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Creation of a Culture Strategy

Seminar Paper

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Introduction (Sanja Bako)

The importance of organizational culture in determining the operational environment of businesses is being emphasized more and more in current business discourse (Zheng et al., 2010). As discussions intensify around the importance of organizational culture in delineating how businesses operate, critical challenges related to its creation, maintenance, and the subsequent measurement of its success come to the forefront. This is especially evident when a company changes leadership, sparking concerns about how to sustain the distinctive method of working that characterizes the organization (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

This scenario underscores the intricate challenge organizations face during board member transitions, where they must adeptly navigate evolving leadership dynamics while safeguarding the fundamental cultural elements that define their corporate identity.

Organizational culture is recognized as the driving force behind a company, encompassing its values, beliefs, and how people behave (Alvesson, 2002). Its significance is seen in its widespread influence across various aspects of a company's operations, including decision-making, employee engagement, and overall effectiveness. However, maintaining corporate culture successfully during leadership transitions is a demanding challenge (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). It requires finding a balance between adapting to new leadership dynamics and conserving the fundamental values that shape a company's identity. This paper aims to illustrate, through overviews of strategic frameworks and practical case examples, the diverse strategies undertaken by organizations to facilitate a seamless transition of board members while meticulously safeguarding their cultural underpinnings.

Theoretical Foundation (Dan Ah Kim)

Generally, organizational culture encapsulates a collective set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that profoundly influence the employee experience and behaviors within a company. Described as a "silent code of conduct" by Pellet in 2009, organizational culture isn't a codified set of written laws but rather patterns of behavior that manifest themselves repeatedly through leadership behaviors, communication styles, internally distributed messages, corporate celebrations, and spoken and unspoken rules, such as dress code, benefits, or workspace design. As noted by Watkins (2013), culture acts as "a social control system," establishing the parameters of what kind of professional behaviors the leaders and

members in the organization deem as "right" or "wrong." Founders and leadership have a strong influence in shaping and developing the organizational culture, as they assume the forefront role and actively communicate their cultural identities to both current employees and prospective hires (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023). Furthermore, there isn't just one culture in an organization but several subcultures. These subcultures, including local cultures in transnational companies, while not universally embraced, have the potential to diversify and enhance the core values of the organization.

Quinn and Cameron (1983) devised a central cultural framework that delineates four types of organizational cultures. Clan culture, also known as collaborative culture, thrives within closely-knit groups sharing commonalities, often found in health care, education, and not-for-profit sectors. Adhocracy culture, or create culture, works best in dynamic environments such as startups, which value high-risk, high-return scenarios and individual freedom and initiatives. Market culture, or compete culture, emphasizes deadlines and results, and they are prevalent in sectors like marketing and manufacturing. Lastly, the Hierarchy of control culture is characterized by strict procedures and clear direction. Leaders value efficient coordination, and therefore, this culture is commonly found in sectors like the military and banking.

As highlighted by human resources coach Sathish Kumar (2020), strong cultures foster effective communication, a climate of respect, and a shared vision. These elements contribute to diminished conflict, a strong sense of solidarity, improved collaboration, and mutual trust among team members. Moreover, the decision-making process becomes more efficient, especially within an informal mechanism. Ultimately, a positive culture becomes the ground for better performance and a reduced employee turnover rate.

A positive organizational culture yields numerous advantages, while the absence of one can negatively impact employees, leadership, and the whole organization. A toxic organizational culture results in disengagement and a high turnover rate, subsequently leading to reduced performance and productivity. According to Gallup Survey (Gallup, 2013), disengaged employees cost U.S. businesses an estimated $450 billion to $550 annually in lost productivity. Additionally, a study conducted by Columbia University revealed that companies with a negative culture experience a 48.4 percent job turnover rate, compared to a significantly lower rate of 13.9 percent in organizations with a positive culture (Siu, 2014).

Besides, Watkins (2013) claims that culture acts as a lens through which employees interpret and rationalize their behaviors when working with individuals from diverse backgrounds. It clarifies the "why" behind their work, thereby serving as a means to regulate or integrate people into the organization.

Critical Challenges of Organizational Culture (Dan Ah Kim)

A transnational organization can be defined, according to Oxford Reference (n.d.), as a company that "is controlled from its home country but has significant operations in many different countries." It is distinct from multinational or global companies, as transnational companies have a more specific focus on a particular market, are typically smaller in size, and most notably operate with less centralized management based in their home country (MBA in Simple Words, 2022).

