EMBED THE CULTURE OF EMBRACING CHANGE

Ankita Shukla
Teaching Assistant, Mangalayatan University

Abstract:
Change generates emotions as employee's experience the processes and outcome of amend, including cultural change. An organization's affective culture, which shape the way emotions are experienced and expressed, plays a particularly important part during changes to the culture or to any other significant aspect of managerial life. This article contributes to the literature by illustrating the associations between culture, change and emotions and presents the results of a qualitative study. We found that when participants' values were harmonizing with those of the organization they tended to react to change more optimistically. Cultural change provoked emotional reactions, often of an intense nature. When emotions were acknowledged and treated with respect, people became more engaged with the change.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Organizational Change, etc.

Introduction

Change is fundamentally about feelings; companies those want their workers to contribute with their heads and their hearts have to accept that emotions are central to the new management style. The most successful change programs reveal that large organizations connect with their people most directly through values and those values, ultimately are about beliefs and feelings (Duck, 1993, p. 113). There are number of ways in which organizational culture, organizational change and emotions are related. Firstly, organizational culture is imbued with emotion and therefore cultural change is especially emotional. A change in culture can be the goal of management and but could occur indirectly as a result of strategic, tactical or operational changes. Secondly, an organization's affective culture influences how these emotions are experienced and expressed. Thirdly, there might be specific elements of a culture that an employee likes or dislikes and these influence emotional responses to any type of change. There is little literature that integrates employees' emotional responses to change with an analysis of their organizations' affective cultures.

Literature Review

Emotions are direct responses to events, issues, relationships and objects that are important to people (Lazarus, 1991; Frijda, 1988), whereas mood is longer lasting, more diffuse and not always linked to something specific (Isen, 2000; Weiss, 2002). Affect is a broad term including emotion, mood and disposition (Barsade and Gibson, 2007). Organizational change has the potential to trigger positive and negative emotions and moods in the employee that depend on a range of factors. These include the perceived valence of the outcomes, the change processes that are used, the speed, timing and frequency of change, the nature of leadership and the employee's personality and emotional intelligence (Kiefer, 2005; Jordan, 2005, Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Smollan, 2006). The culture of the organization can also play an important role in both generating emotions during change and influencing their expression or suppression. The affective culture, in particular, will help or hinder employees' adjustment on an individual level. Organizational culture is regarded as a set of assumptions, beliefs, values, customs, structures, norms, rules, traditions and artefacts (Schein, 2004). The term organizational climate is often used instead of culture, or in addition to it, and is the employee perception of the culture and a manifestation of it (Allen, 2003). The debate as to the similarities and differences between them, and the multiple theoretical perspectives on each (Payne 2002; Denison, 1996), lie outside the scope of this article, and to simplify matters the term organizational culture will be used throughout. More colloquially, culture is "how things are done around here" (Martin, 2002, and it shapes the behaviour of its members in overt and covert ways. It has also been called a system of shared meanings (Pizer and Härtel, 2005) but how widely it is really shared is debatable (Martin, 2002). For example, sub-cultures exist in organizations (Allen, 2003; Ryan, 2005) which are often based on categories such as hierarchy, department, professional identity, ethnicity and gender, but may also be conceptualised as differing value systems. For example, Palthe and Kossek (2003) developed a typology of sub-cultures that are employee-centred, professional-centred, task-centred and innovation-centred. Employees' responses to change are often coloured by their perceptions of, and engagement in, the sub-culture as well as in the broader organizational culture (Harris and Ogbonna, 1998;

Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008). Sub-cultures may become counter-cultures or anti-cultures (Elsmore, 2001) and according to Armenakis, Harris and Moss holder (1993, p. 687), "these cultural memberships may polarize the beliefs, attitudes and intentions of members" through group discourses and undermine readiness for change.

Organizational culture is substantially about values (Kabanoff, Waldersee and Cohen, 1995; Ryan, 2005; Duck, 1993), which have been termed "embedded codes" (Branson, 2007, p. 382) – even if these might be contested. Values may evolve or be deliberately determined and articulated in mission statements and websites and included in induction and training sessions. In this way, they are overt guides to behaviour but the messages and the mechanisms may be more subtle. They often contain emotional language, as the following corporate websites indicate: The Virgin brand is built upon Richard Branson's core philosophy - if you keep your staff happy then your customers will be happy, and if you keep your customers happy then your shareholders will be happy (Virgin, 2008). At The Walt Disney Company, entertainment is about hope, aspiration and positive resolutions (Disney Corporation, 2008). At The Walt Disney Company, entertainment is about hope, aspiration and positive resolutions (Disney Corporation, 2008). We have four core values (or passions) that are the 'glue' connecting Vodafone in every country around the globe. These are Passion for Customers, Passion for Our People, Passion for Results, and Passion for the World Around Us" (Vodafone New Zealand, 2008). When Vodafone New Zealand acquired an internet service provider to enter a new market its work culture was reported in the press as being "energised". According to a senior manager, the company's culture was "youthful, casual and fun" and that "it was important for workers to have

energy and passion" to be competitive (Keown, 2006, p. C4).

