp. 3-41).

⁴ Lussier, R. N., & Achua, C. F. (2010). Chapter 9: Charismatic and transformational leadership. In R. N. Lussier and C. F. Achua, *Leadership: Theory, application, skill development* (3rd ed.). Eagan, Minnesota: Thompson, South-Western. (p.330).

leaders have to have to enable them to change their organisational culture. To start with, Handy mentioned that leaders have to have position power and appropriate status. In this case leaders have to be in the position where others look up at them, and see their status as an influential thing in the organisation. Leaders also have to be a successful role model and being on the loop. A successful role model means that leader has to be able to model the culture that he wanted to implement in the organisation. While being on the loop means that a leader has to know what is happening inside his organisation. This is essential for a leader to be able to know the up to date information about the organisation and the people in the organisation.⁵

The next quality that leaders need to have is expert power and perceived by others to have that expert power. This means that to exert change, the leader has to have ability to make that change happened. In the same time, his/her members of the organisation must think and believe that the leader has power to make that change happened. Change would be hard to be implemented if one of these two things does not exist in the organisation that is trying to implement the change.

The last but not least important thing that leaders need to have is interpersonal skills. This skill is important as leaders are not necessarily managers who lead with coercion/incentive and punishment. Leaders are those who lead in order to help others to grow, and lead with his personal influence. This interpersonal skill help leaders to communicate change in the culture of the organisation that he wanted to see happen with others. It also helps leaders to listen and understand what others think of the change that he wanted to bring about in the organisation. Leaders with less

interpersonal skills will more likely to gain resistance on the change that he wanted to implement.

What leaders need to do to facilitate change in the organisational culture?

Having those qualities as mentioned above are not sufficient for leaders to facilitate change, yet. There are more principles that they have to have in order to see change happen in their organisation. Levin and Gottlieb mentioned at least six principles for leaders to implement when they want to change their organisational culture.

Six principles to help leaders facilitate change:

1. Understand the scope of change. Leaders have to understand the degree of change in culture that needed by the organisation. Is it changing radically, means change all the culture, or incrementally change (change parts of the culture step by step). This principle by Levin and Gottlieb is in-line with Trice & Beyer's which stated that one can change many elements of culture in the organisation but remember to maintain some parts of that old culture. I believe that what has to be maintained here are some good things from the old culture. In this sense as well people are learning the new culture subconsciously because they still feel that there are parts from their old culture being embedded in the new culture. For example, if the old culture of the organisation is spider culture and wanting to move into job oriented culture, then the leader has to slowly delegate people into having their own team that they shared the work together, and at

⁵ Handy B., Charles, (1976), So you want to change your organization? Then first identify its culture, *Management Learning*.....

the end of the day, those teams will get together with the leader to share what they have achieved. In this sense, the people will still feel that they are working directly for the leader, because at the end of the day they are sharing what they have done with the leader. Through this way also, the leader is helping others to grow to be leaders. Since they are presenting what their team has achieved in front of their working partners.

2. Model, teach and embed.

As leader wants to create change in organisational culture, he/she has to be able to model the desired behaviour of the culture that preferred to happen in the organisation. Next after modelling the culture, what a leader should do is ensure that the appropriate formal and informal practices required for that specific culture is embedded and established in the behaviour of all organisation elements in daily work and life of the organisation. This principle is in line with Schein's words, which mentioned that organisation members take their clues from the leader of what is important and desirable.

3. Use multiple levellers

What it meant by multiple levellers is that leader used two levellers, namely instrumental levers and symbolic levers. Instrumental levers mean that the leader modifies the content of the work and how things performed in the organisation into the desirable ones. Thus, the people in the organisation learn to do new things which are part of their routine works. When this lever is

practiced, the followers will not feel that they are drastically changing the way they used to work and do things. In this way as well, the resistance to change can be minimised.

The second lever is symbolic levers. This is beyond visible things in the organisation. Things such as influence perception, attitude and meanings they attribute to organisation, decision, practices, and action. If a leader succeed to bring the change into this stage, then it can be said, that the attempt to change is almost succeed.

4. Create broad involvement of key organisation constituencies

Broad involvement means that people from various levels of leadership and units in organisation as well as from top to bottom level management is asked to join the force to change. In every organisation, regardless to the level of management people are in, there must be someone who sticks out as figure that people respects and adore. If these people were engaged in changes that the leader wants to see happen in this organisation, then those changes are more likely to happen faster and smoother.

5. manage with rigors and discipline

Once it is determined to change the culture of the organisation, the leader has to be consistent with the decision. The persistency to pursue the change in the organisational culture has to be driven by the needs that change has to happen for the sake of the organisation. Therefore, as the leader, she/he has

to manage with rigor rigidity and discipline.

6. integrate into daily work life

This is closely related with the principle number 3 above. This integration of cultural change into daily life works will smoothen the transition and lessen the resistance from the followers in the organisation. by doing so, extra burden for the people in the organisation is lessen so they are more likely to accept the on-going attempt to change.⁶

Eight Practices of Culture Change

Having applied those principles above is not enough for the leader to change organisational culture. Levin and Gottlieb tried to help leaders facilitate cultural change in organisation by providing 8 practices that can help to carried out their task as those who create change.

1. Establish infrastructure and oversight. The infrastructure needed for the preferred new culture and the supervision of what is needed in the process of converting to the new culture have to be established before going into the conversion itself.
2. Defined preferred culture. Leader has to define clearly what the culture the organisation needs to move into. How could he/she explain to the follower if he/she doesn't know?
3. Conduct culture gap audit. This audit needed to be conducted in order to help the leaders to explain why a new culture is needed. Culture gap audit

⁶ Levin, I., & Gottlieb, J.. (2009). Realigning Organization Culture for Optimal Performance: Six principles & eight practices. *Organization Development Journal*, 27(4), Retrieved March 28, 2010, from ABI/INFORM Global.

also needed to see the lack in the old culture and why it needs to be replaced with a new one.

4. Ensure leadership alignment.
5. Manage priority culture realignment levers
6. Promote grassroots efforts
7. Integrate into priority strategic infrastructure
8. Asses progress. Progress of the new culture alignment has to be assessed. This is to see whether the process works well or not. What are the main key things that makes the culture works and what are the main obstacles, what can be improved. By assessing this progress, leaders can decide the further step of the culture alignment.⁷

CONCLUSION

Leaders' role in new culture alignment is important, regardless to the type of leadership styles applied by the leader. There are six principles and eight practices that can help leaders facilitate change in the organisation. However, none of these principles and practices should be applied to the dot. Adjustment to fit the context and the nature of the organization is needed.

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⁷ *Ibid.*

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