Therefore, in accordance with its characteristics, transnational organizations must grapple with both personal and contextual cultural conflicts arising between the local management and the headquarters in the home country (Taras et al., 2021). These conflicts encompass differences in communication styles, decision-making approaches, and conflict-resolution methods, further complicated by linguistic diversity and unconscious biases, as outlined in the SHRM toolkit (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023). An illustrative example is depicted in the documentary "Empire of Dust" (mstdve, 2011), which shows the struggles faced by a Chinese state-funded company, CREC, during a railway construction project in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The cultural conflicts between the Chinese management team and Congolese contractors become evident, with the Chinese employing indirect communication, emphasizing implied meanings showing great respect for authority and seniority, often taking time to save face and make decisions. In contrast, the Congolese exhibit a more direct and explicit communication style, a flexible attitude, and a willingness to give more freedom to individuals.

The company's headquarters not only safeguard the preservation of core values in local branches but also honor the varied expectations that employees hold for their leaders across different national cultures. This dual commitment is crucial for securing the business within specific local contexts. Diversity inspires creativity and innovation, helps wealth and diverse insight, attracts and retains talents, and offers opportunities for growth to the employees. However, some cultures might not be put on the same footing as others; prejudices and

negative cultural stereotypes can get in the way of collaboration; professional communication might be hindered due to misunderstanding of nuances across languages or cultures; and various legal measures must be considered in order to accommodate transnational employees (Reynolds, 2018).

Creation of a Culture Strategy (Panida Naowarat Nowa)

In the realm of organizational dynamics and global business operations, the profound impact of culture cannot be overstated. As Lewis (1996) once stated, "Different languages, different worlds" (p. 3). While often linked to linguistic diversity, 'languages' extends beyond spoken languages to include diverse cultural influences on perspectives, values, and actions. Lewis (1996) further highlighted cultural differences by articulating, "For a German and a Finn, the truth is the truth. In Japan and Britain, it is all right if it doesn't rock the boat. In China, there is no absolute truth. In Italy it is negotiable" (p. 3). This statement illuminates diverse truth perceptions and underscores the dynamic nature of cultural norms.

This revelation is especially pertinent in multinational organizations striving for harmony between central and diverse local cultures (Taras et al., 2021). Organizations must carefully bridge gaps and align divergent cultural elements without compromising integrity, leveraging cultural diversity as a strategic asset for success (Jones et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2023). This can be accomplished by adopting a comprehensive approach that incorporates the following strategic suggestions.

Setting Clear Core Values

The foundational step in formulating an effective culture strategy involves setting clear core values. These values act as guiding principles, shaping the organization's identity and beliefs (Ertosun & Adiguzel, 2018). A strong core values foundation provides a decision-making framework aligning with both the central plant's and local organizational culture.

Recruitment and Selection

Aligning recruitment with the organization's core beliefs ensures new hires seamlessly integrate into the organizational culture and contribute positively to the local culture (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023). The strategy emphasizes identifying candidates who share values and have the potential to thrive within the cultural context (Bouton, 2022).

Orientation

Organizations should offer orientation programs for employees, providing a deep understanding of both the central plant's and local organizational cultures (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023). Insights into cultural norms, communication styles, and work ethics enable better integration and contribute to overall success (Taras et al., 2021).

Addressing Implicit Cultural Differences

According to Taras et al. (2021), addressing implicit cultural differences is vital for effective communication in a diverse workforce. For example, when a Japanese employee interacts with a German counterpart, potential miscommunication arises from differing styles. To mitigate this, implement empowering, inclusive work designs to ensure all voices are heard, fostering open communication and mutual understanding.

Adapting and Achieving Equilibrium

The ability to adapt and find a balance between central and local cultural aspects is crucial (Lisak & Harush, 2021). This necessitates a flexible approach that acknowledges and harmonizes both cultural viewpoints. By being adaptive, organizations can formulate policies and practices that not only respect cultural diversity but also promote it, thereby fostering a harmonious and inclusive workplace (Lisak & Harush, 2021; Molinsky, 2014).

