

Chapter 5

Building an Ethical Culture in the Post-Bureaucratic Era: Empowerment, Dialogue, and Virtue

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a framework for achieving an ethical culture in the post-bureaucratic era. The authors emphasize the necessity of informal dialogue and employee empowerment, and examine the role that personal values have in the post-bureaucratic work environment. Next, this chapter explores the appraisal of personal values and asserts that modern organizations will need similar strategies in order to identify and develop an effective ethical culture. The last portion of this chapter addresses three employee virtues that are helpful in the design and implementation of an ethical culture. Over and above appraising the values of an organization, this chapter provides a modern account for the definition of values and discusses methods for appraising each virtue while also proposing some alternatives for measuring employee loyalty, integrity and perseverance.

INTRODUCTION

In the age of modernity both private and public organizations have adopted different forms. At least some of these operations are guided by the philosophy that the development of a healthy organization will depend on the implementation of an ethical culture. The success of an organization will also rely heavily on a team-centered approach, which amongst other issues, recognizes the benefit of informal dialogue, and group and individual empowerment in achieving collective goals (Block, 1999; Emery & Trist, 1960; Huselid, 1995; Lines, 2004; Weisbord, 1987; Wilson, DeJoy, Vandenberg, Richardson, & McGrath, 2004). In the midst of achieving these goals it is also necessary to consider the benefits of an inclusive workplace that clarifies the role of personal values and seeks to promote the cultiva-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3917-9.ch005

tion of virtues in the post-bureaucratic organization. This chapter sets out to establish that modern post-bureaucratic operations require careful analysis and deconstruction of ethical values. Through the investigation of personal values, a new foundation will emerge which will assist in framing and defining a genuine and balanced ethical culture that promotes an inclusive work environment and fosters the in the post-bureaucratic organization.

Informal Dialogue and Employee Empowerment

Empowerment is currently a popular topic on which consultants and management have focused, their desire being to bring about increases in employee proactivity and self-management. The belief has been that these changes in employee behaviour will assist organizations in achieving their goals. The literature has, however, been equivocal about how justified these beliefs are. This may be due in part to the existence of a great variety of definitions that has interfered with the achievement of conceptual clarity. How empowerment has been defined changes according to the context in which it is used. Non-management conceptions define empowerment through a notion of powerlessness and oppression. It is perceived as the transformation of those without power into equitable partners (Lincoln, Travers, Ackers, & Wilkinson, 2002). West (1990) has maintained that empowerment must not be defined simply as the giving away or gaining of power, but as the eradication of oppressive power and the enablement of the whole population to enter a free and fair world. However, this definition is very “cosmic” and adds little to one’s understanding of the concept as it occurs in the management literature beyond reminding us that in some of its permutations, it can be a politically radical and utopian ideal. And the nature of this ideal hints at the potential problems created by its application to the business environment notwithstanding that there have been demonstrations of its value (Robbins & Langton, 2003, p. 383).

BACKGROUND

Empowerment and Its Use by Management

In the management literature, effective organizations are characterized as those that produce excellent results by any measure of costs, quality, or efficiency while simultaneously enhancing the energy and commitment of organizational members to the success of the enterprise. This “energy and commitment” is frequently part of the empowerment definition adopted by North American organizations (Forrester, 2000). The belief has been that encouraging the creation of conditions that will foster employee decision-making will translate into organizational benefits (e.g., Wetlaufer, 1999). And this is a particularly topical consideration given that many business organizations in Canada and the United States face increasing pressures from international competition, governmental regulation and their own internal ineffectiveness and inefficiencies. Moreover, each year, organizations have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to transform their information management systems with the expectation that through significant technological change equally significant organizational performance improvement will occur. However, a 1996 survey conducted by Standish Group International, Inc. has shown that:

- A staggering 73% of “big information-systems” project implementations fail to meet their target expectations;

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