Organizational culture: shared basic assumptions

Introduction

According to Schein (2004), organizational culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group working together for a common goal has invented in learning to cope with the problems of external adaptation and internal integration. In an organization, culture is seen from integration, differentiation and fragmentation perspectives. Organizations are under nationals and must understand how national culture influences them. National culture is a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another. It includes systems of value and values themselves (Hofstede, 1984). Unlike organizational culture, national culture is influenced by political systems, legal systems, education, family structures, economy, language and religion. In managing organizations in an international context, organizational and national cultures have great impacts. This research paper will evaluate the implications of organizational culture and national culture in managing international organizations as contributed by Hofstede, Trampenaars and Globe. This will be done by looking at the aspects of national culture and organizational culture.

National culture

To determine the implications of national culture in multinational operations, Hofstede conducted a survey among employee of IBM in 50 countries. He identified four dimensions where national culture influences organizational culture. They are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and Masculinity and femininity. The dimensions are based on the four fundamental issues in human society. The dimensions represent the basic elements of common structural system of the countries.

Hofstede's structure is important in useful in understanding people's perception of an organization, and the roles and relations of its members (Chen, 2006). Alongside Hofstede, Globe added his contribution to national culture.

Power and distance

This dimension relates to the degree of people in a particular society in terms of equality and inequality. A country with high power distance scores accepts and perpetuates inequality between people. In this country, upward mobility is very limited as society does not emphasize differences in people's status, power and wealth. Organizations might be operating in two different counties with different power dimensions. The implication with organizational management is that they adjust to each country to reflect the needs of such countries. The management in each country should be flexible enough to reflect the national culture.

Individual verses collectivism

A country with individual score makes the individual rights dominant. In the societies tend to form relationships with larger members of people but the relationship is weak (Hofstede, 2001). In countries with strong collectivism values, individuals are ready to support teams more easily and seek approval from the teams. They also tend to be more accountable to the team because they value team relationships. The collectivism society presents a better environment for business management since the people will work in groups to achieve organizational goals. However, many countries have individualism where people think of their personal need before those of others.

Masculinity verses femininity

This deals with gender differentiation. In masculinity societies, male tend to dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure (Misra, 2009: 37). It is rare to get women leading organizations and people. A low masculinity means a society has a low level of differentiation and inequality between genders. Female get equal treatments in all aspects of society as they can take up leadership positions. Organizations in a masculinity society will try to do what the society suggests by giving leadership position to male only. In contrast, where there is less differentiation, the organizations must balance to reflect gender balance in organizational management.

Uncertainty avoidance

A county with a high uncertainty avoidance score normally has a low tolerance in relations to uncertainty and whichever is ambiguous. This makes them rule oriented and followers of established laws. On the other hand, a low uncertainty avoidance score points a society that is less concerned about ambiguity and uncertainty. It has more tolerance towards variety and experimentation as they risk doing anything as long as they think is good. Such society does not follow the rules strictly, and is ready to accept changes. The management of organizations in this society will take informal structure where people will be allowed to come up with best ways of doing things.

Performance orientation

The performance oriented societies put a thrust on achievement motivation. The achievement motive reflects a desire to perform in terms of standards of excellence or to be successful in a competitive situation. People with high

achievement motives tend to approach rather than avoid tasks related to success, because for them to succeed in a culmination of ability and hard work about which they are confident of. They select performance goals which they are willing to put their best efforts. In case of continuing obstacles, they respond with a helplessness response, involving avoidance of challenge and deterioration of performance (Gupta, 2004). They seek positive feedback and focus their efforts in areas which they have already been successful.

In performance oriented societies, workforce, partners and competitors would be intrinsically motivated by the need to perform tasks better and more innovative, desire for progressive improvement. They also focus on knowledge accumulation, drive for challenge and exhibiting initiative. They value accomplishments and feedback that allows assessment of the results, instead of emphasizing ascribed value characteristics. The government in such society may have only limited involvement in new product and technology development (Steers and Nardon, 2006). The market itself tends to be sufficiently open and efficient to allow firms, local or foreign, to undertake imitative activities.