Training and Performance Management

Incorporating culture-specific training programs is vital, especially for leaders who play a pivotal role in shaping the organizational culture (Ertosun & Adiguzel, 2018). Leadership training should focus on inclusivity, approachability, and cultural sensitivity, equipping leaders to navigate diverse cultural dynamics effectively (Tanneau & McLoughlin, 2021). Performance management programs should reinforce the organization's core values, ensuring alignment with cultural expectations (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023).

Rewards and Recognition Programs

Implementing rewards and recognition programs that align with the organization's core values fosters a positive cultural environment (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023). Recognizing and celebrating achievements in a culturally sensitive manner reinforces

desired behaviors and motivates employees to actively contribute to the shared organizational culture (Stein et al., 2021).

Monitoring and Adapting

Continuous monitoring of the culture strategy's effectiveness is essential. Regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and adaptability to changing cultural dynamics ensure that the strategy remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the organization and its workforce (Molinsky, 2014; Society for Human Resource Management, 2023).

Walmart in Germany: A Case of Cultural Misalignment

Walmart's unsuccessful venture in Germany can be analyzed through the lens of the proposed culture strategies. The American retail giant's failure is attributed to its inability to adapt to the German retail market, underestimating local competition, and cultural insensitivity (Knorr & Arndt, 2003).

Walmart's core values, successful elsewhere, did not align with German expectations and regulations. This was further exacerbated by clashes with German labor laws and trade unions, indicating a lack of alignment between its recruitment strategy and local employment practices. The orientation strategy was insufficient, resulting in a misalignment of organizational and local cultures. Implicit cultural differences were not adequately addressed, causing misunderstandings and operational issues. Walmart struggled to adapt its strategies to the distinct German cultural aspects, hindering successful integration.

Recommendations for success involve a comprehensive restructuring of Walmart's culture strategy in Germany. A deep understanding of local culture is imperative, allowing Walmart to align its operations with local expectations. Adapting core values to reflect the German preference for structure and order is essential. Orientation programs should incorporate training on German cultural norms, communication styles, and work ethics. Achieving equilibrium necessitates striking a balance between Walmart's customer service focus and the German value for privacy. Leadership training should prioritize cultural sensitivity, empowering leaders to navigate diverse cultural dynamics effectively. Finally, continuous monitoring and adaptation involve staying informed about changes in German culture and consumer behavior, enabling timely adjustments to strategies.

Measuring the Success of a Culture Strategy (Mithun Kumar Das)

Organizational culture is a critical driver of success in modern business environments, affecting employee behavior, innovation, and overall organizational performance. As organizations increasingly recognize the importance of cultivating a positive and effective culture, the need to measure the success of organizational culture strategies becomes paramount. There are different types of effective methods to assess the success of a culture strategy of an organization. These Methods could be quantitative approaches or qualitative approaches.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Measuring the success of organizational culture strategies is crucial, and KPIs are powerful tools for this task. These metrics, which track important factors like employee engagement, turnover rates, and productivity, offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of cultural initiatives. Through assessing these metrics regularly, an organization can measure the effectiveness of its strategies. A study from Kotrba et al. (2012) highlights the importance of KPIs even more, revealing a strong correlation between a positive culture and increased employee engagement. This reiterates the importance of consistently monitoring KPIs to gauge the impact of cultural interventions and drive continuous progress and development (Tedla, 2016).

Employee Feedback Surveys

Employee feedback surveys are essential for gaining valuable insights into how individuals perceive and experience a company's culture. These surveys gather qualitative data that can reveal areas of excellence and opportunities for growth within the organizational culture. As a company renowned for its exceptional workplace culture, Google regularly utilizes these surveys named 'Googlegeist' (Hakobyan, 2022); 'Pulse Surveys' (Styr, 2021) to gather employee feedback on various aspects of their environment. By leveraging this data, organizations can make informed decisions and shape their culture to meet the unique needs and preferences of their workforce (Bock, 2015).

Leadership Alignment

The relationship between leadership and organizational culture is essential in achieving success. Leaders are instrumental in creating and maintaining a positive culture, and their

dedication to cultural values significantly impacts employee actions. An organization can use methods like 360 reviews or board evaluation to assess the alignment of leadership with its culture. This is exemplified by Southwest Airlines, a company renowned for its strong organizational culture, which places great importance on aligning leadership with its values (Couch, 2023). By ensuring that leaders embody and uphold the desired cultural traits, organizations can greatly improve the authenticity and effectiveness of their cultural efforts (Gittell, 2005).

