

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL CULTURE AND THE SHADOW LIFE OF ORGANIZATIONS

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I. Introduction: the "feel" of schools.

- A. Feeling culture as an outsider
- B. Feeling culture when you attempt to change it.

II. What is school or organizational culture?

- A. A concept from anthropology, one of many ways to look at a school; the others are:
 - 1. Human resources view (Psychology)
 - 2. Formal structure and operation (Sociology)
 - 3. School constituencies (Political Science)
 - 4. Market mechanisms (Economics)
- B. The difficulty in seeing a "school" that is already part of our own culture.
 - 1. Why teach reading and numbers? (Sarason)
 - 2. The assumption of an underlying order and alternatives to it is a cultural assumption.
- C. Definitions of culture:
 - 1. Common meanings (Schein): Observed behavioral regularities; norms; dominant values espoused philosophy; rules of the game; feeling or climate.
 - 2. Schein's definition: The deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic "taken-for-granted" fashion an organizations' view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problem of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration.
 - 3. Schein's three levels: (a) artifacts and creations; (b) values; (c) basic assumptions.
 - 4. Deal and Peterson's definition: "The concept of culture is meant to describe the character of a school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of its history...Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time.

5. Sarason: "...acculturation is directed to shaping a person's definition of reality, not only what is but what it should be."
6. Bower (quoted in Deal and Kennedy): "The way we do things around here."

III. Why is it necessary to understand culture?

- A. It is a time of questioning and attack on mainstream culture: the patriarchy, white society and its racist assumptions, the attacks on the U.S. from abroad for cultural domination.
- B. Multi-culturalism demands insight into our own cultural assumptions.
- C. Cultural blocks to effective learning, teaching, cooperation, etc.

IV. The function of culture in an organization.

- A. External adaptation and internal integration.
- B. Defining the school's major external survival problem, mission, and primary task.
 1. Goals
 2. Means
 3. Criteria for success
 4. Correction and remediation
- C. Maintaining the relationships within the organization and accomplishing the tasks.
 1. Common language and conceptual categories
 2. Group boundaries
 3. Power and status
 4. Intimacy, friendship and love
 5. Rewards and punishments
 6. Ideology and "religion"

V. The leader and school culture.

- A. Leadership as cultural expression (Sergiovanni)
- B. Leader as culture manager (Schein)
- C. The roles of symbolic leaders (Deal and Peterson)
 1. Head as symbol
 2. Head as potter
 3. Head as poet
 4. Head as actor
 5. Head as healer

VI. The culture contains the "Shadow" aspect of human life.

- A. The "shadow" is denied, but lives in the deepest assumptions of the culture.
- B. The deepest assumptions are unconscious to those that hold them, and obvious to outsiders.
 - 1. Jung: the shadow in bright sunlight
- C. Defensiveness is the classic reaction to exposure.
- D. The leader as articulator and acknowledger of the "shadow."
 - 1. Modeling courage and honesty
 - 2. Blind spots are inevitable
- E. Leader conflict between honesty and optimism.

VII. Understanding the nature of your own school's culture.

- A. The dialogue of the insider and the outsider.
 - 1. Therapy is the model, a clinical process.
- B. Is the school "ready" for insight?
- C. Schein's ten-step process of cultural assessment.
 - 1. Pushing through to the level of assumptions
 - 2. The superficiality of culture tests
- D. Analyzing the deepest assumptions of culture. Group interviews on specific dimensions.
 - 1. What are the school's basic assumptions about itself?
 - 2. What are the school's basic assumptions about reality?
 - 3. What basic assumptions are held about human nature and how are they applied to student, teachers and administrators?
 - 4. What are the basic assumptions about the nature of human activity?
 - 5. What are the school's basic assumptions about the nature of human relationships, love and aggression?