

Description and Analysis of an Organisation's Structure and Culture

INTRODUCTION

Maureen Guirdham defines culture as “an imperfectly shared system of interrelated understanding, shaped by its members’ shared history and experiences.” (2005, p. 43) The purpose of this paper is to research and analyse aspects of the structure and culture of Star Link, a private not-for-profit health organization based in North Carolina. Star Link includes 13 hospitals and more than 1,000 physicians in 360 different locations in the US. Susan Pearson represents the person interviewed for this paper. She is a senior public relations and marketing specialist within the public relations and marketing department of the company. Star Link uses many aspects of bureaucracy to structure the organization but tries to foster an opposite approach when considering the company’s culture. The paper will focus on the organization as a whole but in particular on the public relations and marketing department of Star Link. After explaining the methods used to collect the data, a description and an analysis of the structure and culture of Star Link follows. Recommendations to improve weaknesses are made at the end.

METHODOLOGY

Primary and secondary research was used to conduct this paper. Secondary research was used to find additional information about organizational structure and culture as well as the organization Star Link itself. Primary research consists of observation during an internship at Star Link as well as an interview with Pearson. The interview represents the main information source for this paper. There are many advantages to an interview. According to Downs and Adrian “the skilful interviewing of employees is one of the richest means of diagnosing an organization’s communication dynamics.” (2004, p. 76) Interviewers obtain firsthand experience with the company that allows them to gather information which would be impossible when using an electronic approach. In addition, interviewees are able to provide more information in a shorter amount of time than they are able in a survey. In general, people like to talk about themselves, which motivates them and interviewers might be able to gather information they did not expect before the research. However, interviews still have limitations. Downs and Adrian list analysis, perceptual data and time as the main interview disadvantages. (2004, p. 78) Firstly, it is hard to interpret and value the information that has been given to the interviewer. In addition, the interviewee’s personal perception also has to be taken in consideration. It is possible that other employees of the same

company have a different perception. Therefore, it needs a great deal of time as well as money to use this kind of research method.

ORGANIZATION CHART

The organization chart of Star Link's public relations and marketing department shows the hierarchy as well as differentiation and specialization within the department (Cheney, Christense, Zorn & Ganesh, 2011, p. 20-22). The Star Link hierarchy consists of many vertical levels which represent positions with different amount of power. The higher a position within the hierarchy is placed the more power it has. In the case of Star Link, the Chief Administrative Officer is the person with the most power and interns the least. Looking at the chart from a horizontal perspective, differentiation and specialization can be found. The department is divided into different units which perform different tasks for different regions such as the web centre, the marketing and public relations (Coastal Market, Central Piedmont Market and Charlotte Market), government relations, executive assistant, corporate communications manager and different public relations and marketing specialists. Pearson said in the interview that within the department everyone has some sort of communication or English degree and they are mostly women. The managers are skilled writers and many of them received their master of business administration as well.

STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The Star Link employee chart shows a large number of similarities with Weber's theory of bureaucracy. It shows a clear defined hierarchy of positions. People in the management positions of the chart resemble those who have worked their way up to the top. They have been employed because of their qualifications for a specific position and earn a fixed amount of money. Bureaucracy also means that the power in an organization is centralized and the top management decides who will be rewarded for their achievements. Pearson says that if employees of Star Link want to be recognized and receive a promotion the thing they have to do is to work hard. "You have got to be committed to why you are doing what you do, not just knowing you need to get it done. Compassion is visible in the eyes of managers."

Star Link is a large organization that has a high number of employees; therefore, structure is necessary in order to succeed. Departments have to be divided into different levels to work effectively. However, too many levels can cause delays or even stop the message flow inside the department. The more levels that are established, the longer it takes until the message reaches the upper management. This can be caused by different things such as fear of punishment or disdain,

people's different perception of the message value, misunderstanding of the message or bad communication.

Through specialisation, employees of different units in the department have different education and use different languages to communicate. For example, the web centre, where people studied in the field of information technology, uses a specific jargon as well as the public relations workers who received education in communication. Both languages are different from each other. This connects people inside one unit but at the same time this can have an alienation effect for those people outside of a specific unit. (Cheney, et al., 2011) Nevertheless, the office setup of the PR and marketing department of Star Link makes it unavoidable for its employees from different units not to interact with each other. Their cubicles and offices are side by side and they have to share common areas such as supply room, coffee and lunch area.