Impact on Organizational Performance

The assessment of organizational culture strategies is essential in determining their influence on overall performance. Experts assert that a positive organizational culture is closely linked to financial prosperity, employee well-being, and innovation (Cameron & Quinn, 2005). This is evident in the success stories of prominent organizations such as Zappos (Gallo, 2021) and Netflix (Dudovskiy, 2023), which attribute their accomplishments to a distinct culture that fosters inventiveness and flexibility. By carefully analyzing financial indicators, innovation metrics, and employee satisfaction ratings, we can gain a comprehensive insight into the impact of culture on organizational success (Hsieh, 2010; McCord, 2018).

Continuous Improvement

To achieve lasting success, organizations must prioritize implementing effective strategies for organizational culture. This means constantly striving for improvement, as the business world is ever-evolving. A notable example of this is Toyota, renowned for its commitment to continuous progress through the Kaizen principle (Liker, 2020). By regularly reviewing key performance indicators, actively seeking input from employees, and flexibly adjusting cultural initiatives in response to changing demands, companies can cultivate a culture that is highly adaptable and resilient.

Social Network Analysis

In today's interconnected world, the use of social network analysis (SNA) has become paramount in evaluating the effectiveness of organizational culture strategies. Through analyzing communication patterns, information flow, and collaboration networks within a company, leaders have the opportunity to understand the informal structures that greatly impact culture. Studies by Cross and Parker highlight the crucial role of social networks in

shaping organizational culture and emphasize the value of mapping these networks to uncover hidden dynamics essential for achieving cultural success (Cross & Parker, 2004).

Diversity and Inclusion Metrics

Organizations must include diversity and inclusion measures in their evaluation methods to promote an organizational culture that celebrates and embraces individual differences. Leading companies like Microsoft and Salesforce understand the importance of diversity and have infused diversity objectives into their cultural approaches, acknowledging that a diverse workforce leads to increased innovation and more effective decision-making (Microsoft, 2023; Salesforce, 2023). By tracking diversity-related statistics such as recruitment, retention, and promotion rates, organizations can gauge the inclusivity of their overall culture.

Benchmarking Against Industry Standards

When organizations benchmark against industry standards, they gain a valuable perspective on the effectiveness of their culture strategies. Analyzing 'how an organization's culture measures up against industry norms' can provide valuable insights into areas where they may have competitive advantages or areas that need improvement. This type of comparison can be especially helpful when organizations are trying to align their culture strategies with emerging trends and industry best practices (Gordon, 1991).

Ensuring the Long-Term Viability (Sanja Bako)

Board member transitions pose a critical challenge to the long-term viability and sustainability of organizations (Peng, 2003). This segment explores strategies such as embedding cultural values, creating comprehensive strategic documentation, fostering continuous communication, and integrating succession planning and real case examples to ensure the smooth transition of board members while preserving and institutionalizing organizational values.

Institutionalization of Values

A foundational aspect of sustaining organizational culture during board transitions is the institutionalization of values (Peng, 2003; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Ravasi and Schultz (2006) argue that values must be deeply ingrained within the organizational fabric, transcending the influence of individual board members. A well-established set of shared

values serves as a guiding force that persists through transitions, anchoring the organization in a stable cultural foundation (Rendtorff, 2017; Tarczyński et al., 2020). Organizations must actively engage in initiatives that embed these values into daily operations. This may involve integrating values into performance metrics, incentivizing behavior aligned with the established values, and creating a culture that not only values adherence but actively encourages the promotion of these principles (Tarczyński et al., 2020). By doing so, organizations create an environment where values are not static declarations but living, breathing elements of the organizational identity (Askeland et al., 2020).

Strategic Documentation

Comprehensive culture strategy documentation, as stated by Umerle (2017), is not simply a static repository of ideals but rather a dynamic framework that evolves in tandem with the organization. It encompasses mission, vision, values, and implementation guidelines, acting as a compass for board members while also providing a clear roadmap for aligning decisions with the organizational culture. Additionally, the strategic documentation becomes a critical resource during transitions, offering a tangible reference point for incoming members to understand and uphold the organization's cultural expectations (Zawaideh et al., 2018). It also aids in the preservation and transmission of cultural values, serving as a continuity tool during leadership changes (Umerle, 2017).