Researchers have explored the emotions-culture nexus. Schein (1990, p. 111) indicates that "Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration", and he emphasizes that "such learning is simultaneously a behavioural, cognitive, and an emotional process." Focusing on the affective process he contends that one of the factors that contribute to the development of culture is the "emotional intensity of the actual historical experiences" organizational or group members have shared (Schein, 2004, p. 11). Beyer and Nino (2001) assert that culture both engenders emotions and provides for their expression in socially accepted ways and that culture acts as a 'glue' that binds people. According to van Maanen and Kunda (1989, p. 46), "Any attempt to manage culture is therefore also an attempt to manage emotions." The role of emotion is emphasized somewhat idealistically by Bratton, Grint and Nelson (2005, p. 51), who claim that "The most critical function of corporate culture is to generate commitment and enthusiasm among followers by making them feel they are part of a 'family' and participants in a worthwhile venture."

Organizational values are often reflected in the language that is used, and the language of culture in the context of change can be suffused with emotion. Martin (2002) explains how jargon both defines a culture and shapes it. For example, in researching mergers and acquisitions she noted that the informal use of terms such as 'shark', 'ambush', 'stud', 'cupid', 'rape' and 'afterglow' reflect themes of sex and violence and that these "metaphors tap the emotional aspects of life in particular kinds of organizations and industries, alluding to emotions that

may not be socially acceptable to express more directly" (p. 80). If, as Branson (2007, p. 377) claims, "Values alignment is the bedrock of successful organizational change", this process needs to be carefully managed but nevertheless cannot always work. A person's sense of identity is partly determined by his or her values, which can mesh or clash with organizational values (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Pepper and Larson, 2006). As Ryan (2005, p. 432) puts it, culture "represents the often unwritten sense of identity, feeling part of the organization. It provides a 'glue' and understanding in that it can help individual members make sense of events and change activities." According to Carr (2001, p. 429), "the processes involved in the relationship between employee and organization are deep-seated, largely unconscious, intimately connected to the development of identity and have emotional content." He suggests that change 'dislodges' identity and leads to anxiety and grieving.

Van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Monden and de Lima (2009) reported from a study of a merger that members of the dominant company felt a much stronger form of organizational identification than the members of the other company. Similarly, Larson and Pepper (2006) found in a takeover that members of the acquired company resisted the values of the acquiring company, as a result of what they termed 'identity tensions'. Van Dijk and van Dick (2009) found that change can undermine an employee's identity, particularly in terms of social status, while resistance to change undermines a change leader's identity as a person with power. It should also be emphasized that in addition to its cognitive and behavioural components, resistance to change is also affective (Piderit, 2000; Szabla, 2007), but the role of affect is frequently overlooked or Discounted as irrational (Domagalski, 1999). In the context of cultural change the

emotional elements, wrapped as they are in values and identity, are particularly salient. A number of other examples provide evidence of the dissatisfaction and alienation that can be experienced by employees when the culture changes. Eight years of structural change at GE, according to Huy (2001, p. 619), "left remaining employees reeling from cultural shock and its managers exhausted." Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006) found that when values were threatened by change in the tertiary education sector, employees responded with defensiveness, shock and lower levels of trust. Having conducted in-depth studies of two privatised organizations Elsmore (2001) concluded that changing the culture on a large scale is a long term endeavour and causes pain and anguish, particularly when the change is legislated in a top-down fashion. Brooks and Harfield (2000) report on a culture change programme in a local government authority from a civil service mentality to one of 'public management' where the user pays for a service. The cultural change programme, known as 'Giving Value - Being Valued', was considered inequitable since the 'Being Valued' component fell short of the effort expended by staff in 'Giving Value', and evoked negative emotions. At Hewlett-Packard strategy, structure and culture all changed with a new CEO (Forster, 2006). The family-culture of previous years gave way to one more focused on the individual and profit-sharing was replaced by individual performance measures. A number of disaffected staff resigned. Schein (2004, p. 309) points out that new leader, who are often brought in specifically to change the culture, need to deal with emotional reactions.

Research Methodology

For this study we have adopted a qualitative/social constructionist approach because it provides a useful way of understanding the three main constructs of organizational culture,