CULTURE ASPECTS

Pearson says that one of the best things about the company is its culture. "Staff really does put the patient first. We're known for our kindness and compassion, which I think is of vital importance in healthcare. We also take on serious issues, like safety. We endeavoured on a hand washing campaign to decrease hospital-acquired infections and are now nationally recognized for our efforts. Same goes for serious safety events. We want to be proud of our reputation for ensuring best outcomes."

Narratives

"We believe in using the basic art of storytelling as a communication tool." (Star Link, n.d.) The goal of these stories is to have a positive impact on people inside and outside of the organization, highlight the dedication of the employees as well as create an organization wide passion for the company's vision statement. Star Link's vision is to "deliver the most remarkable patient experience, in every dimension, every time." (Star Link, n.d.) The organization compiled many of these employee stories in two volumes of the book One Person at a Time. According to Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, storytelling has a great impact on people's performance because it is inspiring, which helps people to do a better job in the future. (1983, p. 139)

Values

Pearson believes in the mission and values of the company. During the interview she said, "I believe it's easy to do good work when you believe in what you do. I have the wonderful opportunity to touch lives every day in a very small but significant way by supporting the great work of our doctors, nurses and staff."

The values of Star Link are as follows:

- Compassion: We treat our customers and their families, staff and other healthcare providers as family members with kindness, patience, empathy and respect.
- Diversity: We recognize that every person is different, each shaped by unique life experiences. This enables us to better understand each other and our customers.
- Personal Excellence: We strive to grow personally and professionally and approach each service opportunity with a positive, flexible attitude. Honesty and personal integrity guide all we do.
- Teamwork: The needs and expectations of any one customer are greater than what one person's service efforts can satisfy. We support each other so that together as a team, we can be successful in the eye of the customer as a quality service provider. (Star Link, n.d.)

Communication through personal appearance

Personal appearance plays an important role in the public's perception of employees as professionals and Star Link as an organization. Accordingly, Star Link has implemented the professional image policy to provide guidelines for dress and appearance for different departments. The organizations wants that all employees bring the message across that they are professional and take their job seriously. Consequently, no matter what position one might hold in the company it is important to wear appropriate clothes and look suited for the situation. The dress code for people working in the public relations and marketing department is expected to be "on the more formal side of business casual". (Pearson) Everybody is expected to maintain a neat, well-groomed appearance at all times. However, in all cases attire must be appropriate to the care setting and employees are expected to use good judgement as to when it is appropriate to dress more formally. General guidelines which apply to everybody include no extreme makeup, hairstyle, clothing and tattoos, no strong perfumes, moustaches must be neatly trimmed and all employees must wear a name tag that identifies them as employees of the company. An abuse of the dress code may even result in disciplinary action.

CULTURE ANALYSIS

According to Edgar Schein (2004), a culture can be analysed in three different sections and each section differs in the visibility of the cultural aspect to the examiner. All of Schein's sections enforce one another. The first section of culture is called artefacts and represents the most apparent organizational structures and processes. In the case of Star Link, artefacts would be the dress code as well as the company's stories. The second section, espoused values, includes aspects that are important for the organization and that are communicated on a regular basis. (Cheney, et al., 2011)

Star Link's values form and influence the appearance guidelines as well as the stories that are told. If an organization has more than one value, following these values simultaneously can cause conflicts.

John Meyer states that the issue on agreeing on these values is an ongoing process within an organization. (1995) The different departments of an organization apply the company values to their specific field of work. This can cause different priorities and goals for various departments within the company and create disagreements between those groups. In addition, narrative expression of values can be contradictory if applied to the whole organization. Schein's third section, called the basic underlying assumptions, includes aspects of the culture that individuals believe to be true but there is no certainty that they are right.

Even though Star Link represents many aspects of a bureaucracy when looking at its structure the organization tries to communicate by following the model of Ideal Managerial Climate (IMC). (Cheney, et al., 2011) This means the organization tries to create a healthy atmosphere at work through supportiveness, trust, openness, emphasis on high-performance goals and participative decision-making. Visible is this approach especially through the company's vision statement. While bureaucracy means to strictly separate work from private life, Star Link encourages employees to treat each other and everybody else as family members and build a personal relationship with these people and the company. Through values such as teamwork and personal excellence the organization encourages worker to be supportive as well as flexible at work.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The culture Star Link creates within its company does not agree with the structure the organization has. There are conflicts in how the organization works inside and how it wants to be seen from the outside. In order to be a successful company where employees enjoy to work and customers feel they are in good hands, Star Link needs to rethink how it wants to position itself. The structure of the company should agree with its values and for what the organization stands for. If employees do not know what Star Link represents they won't be able to do a good job. Star Link should try to work towards its values not only outside but also inside of the company.

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