Continuous Communication

Continuous communication, according to Jameson (2007), is not merely an update mechanism but a strategic tool for fostering a culture of transparency and accountability. Beyond routine updates, organizations should invest in forums that facilitate open discussions on cultural matters (Bucăţa & Rizescu, 2017). Regular updates on culture-related initiatives and progress are essential for board members to stay connected with the organization's cultural trajectory. Emphasizing the significance of the culture strategy through consistent communication fosters a shared understanding and commitment among board members (Marković & Salamzadeh, 2018). This ongoing dialogue serves as a mechanism to instill a sense of collective responsibility, aligning the board with the enduring nature of the organization's values.

Succession Planning

Succession planning, integrated with cultural considerations, involves not only identifying potential leaders but also actively cultivating a leadership pipeline that embodies the organization's culture (Llopis, 2014; Peng, 2003). This goes beyond traditional leadership development programs to include mentorship initiatives, experiential learning opportunities, and exposure to diverse aspects of the organization (Bano et al., 2022). By aligning leadership development with cultural preservation, organizations can mitigate potential disruptions caused by changes in leadership (Rana, 2023). This approach ensures that incoming leaders are well-versed in the organizational culture, fostering a smooth transition and preserving the continuity of cultural values.

Practical Insights and Applications

Johnson & Johnson (J&J), one of the largest firms in the healthcare industry, is an intriguing illustration of the actual execution of the previously outlined strategies. They have successfully employed a robust onboarding and orientation process for new board members. This process is designed to familiarize incoming members with the company's Credo, a set of ethical principles guiding decision-making. For instance, Alex Gorsky, the former CEO of J&J, not only underwent this onboarding process but also prioritized and integrated the Credo into the company's broader strategy (Brunswick, 2021). This deliberate effort aimed to sustain cultural continuity and values amid leadership changes.

IBM (International Business Machines Corporation), on the other hand, places a strategic emphasis on leadership development and succession planning to navigate board member transitions. The company makes substantial investments in identifying and grooming internal talent to seamlessly step into leadership roles. Virginia Rometty, the former CEO of IBM, exemplifies the success of this strategy (IBM Newsroom, n.d.). Rometty's deep understanding of IBM's culture facilitated a smooth transition, highlighting the efficacy of IBM's focus on internal leadership development in maintaining cultural continuity (Rometty, 2012).

Conclusion and Discussion (Dan Ah Kim)

Organizational culture encompasses everything pertaining to beliefs, values, and attitudes within a company and manifests through both spoken and unspoken rules. A positive organization can foster engagement, lower turnover rates, and decrease productivity. Culture

also acts as a lens through which employees interpret their behaviors, helping regulate and integrate individuals into the organization.

The core values of transnational organizations are controlled from the central country where headquarters are located but managed and operated in various countries. Therefore, cultural conflicts between local management and headquarters, encompassing differences in communication styles, decision-making approaches, and conflict resolution, are bound to arise. These conflicts are further complicated by linguistic diversity and unconscious biases. Transnational organizations must preserve headquarters' core values in local branches while respecting their diverse expectations, and in this attempt, possibly need to face the challenges of cultural prejudices, communication barriers, and legal considerations for accommodating transnational employees.

In order to grapple with these challenges, organizations must emphasize clear core values, recruit strategically, maintain a comprehensive orientation, address implicit cultural differences, adapt to achieve cultural equilibrium, implement effective training, and establish rewards and recognition. Coupled with continuous monitoring, organizations can foster sustained excellence growth and benefit all stakeholders among diverse cultures.

Also, the effectiveness of organizational culture strategies can be efficiently measured through key performance indicators (KPIs), employee feedback surveys, leadership alignment, impact on organizational performance, continuous improvement, social network analysis (SNA), diversity and inclusion metrics, and benchmarking against industry standards. Especially during board member transitions, organizational culture can stay viable through institutionalization of values, strategic documentation, continuous communication, and succession planning.

In the context of our findings, it becomes clear that the management of organizational culture in transnational corporations is not just a necessity, but a strategic imperative. The strategies outlined in this paper, if implemented effectively, have the potential to mitigate cultural conflicts, accommodate diversity, and enhance overall organizational performance. However, the complexity of this task should not be underestimated, as it requires continuous effort, monitoring, and adaptation.

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