

Interactive Learning Techniques - Vibrant Organisations

Organisational Culture:

Keeping it young and vibrant

→ At any one time all organisations are in a state of change or development, whether intended or not. This truism is however often ignored or at least avoided as organisations strive towards the concept of 'perfect'. Occasionally a period of smooth running and favourable market conditions can lull an organisation into believing they have found the perfect formula. Unfortunately this can breed thinking such as "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" which is probably the first step to extinction for any organisation. On the other hand acknowledging that change is afoot and that 'perfect' is a

shifting target can keep your organisation young, vibrant and willing to tackle new opportunities.

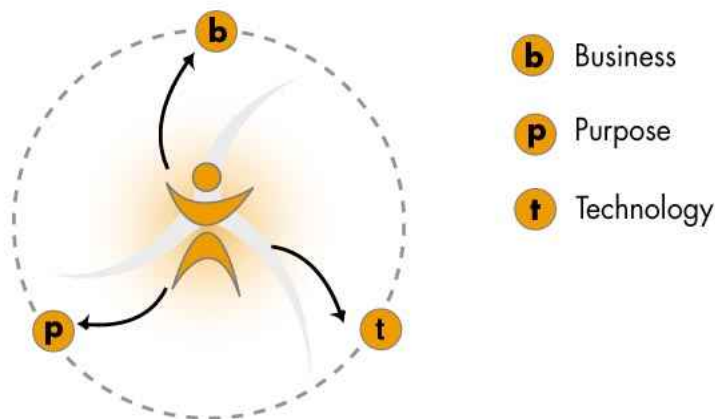
To better understand an organisation that is continuously changing consider the following perspectives, or views, of the organisation as a starting point:

The Business perspective

Informed by the vision and mission, the business provides goals and strategies for sales, marketing, operations, HRM, and financial management. This perspective will tell us if we are doing the right things and also doing things right.

The Purpose perspective

What the business does, what is core and what is context, what is working, what is not. For a bank it's about managing money, for a restaurant it's about managing food and service, for charity it's about providing people in need with services and resources. Purpose entails the operational aspect of the organisation.



The Technology perspective

Technology is really a euphemism for value-adding processes and supporting procedures, organisational knowledge and information systems. These processes may be analogue or digital, manual or automated, written down or tacit. They are however usually critical to the purpose of the business.

The People perspective

People are equally affected by, and affect, all perspectives and in addition to the HRM aspect require a steady diet of learning and growth to deliver increased performance at the individual, team and organisational levels.

In the words of Tom Peters “Soft is hard”

As well as these four perspectives of an organisation two other elements are required to provide the skin and the bones, culture and structure respectively. While structure is concrete and easily shown through skeleton charts and procedures etc, culture is abstract, intangible and often hidden. Culture is often the

invisible driving force and competitive advantage that differentiates your organisation from the rest, whether you are a school, engineering firm or political party.

Culture and structure both define and are defined by the business, purpose, technology and people.

Yet we continually tinker with structure in organisations thinking that changing the reporting hierarchy or creating a new division will somehow magically turn us into a modern, self-empowered, leadership driven organisation that everyone else looks up to. Unfortunately structure is mainly passive and it is only by continually tinkering with the active component, culture, that we can perpetrate real change and improvement.

Structure is ‘hard’ and easy to change while culture is ‘soft’ and in the words of Tom Peters “soft is hard”. The first obvious step is the alignment of the business, purpose, technology and people (and the structure they work within). Yet this is where most organisations either stop in their development or continually repeat

the reorganisation process (and the same mistakes). What is usually missing or given only token recognition is the culture, and culture itself is complex and needs to be approached differently at the individual, group and organisational levels, for example:

- A risk taking culture will change the business strategy and planning.
- A culture of excellence will define the product design.
- A culture of efficiency and customer service will define the procedures and technology requirements.
- A culture of teamwork and support for innovation will attract and retain the best people.
- A culture of trust and responsibility will reduce the need for a structure of supervision and blame.

When culture starts to emerge or is shaped it then starts to have an impact on all the other perspectives of the organisation.

The best business managers, technology and management practices are now considered as standard requirements for competing in the 21st century. Yet increasingly research is showing that culture is the key to succeeding and young and vibrant cultures will adapt faster! So if you are not defining your organisational culture, who is?x

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