Role of Leadership in Shaping an Organization Culture

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to analysis the influence of leadership role in shaping an organization culture and the analysis presented are based on the learnings from scholarly literature relevant to organization culture and leadership. The paper considers a cultural change from a change management perspective and examines the influence of leadership style, approach, ethics, power and politics as driving factors for success.

Role of Leadership in Shaping an Organization Culture
An organization culture could be defined as a system of shared values and beliefs that develops within an organization, which guides the behaviors of its members (Schermherhon, Hunt and Osborn, 2007). From the definition, it appears that, shared values are been developed over a period of time and members of the organization respect and behave in manner that is unique to an organization. Though an organization may have an established culture, many leaders will be compelled to shape them or changes them based on circumstances that would become prevalent due to compelled external adaptation or internal intergradation (Schermherhon et al, 2007). This process of shaping the culture would demand a change (Williams and Gordon, 2006) in shared values and acceptable norms of conduct. Hence, as stated by Selznick, leaders play a pivotal role in defining the values and norms in an organization and implementing them to become part of an organization culture (Cited by Banisman, Hinings and Slack, 2006).

Organization Culture and Process of Change
There are three layers of culture in an organization which can be associated to a pyramid (Schermherhon et al, 2007). At the top, it is the observed culture, the middle is the shared values and at the bottom it is the common assumptions (Schermherhon et al, 2007). In pursuit of change, the leaders should pay attention to these three aspects and strategize the action that will avoid any crisis situation in the change process. Hence, a leader should have the desired skills to navigate the employees through the three layers effectively.

The change in organization culture is driven primarily by changes in the industry, or change in the organizational strategic goals, which may be influenced by external adaptation (Graetz and Smith, 2010). The organization’s redefined goals would provoke the leaders to relook at the process. This process would awaken the desired for change and progress towards pioneering with new directives, vision, and problem definitions that would pave the way towards transformation (Newman, 2012) of culture that would be supporting the environment. Therefore, leaders would consistently drive internal integration process with insightful, persistent, higher degree of control, active political coalition and use of powers (Graetz and Smith, 2010) as tools for initiating and driving change.

The above arguments establish that, shaping the culture would mean, the leaders would need to drive a change initiatives that would transform the organizations towards new values, norms and common assumptions. Hence, the role of leadership that would steer such change becomes extremely important and success of such transformation will largely depend on the leader’s style, process, ethics, use of power and organizational politics.

Leadership Style
Every leader has got their own style that would suite different objectives. However, initiating, pioneering and transforming a cultural change will call for specific styles, which would consist of task driving components and people managing components with equal importance. Evidence of these components are important as, in a change management process, leaders will be challenged by the followers in accepting the imposed changes. Organizational politics will be pivotal in influence resistance for change. Therefore, a leader’s ability to succeed will depend on his uncompromised task management skills that would keep the goals in perspective, while address the emotional and power-play aspects of its members with resourceful people management skills. Given the business objectives and implicating human emotions and politics, it is important that the leader is able to adapt a style which will have strong task orientation and people orientation aspects that would facilitate in dealing with these contrasting dynamics.
As per the Blake's and Mouton's leadership grid (cited by Northouse, 2013), leadership is defined in to five main styles; authority compliance, country-club, improvised leadership, middle-of-the-road and team leader. The authority compliance leader is considered to be strong in task management and weak in relationship management, while a country-club style is considered to be strong in relationship management but weak in task management. Both these leadership styles are oriented toward one end of the scale and will not be ideal for initiating and managing cultural changes. Similarly, an improvised leader is considered to have a style that is low in involvement in both the aspects while middle-of-the-road leader encompasses a mean style of both the aspects, which again don’t demonstrate the desired strength and skills for transforming organizations common assumptions, shared values and observed cultures. However, the team management style is considered to be oriented towards task and people. A leader with high team leadership style will be concerned with each of the outcome and will be driven by task orientation skills while, maintain a higher level of alliance and team spirit to establish and maintain the cohesiveness that is desired to support the outcome. Hence, team leadership style could be considered as the most ideal style for shaping an organizations culture through awakening, pioneering and transforming process (Newman, 2012).

**Leadership Approach**

Having established the leadership style, it is equally important to analysis the ideal leadership approach for purpose. In order to effect change or shape the culture, the leader would need a great deal of flexibility in exercising his or her team leadership style while should have the ability to harness the charisma and vision to transform followers. Based on these elements, situational leadership approach and transformational leadership approach qualifies for the task and deems suitable. Hence, the two leadership approaches are been analyzed to ascertain its suitability.

In situational leadership, the leader would move along the spectrum to direct and support the subordinate’s behaviors to guide them towards the intended objectives (Northouse, 2013). In doing so, the leader would exercise the team leadership style by directing, coaching, supporting and delegating its followers. Hence, the aspects of greater flexibility in shifting the leaders’ position to suite the follower’s situation would be an integral part of the leadership role as situational leadership approach advocates and promotes such position change (Northouse, 2013). Therefore, Situational leadership could be considered as one the most suitable approaches for shaping cultures of organizations.