emotions and change, all of which have been subjected to social constructionist treatments in the literature. "A general assumption of social constructionist is that knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical, and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but is in some sense ideological, political and permeated with values" (Schwedt, 2003, p. 307). One of the major dimensions of organizational culture is a set of values (Schein, 1990; Martin, 2002) which are moulded by both intra- and inter-organizational forces (Standard Pedersen and Dobbin, 2006). Organizational cultures can be shaped by explicit management intervention but are also influenced by multiple employee (and managerial) discourses and sub-cultures so that there is often a divide between espoused and perceived values (Kabanoff et al., 1995). The social processes that enact the values "endow them with the meaning" (Rosen, 1991, p. 6), and, as Allen (2003) put it, organizational actors create, but are also constrained by, organizational meaning. The social constructionist perspective of emotions takes the view that emotions are phenomena that are culturally mediated (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001) and developed through interaction in social relationships. Cultural factors influence not merely the experience of specific emotions (such as shame, anger or pride) but also influence how appropriate their display is. Commenting on this approach Callahan and McCollum (2002, p. 14) indicate that "emotions are created or constructed as part of a common sense making process in social structures" and that "social constructionist knits together the personal and the social." Social constructionism underlies much of the literature on emotional labour (e.g. Mann, 1999; Bolton; 2005; Fineman, 2008). Zembylas (2006) notes that the feeling and display rules that operate in organizations are both contributors to, and outcomes of, organizational culture. Change

has also been the subject of social constructionist approaches. The way in which change is framed by various organizational actors (for example, as an exciting opportunity or a response to problems) can stimulate discourses about change (Bean and Hamilton, 2006; Mills, 2000; Ford, Ford and McNamara, 2002) that may or may not result in shared understandings. Resistance to change may be seen as culturally acceptable and negotiable - or as unacceptable as a barrier to be 'dealt with' or 'managed' (Dent and Goldberg, 1999; van Dijk and van Dick, 2009).

The emotions that people experience express or suppress during organizational change, are shaped by social relationships inside and outside the organization (Bryant and Wolfram Cox, 2006). To explore the interaction between organizational culture, change and emotions we interviewed 24 people in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2006 and 2007. There were 11 women and 13 men, 16 European, two Maori, three Asian and three of Pacific Island background. The participants came from a variety of industries, organizations, functional departments and hierarchical levels. They had experienced a wide range of changes including mergers, restructuring, redundancy, relocations, new systems and job redesign. Participants were sourced through management consultants who knew them so that we had no previous Relationship with them. The interview was part of a larger project on emotions and organizational change and one question participants were specifically asked was, how did the culture of the organization impact on your emotional responses to the change? Some commented on how the change had affected other employees and some also referred to the influence of organizational culture elsewhere in the interview. Part of the social construction of knowledge rests on how researchers select and

interpret interviewee comments. We drew up a table of the 24 participants and noted key issues and quotes from the transcripts that deal with organizational culture. We particularly looked for the emotional ramifications of changes to the culture, the influence of the affective culture, and for how positive and negative views of the existing culture impacted on their emotional reactions to any of the changes they were discussing. We also examined whether emotional support has been provided by leaders and managers of change and whether this was evidence of cultural norms. The analysis of the findings is, therefore, our reconstruction (Schwandt, 1998) of the dynamics of culture, emotions and organizational change.

Limitations

In the present research, we investigated individuals' perceptions of how culture affected their emotions during change events. This study, therefore, uses ideographic perceptions of organizational culture from individual subjects influenced by change. However, given that our focus has been on emotions in relation to change events, this approach is justified in our opinion. Methodological debates about researching organizational culture are as heated as they are in other areas of organizational behaviour (e.g. Rosen, 1991; Martin, 2002). The wider project covered many causes of emotional responses to change and therefore did not delve into the culture in as much depth as a more narrowly targeted study would. Quantitative studies within organizations and across national boundaries may give a much more detailed picture of organizational

culture, and its affective elements, and of the influences of nationality, ethnicity and gender. Ethnographic accounts could provide a deep and rich vein of material that is peculiar to an organization, such as those provided by van Maanen and Kunda (1989) Martin et al. (1998) and Elsmore (2001). Further research may have the capacity to more completely capture the many variables at play when considering emotional reactions to change events, such as emotional labour, perceived organizational support, organizational EI, systemic justice, sub-cultural issues, professional norms and gender factors. In addition, the roles of leaders in creating, sustaining and changing culture, and the degree to which they infuse culture with emotion needs deeper exploration.

Conclusion

Organizational change has the capacity to alter the culture, whether deliberately or not, and thereby influence people's emotional reactions. Conversely, the culture affects the way in which staffs respond to the change on an emotional level. Arguments have been advanced by researchers that organizational culture, change and emotions are socially constructed. Many have criticized the cynical way in which all these elements have been deliberately manipulated to control people and harness them to the organizational machine (Sturdy and Fineman, 2001; Zembylas, 2006). Yet if employee engagement is to be authentic organizations need to create cultures sufficiently strong to embrace change without altering their fundamental ethos and to develop an acceptance that emotions are a natural part of organizational culture

and organizational change. This study has contributed to the literature by integrating affective culture with other elements of an organization's culture and by presenting ideographic accounts that reveal how participants in change believe the affective aspects of organizational culture shaped their emotional reactions. Dramatic changes faced by organizations in the economic crisis, developing in late 2008 and mushrooming in 2009, have strained and altered organizational cultures and put an emotional burden on staff. The lessons from our research study should be of benefit to managers struggling to maintain, adjust or blend organizational cultures and deal with the emotional outcomes for staff.

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