

# Cultural analysis of an organization

[Psychology](#), [Goal](#)



Kathy Everett EPEL 8970 Seminar in Educational Leadership April 6, 2010 An Analysis of the Culture of My Organization Culture, or the personality of a school, is critical to its success or failure. Culture can be described in many different ways and include so many different parts of an organization that you can get lost in determining whatever it was you were looking for. Culture can be viewed using four pieces. These four pieces, or as Deal likes to call them frameworks, include the structural, human resource, symbolic and political (Bolman and Deal 1991) aspects of an organization. Looking at these four references one can analyze where some of the strengths and weaknesses of their organization are currently and even identify ways to improve the organization. A walk to the front door of our school and then in and around our school would show you many positive things about the culture of our school. In the end it is the leader that sets the tone for the culture of the organization and it is the leader that can change it. First let's look at the structural framework of an organization. The structural framework of a school is often determined by perception. When we talk about the structural framework of a school, we are talking more than the bricks and mortar. In assessing the structural framework, one might look at everything from the organizational goals, to the management of the environment, and to the lines of authority. The structure is the basic foundation. In my school, the assistant principal sets the tone and enforces it more than the principal. That is not to say that the principal does not know what is going on but she has delineated a lot of the structural function to the assistant principal. While the front entrance is not clearly marked once inside you see happy faces that are willing to help whomever walks through the door. This shows that

the environment is a friendly place where people like to be and like to help others. The entry way shows highlights of awards our school has received from the governor down to the PTA which is an important validation of our priorities. Often in a school there seems to be two front office secretaries and one is typically nice and friendly while the other appears more cold and abrupt with visitors. In our school both of our secretaries greet visitors with a smile and warmth not found in all organizations. They make the visitor feel welcomed whether on the phone or in person and that is important to the initial perception a visitor has of our school. The initial impression is not alone able to sustain a positive image of the school. It takes the structured management of the organizational goals, the management of the external environment, the development of a structure appropriate to a task, and environment, and the clarification of authority lines. The organizational goal must be student focused and the focus needs to be on improving student achievement coupled with enhancing the environment in which a student learns. We cannot dictate or even affect the home life of a student but we can affect their environment at school. When the staff knows that the purpose of our being it to provide a conducive learning environment for all students, then they will go the extra mile to help achieve that. During my tenure at my school I have always felt the organization structure emphasized the student. However, there is one incident that happened several years ago that still resonates in my mind and makes me sometime question where the priority for our students really is headed. I had a student from our psycho-educational center that I had in my resource classes. He has been hospitalized for several years and was back in school and doing very well. He

was identified as being Emotionally-Behavior Disordered, bi-polar, autistic amongst other diagnoses. All I knew is that I had a student that was learning and doing well in my environment. He was typical of someone with autism and was very socially inept but for the most part handled himself well. My principal decided that since he was receiving all of his services through resource that he needed to be transferred to his home school. This happened in the middle of 5th grade and his mother had moved to a new home which meant he would be going to a school where no one knew him. I (tactfully) fought and argued for the student to stay with us in our building. He didn't have much longer to finish and transferring him to a new school mid-year could be extremely detrimental to his progress. Historically my principal had felt "abused" by the psycho-educational center housed in our building as was adamant on the "policy" being followed. I argued that I could not take the risk of this child regressing all because of a policy. The point of that example is not to highlight a disagreement but to bring into question the structural framework of my principal. Her behavior in this one incident made me question her priorities and goals of our organization. She had coordinated with her area superintendent and she felt justified in her decision. The lines of authority were clear, she made the decision and was supported by her supervisor and so I was to follow it. Lost in the scenario was the organizational goal of doing what was best for children in a learning environment. I am grateful that this was a rare incident where I questioned her loyalty and we continue to have an excellent rapport. She undeniably knows where my loyalty is and on several occasions has commented that she wished others had my passion to stand up for what they believe in.

