THE DIFFUSION OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE WITHIN THE DYNAMICS OF SELF, GROUP AND ORGANIZATION: THE CASE OF CHEFS IN HOTELS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to highlight the notion that neither identity nor culture are singular concepts when it comes to understanding organizational behaviour within work relationships. Instead, identity and culture merge as interpretative meta-concepts evoked within a group context (Cameron *et al* 1999a). From a cultural viewpoint, it has been suggested that unitary dimensions in culture will only lead to a lack of analysis (Pettigrew, 1979). Similarly, Harris and Ogbonna (1998) argue that current research should focus more on the existence of 'multiple cultures' within an organization. To extend these notions beyond the 'singular concept' it is hypothesised, as a continuing in-depth study of cultural dynamics and complexity within organizations (Cameron *et al* 1999b), that management rarely acknowledges the complexity of group process in relation to the identity and the culture it projects. The challenge therefore, calls on management to be aware that there does exist, both conceptually and operationally, a diffusion of 'identity in organizations' (Whetten and Godfrey, 1998).

OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to:

- provide a conceptual examination of the links between identity, culture and climate in the case of chefs in hotels.

- support a workshop at which a methodology will be proposed to link the perceptive identity of chefs with the diffusion of culture and climate.

CILMATE, IDENTITY AND CULTURE: A RATIONALE

Tajfel *et al* (1971, p.151) comment that "there can be no inter-group behaviour without relevant aspects of the social environment". This implies the social and organizational role of climate. Moreover, it infers that identity is part of the socio-cultural process. For example, a climate change when at its most illusive, seeks to obtain objective 'sensemaking' (Weick, 1995) to a given phenomenon. From a functionalist and radical-structuralist viewpoint society seeks to curtail, or at best to modify, identity and cultural aspirations.

Operationally, climate also has to deal with the social-psychological ideational world of culture where for example, identity seeks to maintain a 'self' and group concept by way of sharing symbolic and cognitive meanings. Such ideals are often set 'within the mind of the cultural bearers' for example, a chef culture. Moreover, should cultural norms be disturbed then it is likely that behaviour will reflect discourses within cognitive and in a low-committal mutual-equivalence. Although useful, the core reasons for discourse may not always be obvious. This would imply that a deeper analysis might be required for which there are no finite cultural boundaries. In other words, cultural typologies within organizations hold "complex relationship[s] and [are] mutually supported in normal circumstances but fraught with great potential for tension and stress whenever the organization is subjected to sudden pressures of change" (Allaire and Firsirtou, 1984). For example, identity within a chef culture can hold profound rhetoric for the organization. Through 'identities in talk' (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998) chefs are able to maintain a 'self' and social categorisation that aims to maintain their structuralist world. Within their world lies a hierarchy, levels of skills with degrees of artistry, profession, status and a division of labour that is grounded within the representation of an occupation and is upheld by identity through rhetoric. Therefore, the prime goal of rhetoric - via - talk (Fine, 1996) is to sustain a chef's 'self' and group identity within the organization they work and in addition, to the wider community. This was unlike the Saunder's (1981) examination of kitchen porters. In this study the social-categorisation of porters, which organizations were party to, stigmatised both 'self' and social. By comparison Saunder's research indirectly shows how an occupation can be curtailed by organization and society for which identity could not be supported by rhetoric.

FURTHER RESEARCH

So far the literature has explored merging concepts that have close a relationship as to the diversity culture and identity within organizations and moreover, the affect society has on self, groups and organizations. The next step of this research is to formulate a methodology as to the key and contentious issues posed.

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