Assertiveness orientation

This dimension is associated with strong consciousness, expression, articulation, and communication of one's thoughts, feelings, rights, and beliefs. This is in public, political and social forums, and is related to physical and psychological aggressiveness and confrontation. People in assertive societies stand up for their rights and demonstrate strong interpersonal competence. They tend to be adventurous, confidents and willing to accept

change in their environment. In assertiveness society, people are willing to ask for what they want, deny what is not in their interest, and articulate positive and negative messages to others in an open and non-passive manner. There is a focus on encouraging personal standards and the judgment of morality. Individual and government in assertive societies tend to take actions to stop the exports of natural resources, and focus instead on value-added manufactured and service product exports. Management of organizational in assertiveness societies follows the rules of such societies and this is where the national influence on any business is felt.

Future orientation

This dimension is reflected in behavior such as planning and investigating for the future. Sometimes it is associated with the distinction between materialistic verses spiritual orientation. Less future oriented cultures focuses on short term materialistic consideration of respecting traditions to avoid isolation from the society, and maintaining face to protect one's reputation and creditworthiness in the society. More future oriented cultures emphasizes on long-term consideration of education for self development, and in their inner ability to persist in the face of obstacles for self actualization (Chen, 2006). These cultures encourage planning, while lack of orientation encourages consumption, and spending. Future oriented societies foster search for the opportunities with the desire future state. They are inclined to support investments in intellectual property rights, such as trademarks and patent. The societies tend to be associated with a higher rate of saving, a lower rate of consumption, and lower level of lifestyle. In the

less future oriented cultures, people seek material acquisition to make their life more meaningful.

Humane orientation

This dimension is concerned with generosity, compassion, and empathy for others. The value of human orientation is deeply rooted in the human experiences, and in the moral values arising from the situational and spontaneous demands of this human experience. In human oriented societies, the thrust is on striving for a good life in this world, not on a good life in other world. There is a tendency to seek political interventions to temper the market forces for guarantying welfare and security for all people irrespective of their social power (Gupta, 2006). This means there is limited emphasis on pleasure, personal comfort, and material success.

Institutional collectivism

In collectivistic culture like Japanese society, social connections are essential parts of the culture. In institutionally collectivist cultures, the people act with modesty, and demonstrate self effacing and self-abnegating tendencies (Mobley, 2009). People are encouraged to seek self-critical and self improving orientations as means to pursue the cultural goals associated with independence. Institutional collectivism emphasizes shared objective, interchangeable interests, and common social behavior of the people base on association with others in groups. In contrast, lack of social institutional collectivism tends to be associated with a preoccupation with self esteem.

In group collectivism

This dimension relates to how the individuals relate to their group, as an autonomous identity. It is associated with pride in affiliation and general effectiveness identification with and effective commitment towards family, group, community and nation. People from the birth are integrated into strong, cohesive in a group, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty. In group collectivism represents a strong sense of family integrity. The responsibility and identity of the people begins with immediate group and extends outside. In-group collectivism emphasizes the innate and leaned need to affiliate. Need for affiliation reflects the desire to be part of a group. Need for intimacy reflects a desire to experience warm and communicative relationship with others. Need for social support, control and power in enacted by organizing and maintaining the group's process. The three needs generate commitment.

Gender egalitarianism

In gender egalitarianism societies, there are fewer gender stereotypes that characterize women as passive and weak. Low gender egalitarianism is associated with a more orthodox role for women. In gender egalitarian society, gender discrimination is mitigated, allowing both men and women to effectively participate in the labor force and contribute to their family on an equal basis.

To enhance those seven dimensions Trompenaars added other seven dimension of culture by conducting a survey in 50 countries whereby 1, 500 questionnaires were administered to managers in different organizations. The dimensions are universalism verses particularism, individualism verses

communitarianism, neutral verses emotional, specific verses diffuse, achievement verses ascription, time sequence verses time as a synchronization, and attitudes towards the environment. He has been criticized that he did not attempt to develop valid scales for measuring culture, but instead intended to teach managers about the importance of cultural diversity.