Passion for what you believe in brings me to our next framework: human resource. Organizations are filled with staff members, each of whom has their own feelings, needs, and biases as well as their own skills and potential. I really like how the book described the major elements of organizational culture (Gorton and Alston 2009, page 155). An organization with an effective set of values, goals, principles, procedures, and practices defines that organization. While the leader solicits the staff to help develop the values, goals, and principles, it is the staff, the human resource that affects it. The staff is viewed as the heart of the organization and the leader needs to be responsive to the needs and the goals in order to gain commitment and loyalty from the staff. If the staff feels supported, this empowers them to do what they need to do for the organization. While many staff members feel stressed and stretched with all of the furloughs, no pay raises, etc it says a lot about an organization when the staff continue to go above and beyond what is expected of them. While my school is far from a low socioeconomic status, we certainly have our share of students left alone and to their own devices (maybe because the parents are too busy working or playing themselves). Identifying that there were some children that needed some positive mentoring one of the teachers approached our principal about creating a mentoring program at our school. She organized the entire program so that any teacher could nominate students in their class that they felt could use a mentor. Today over 40 teachers provide mentoring services to students that may be only checking on them to say hi or to help them with some class work. The point is that the staff rose above the fray to create and implement a program despite many feeling abused and misused this year.

That aspect of culture, the human framework is something that is invaluable. When teachers care enough to do their very best they are showing that they understand the values and norms of an organization. It also shows a symbolic behavior through their activity. The symbolic framework of an organization is what many refer to as "walking the talk not just talking the talk." If an organization is to be effective everyone must be able to see examples of people whether it is teachers, parents, or students emulating the goals, values and norms of the organization. The symbolic rituals of an organization cannot be performed by rote or their purpose and meaning can get lost. The value is seen in everyone playing a part and having a role. When people know the rules or the norms, they can then work at accomplishing them or perform within them. When faced with ambiguous or confusing situations, they will know how to respond based on the rituals or norms that have already been established. If an organization is rampant with uncertainty and ambiguity, it makes decision making and problem solving more difficult for those involved. Symbolic framework creates an air of predictability that guides us in the actions we take. My principal recently sent out a note about the time all staff members were to be at school and specifically that they were to be in their classrooms at that time. Critical in the message is that students are in our rooms at that time. Without going into any details, you can imagine what could happen if students were allowed in the classroom with supervision. It is amazing to me the teachers that feel the message was not "intended" for them or that have chosen to ignore it. These teachers are the teachers that I would question their loyalty to the organization and ultimately their effectiveness as teachers. I am not

trying to say every teacher that may come in late is not a good teacher but the behavior, the symbolic behavior illuminates other issues with these staff members. As a grade level they are the takers. They never create their own new and exciting and creative lessons to share with the grade level. They are the ones who complain about almost everything and anything (especially the furlough, pay issues and additional paperwork). The point is that these teachers are “walking their talk.” I am glad there are only a few of them but it is still sad to see how they affect so many aspects of the school from the organizational culture, to the emphasis on academic effort and achievement. Up until now one of the aspects which is a major element of culture effecting the school was lack of sanctions that encourages or discourages the behaviors. By implementing a reward system, a principal should be able to expect improvement and accomplishments of their staff instead of disorder and complacency. A leader must also understand and build the political framework of their organization for it to be successful. Gorton and Alston elaborate on the three major factors affecting the organizational culture: the history of the organization, the characteristics of the members of the organization and the current problems and external demands of the organization. These three factors are intertwined with the other frameworks already elaborated on in this text. The one piece that cannot be overlooked is the way political framework affects these factors. The political framework involves what some call micro politics: the staff, parents, and other community members/leaders. The first person to really study micro politics within an educational context was Iannoccone (Spaulding, 2000). School members (parents, teachers, community leaders) can develop their own

micro political strategies in their attempt for personal and school goals. It is not so much the micro politics that is the problem; it is the competing against one another that causes the conflict. When different interest groups compete for power and/or resources disorganization and conflict can arise. During the presidential campaign the political framework of our school seemed impervious to the national debate of electing a black president. But when the national networks were prepared to let President Obama talk to the children the community was in an uproar. I was so saddened by the lack of respect shown our president and the moral values the parents were instilling in our children. Children came to school saying things you know they overheard from their parents or that they were specifically taught by their parents. Parents kept their children home from school to “ prevent” them from hearing what our president had to say. Our Board of Education and Superintendent waffled enough on the issue and left the decision be made by each individual principal. This showed me that they were not sure which way the wind was blowing and tried to avoid it. My example happens to be of a true political nature but political framework does not have to include politics at all. The political framework is more about forces that band together and compete with other forces for the power and influence involving the organization. Our schools are in the public eye and what we do or do not do is seen and interpreted. We have formal and informal leaders and it is best as a leader to keep them all by your side. The community will support our organizations when they know what we are all about and what we are doing. The frameworks discussed here must be evolving and used according to each situation. As Boyer said, “ A school’s greatest impact



occurs not in the formal lessons taught, but in creating a climate in which virtues are learned by example.