Similarly, transformational leadership is considered to be a process that changes and transform people (Northouse, 2013). This leadership process takes in to account the importance and implications of emotions, values and ethics. Further, as suggested by Bass and Riggio, transformational leadership emphasis on intrinsic motivation and follower development (cited by Northouse, 2013). Hence, transformational leaders, through their idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualize consideration, are able to mobilize the followers towards their future vision and influence the followers towards accepting the new group identities (Northouse, 2013). Therefore, transformational leadership could be considered as another viable approach that would support change initiatives; in this case it would be the cultural change of an organization.

**Leadership Ethics**

Leadership ethics is another aspect that influences an organization culture. Absence of ethics in an organization would lead to ambiguity in behavioral acceptability and competence (Hatcher and Argon, 2000). Thus leaders play a pivotal role in setting the behavioral standards that become part of an organizations culture. As a leader, one could inculcate the ethical culture based on teleological concepts or deontological concepts. Teleological theory being based on consequences encompasses three facades, which are contrasting to each other. One being ethical egoism, which is driven by individual interest, advocates selfishness or considers the self-interest in forefront, while the other being altruism, advocates the consideration of others interest before the self-interest. The third facade advocates the utilitarianism, which advocates greater good for greater people, which don’t have self or others in forefront.

The deontological theory advocates a duty bound practice. An organization embracing deontological ethics would be action dependent and will be obliged to perform their duties towards the right thing. In a deontological culture, the members will accept the norms of fidelity, justice, non-injury, gratitude, self-improvement and beneficence (Northouse, 2013), which could be categorized in to contractual obligations, self-interests and group interest.

Inducing ethical conduct in to an organization culture seems a challenge as utilitarian practices may not be practically implementable in an organization, as it cannot account for justice and other principals that a society embraces (Wong and Beckman, 1992). Further, the leaders must be cautious in selecting the right ethical behaviors that would facilitate the shaping of organization towards the desired culture. If an organization would focus on pure profits, the leader would embrace deontological ethics based on teleological concepts or deontological concepts; hence, the leader would need a style that is low in involvement in both the aspects while middle-of-the-road leader encompasses a mean style of both the aspects, which again don’t demonstrate the desired strength and skills for transforming organizations common assumptions, shared values and observed cultures. However, the team management style is considered to be oriented towards task and people. A leader with high team leadership style will be concerned with each of the outcome and will be driven by task orientation skills while, maintain a higher level of alliance and team spirit to establish and maintain the cohesiveness that is desired to support the outcome. Hence, team leadership style could be considered as the most ideal style for shaping an organizations culture through awakening, pioneering and transforming process (Newman, 2012).

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coaching and supporting while followers would consistency be acumen towards idealized influence and inspirational motivation. Therefore, leader's consistency in ethical behavior forms an important part in shaping an organization culture.

**Power and Politics**

Leadership power is described as the leader's ability get the someone else do what he or she wants them to do, or the leaders ability to make things happen or, get things done in a way the leader deem appropriate (Schermerhon et al, 2007). In pursuit of shaping organization culture, role of power becomes important as power could be used to influence behavioral response of the followers (Schermerhon et al, 2007). The success of any change initiative, in this case the cultural change would notably rest on the role of leadership and how the leadership is practiced towards exercising the powers to influence the followers to adopt certain changes. French and Raven bases of powers; reward, coercion, legitimate, expert, referent and informational (Cited by Schriesheim, Hankins & Podsakoff, 1991) will be a useful tool for the leaders in a cultural change process. Leaders using expert powers to influence behaviors could get an unconditional support from the followers based on the belief that the leader has got superior knowledge, experience and skills than the followers (Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2005). However, it is important that the leader establish such a high level of credibility before using this power base. Similarly, referent power could be used by transformational leaders based on their charisma and followership. However, leaders may use their legitimate powers in order to drive tasks that may not be acceptable though other power bases. Depending on the circumstances, leaders could use reward power as an incentive or benefit that would emerge as part of the change while coercion powers could be used to influence tapping in the guilt aspects of the followers. Leaders are further empowered with information and controlling the information flow through representative powers that would facilitate the avoidance of follower anxiety.

Leaders understanding of organization politics will be a necessity when it comes to change initiatives such as culture. An organization politics is defined as leaders influence towards the ends, not sanctioned by organization or to obtain sanction ends, through nonsanctioned means (Schermerhon et al, 2007). Being given the understanding that organization culture cannot be legitimately sanctioned, the use of political influence would be an ideal platform for leaders to define, implement and influence non-sanctioned end-means. Through politics, a leader could harness alliances horizontally and vertically, and tap in to the organizations informal and cohesive networks to build the desired acceptance and manage the ambiguities and resistance.

**Conclusion**

Shaping an organization culture could lead to change in common assumptions, shared values and observed philosophies. Altering these deep routed fundamental beliefs and practices would cause anxiety and ambiguity that may lead to an organization crisis; if not managed properly. Hence, principals of change management should be taken in to consideration. Leaders should adopt team leadership style considering they have to deal with tasks and people with equal importance. Given the uncertainty, leaders may use situational leadership approach or transformational leadership approach to guide and motivate their followers towards the new culture. In their pursuit to shape the culture, leaders may induce ethical values and use their power bases and political influence apart from the leadership style and approach. Given all these aspects, shaping an organization is a challenge and leader plays a pivotal role in initiating, pioneering and accomplishing such cultural changes.

**References**