Universalism verses particularism

Universalism deals with general rules which can be applicable while partcularism is when people are concerned with exceptions. People in universalism generalize things and no specific interpretation of particular events (Sloma, 2008). Organizational management in universalism society will tend to have universal rules applicable to all organizations operating in such societies.

Individualism verses communitarism

Individualism is concerned by individual rights as it lets each person do their own and sees grouping as limiting a person's rights. People work as individuals where everybody is charged as a person (Jandt, 2010). Communism deals with the rights of society and groups. In this consideration, groups, families and organizations are considered rather than individuals themselves. It leads to collective responsibility. Organizations in individualism societies will tend to judge each individual according to what he or she has done while those in communitalism societies will judge a department rather than individual workers. The management of a failed department is responsible for actions performed.

Neutral verses emotional

This is concerned with the degree to which persons display their emotions. Some people are neutral while others display their emotions as their culture allows expression. In neutrality, people are taught not to display their emotions as when emotions are felt, they are controlled. In organizational management, the emotional society should be given room to express their views as they might be helpful in solving organizational problems.

Specific verses diffuse

This deals with involvement of people in any activity. In a specific culture, people have to analyze anything individually before putting them together. Specific people are characterized by hard facts, standards and contracts. A diffuse culture starts with the whole before seeing individual elements from totality. All elements are related. The relationships are more important than individual elements. People in the diffuse culture will be seen in the perspective of the organization.

Achieved ascribed status

Achieved status is about power through individual efforts and performance. People earn their status through competitiveness and replace those who do not work hard. In ascribed status, people gain status through other means like inheritance. A person has a right to acquire status from their seniors. This is mostly in family business where a parent leaves the business estates to the generations instead of qualified people from different families. Organizational management in achieved status culture encourages people to compete for managerial positions rather than wait to be given. The management is characterized by qualification rather than ascription. Toyota

Corporation is one of the companies where ascribed status works. Being a family business, The management follows down to the sons and grandson the found. It is the grandson of the founder, Toyoda, who is the director of Toyota.

Time as a sequence verses time as a synchronization

In time as a sequence events are seen as separate items in time and follow each other in a sequential manner. There is order in events where one activity follows another in a predetermined way. Time as a synchronization looks at events in a parallel way where they coordinate and multiply instead of following one another (Gupta, 2004). Some activities can be done together instead of waiting for one to finish.

Attitudes towards environment

With the current trends in environment, many companies are considering protecting environment hence international organizations which are seen as threats to the environment are restricted in their operations. They must adhere to environmental policies and be ready to protect it through all means. In countries with less regard to the environment, they consider the investment than what the company will do as they view the contribution to the economy great than the impacts on the environment.

Organizational culture and national culture

Many managers believe that organizational culture moderates the influence of national culture as they assume employees working on the same organization will similarly (Adler & Gundersen, 2008: 63). However, researchers have found that far from reducing national differences,

organizational culture maintains and enhances them. This is because an organization exists within a society and must adhere to what is in that society. Multinational organizations' culture is not similar all over the countries where it operates as it must adjust to adapt to the national values. In managing such organizations, top managements have tried to employ people from the countries the organizations operate so that they conform to the national culture. They follow the national culture to come up with organizational cultures which can serve the people of that country.

Conclusion

The three contributions have depicted the influence of national and organizational culture on organizational management. In international management, a culture in one country may be different from another. It is important for organizations to realize the strengths of certain cultures so that they are able to manipulate and adapt to the international management standards. Culture influences the business environment and management practices of a country. It helps in understanding the differences in culture between countries. National institutions are tangible and easier to study while accommodating the cultural and politico-economic history of the country. In some organizations, organizational culture are powerful than national culture. This is commonly where the organizations have much influence. This happens in developing countries which have little resources and depends on foreign investments.