

Chapter 1

Organizational Culture: History and Definition, Conceptualizing Organizational Culture, Organizational Culture Models, Measuring Organizational Culture

ABSTRACT

This chapter gives a comprehensive review of the literature on organizational culture. It examines the history and definition of organizational culture and the diverse approaches used to conceptualize it. It also sets out some of the different organizational culture models, emphasizing the Denison model with its four types of culture (mission, adaptability, involvement, and consistency). This chapter also covers the concept of national culture and uses the dimensions of Hofstede's model to shed light on the national culture of UAE, which has common characteristics with other cultures in different regions. It sets out different approaches to measuring organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

History and Definition

The significance of organizational culture was recognized for the first time at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. In industrial firms, organizational culture was used to explain the low productivity environment and why rules and procedures failed to improve unhealthy relationships between supervisors and subordinates (Jaques, 1951). Thirty years later, another new concept of organizational culture was introduced: the idea of culture as the social fabric of the organization, contributing to the collective process of establishing a unique organizational character (Pettigrew, 1979). Since then, a number of other definitions have been suggested, for example, considering organizational culture as a factor that differentiates between organizations on the basis of employee mindset, or “The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another” (G. Hofstede, 2004). Other researchers focused on the long-term beliefs characterizing groups and companies (Cameron & Quinn, 2005). Perhaps the most common definition is of organizational culture as a pattern of norms, values, beliefs, assumptions and attitudes that influences behavior within an organization (Chin-Loy & Mujtaba, 2007; Schein, 2010).

Conceptualizing Organizational Culture

The literature also conceptualized organizational culture in different ways. Some researchers suggested that culture can be seen as a series of levels. Schein (2010), for example, identified three levels of organizational culture. The first level is symbols and artifacts, and covers communications, songs, words, and pictures that have a precise meaning for employees plus language, mythologies, costumes, and the space where the organization operates. This layer is considered to be closest to the surface and can be identified by observation. The second layer is the espoused values, or the organizational values that have been set out by managers as the most essential for the organization (Schein, 2010). The espoused values will not necessarily be accepted in the same way by all employees, and in some cases, they will be most powerful when they are not written, but held in employees' unconscious mind and used as a guide when making decisions (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013). The third layer identified by Schein (2010) was the underlying assumptions,

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