

Leadership and Information Flow

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Halifax 5 Calgary 2005



Leadership shapes information flow



- Leadership shapes organizational culture by its emphases. The priorities for the leader become the way the organization learns to view the function of information.

Leaders have different emphases on how to treat information



- #1 Information supports the power and glory of individuals
- #2 Information supports departmental interests
- #3 Information supports the mission

Information supports individual power and glory

- Typical in despotic or totalitarian regimes
- Information is hoarded, tampered with, or doled out to support individuals' interests
- Emphasis on loyalty and conformity
- Atmosphere of fear and intimidation
- = A **"Pathological"** environment

Information supports departmental prerogatives and "turf"

- Information supports current missions and positions
- Information moves through approved channels
- Whatever is not in dept's interest is neglected
- Information is used to make department look good
- =A **"Bureaucratic"** environment

Information supports the organization's mission

- The mission is paramount
- Structure supports and is subordinate to outcomes
- Cooperation is encouraged
- Information flows freely to those who need it
- Honesty and humility are prized
- = A **"Generative"** environment

Pathological: Robert Gallo and HIV

- Gallo argued that only he had discovered the nature of the AIDS virus, a claim not now accepted.
- Gallo acted like a rogue, whose major aim was to advance his scientific reputation.
- He promoted, flattered, threatened and cajoled to advance his case, and got many awards.
- He emphasized loyalty, and punished the disloyal.
- Gallo's threats were usually taken seriously

Bureaucratic: Adoption of TQM

- Hospitals that were early adopters of Total Quality Management tended to adopt for technical efficiencies, they also customized to fit their own needs
- Later adopters of TQM did it because everybody was doing it, and generally followed the standard package.

Generative: C. Henry Kempe, pediatrician

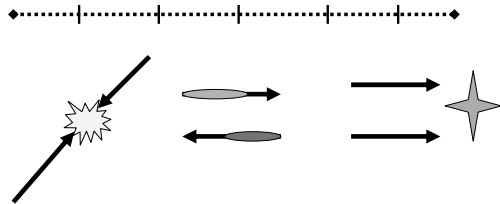
- Kempe played major roles in eradication of smallpox and recognition of "battered child syndrome"
- As head of Pediatrics at Colorado, Kempe was constantly innovating to advance the mission of helping children get well.
- In one case he asked mothers to prepare their children's ethnic foods in the hospital, to the horror of the (mostly German) nurses

Each emphasis creates a culture

- Leaders shape culture through their preoccupations
- Organization members quickly learn to read the signals about what is valued
- Those who don't read signals get brisk lessons about what counts
- The 3 cultures form a **spectrum of effectiveness**

Spectrum of cultures

Pathological---Bureaucratic---Generative



Example: Amy Edmondson's study of nursing leadership

- In 8 clinics studied by Edmondson, leadership varied from distant and authoritarian to hands-on, cooperative leadership
- The more generative the culture, the more errors got reported
- Tallies perfectly with idea that generative culture increases information flow

The nurse manager as coach

- Most important finding from the Edmondson study of nursing unit culture:
- *The best unit cultures were led by nurse managers who saw themselves as coach and consultant, rather than manager or chief*

Response to signs of trouble

- How does organization respond when signs of trouble (anomaly) arise?
- There is a spectrum of responses shaped by the unit's culture, from suppression to inquiry. This too is shaped by leadership.

The response spectrum

- Suppression
- Encapsulation
- Public relations
- Local fix
- Global fix
- Enquiry

Suppression—shooting the messenger

- Suppression is harming the bearer of unwelcome news
- Typical in pathological environments, where fear and intimidation are common
- Threat and punishment are typical of these environments
- Those who speak out are punished, and are used as “examples.”

Example of suppression

- Richard S. Foster, chief actuary of the U.S. Medicare system, was told by his chief to withhold estimates that showed that legislation was more costly than it appeared. He was warned that if he spoke out, “he would be fired so fast that his head would spin.” He kept quiet until after the vote.

Encapsulation

- Encapsulation is isolation of the messenger, so the message cannot be heard.
- Has same purpose as suppression, but less brutal
- Example: China’s isolation of news about HIV and SARS epidemics. This blackout of news led to less effective responses, as well as more infections, and additional deaths

Public relations

- Public relations is an attempt to “explain away” unpleasant news by “putting it in context.”
- Public relations defuses the motives for action by presenting a situation as less serious.
- “Rationalization” is the same thing on a smaller scale.

Public relations during HIV contamination of blood supply

- Krevor report shows that public, and particularly hemophiliacs, were assured that the blood supply was safe in early 80's when there were good reasons to believe that in fact it was not safe.
- The public was put at risk, and the result was HIV and hepatitis infections and deaths in the thousands.
- Public relations is a common response by bureaucrats who fear loss of control of turf

Local fix

- A “local fix” fixes the immediately presenting situation, but does not probe beyond it.
- A local fix treats the symptoms, not the disease
- Often there may be good reason to believe the problem is more widespread.

Edmondson and Tucker find that nurses use workarounds

- A study by Amy Edmondson and Anita Tucker of nurse problem-solving found that nurses were often good at fixing immediate problems through a workaround.
- However, the nurses seldom “reported up” these problems so that a more overall fix could take place. Higher authority did not find out and thus could not take action.

Global fix

- A global fix tries to fix every example of a particular kind of problem.
- Common in the aviation industry for mechanical problems. When a problem is discovered on one aircraft, all those of the same type are checked for the same problem.
- Requires a mechanism for reporting and notification to let the community of interest know of the problem.

Failure to attempt global fix: Shiley heart valves

- When Shiley corporation discovered that a new heart valve had frequent failures, it delayed reporting this to competent authority.
- Even the designer, Viking Björk, after finding out about the problem, kept quiet
- Before the problems became common knowledge, hundreds of individuals had Shiley valves that failed and thus died.

Enquiry: Getting at the root causes

- Enquiry tries to get to the heart of the problem, rather than just fixing it.
- The cause of one problem may be the cause of others.
- Enquiry is an attempt to get at the true, underlying facts

Enquiry: Sturdy Hospital evaluates the quality of its biopsies

- In 1999 Sturdy Hospital discovers it made some defective prostate biopsies.
- It decides to examine all its prostate biopsies for the last two years; 20 more defective prostate biopsies are discovered, apparently caused by two of its pathologists.
- It then decides to hire outside consultants to evaluate *all* biopsies done by the hospital, some 6,000.

Outcome for Sturdy Hospital: An enhanced sense of confidence.

- "Our openness reaffirmed our reputation for putting our patients first. Our patients were much more accepting of the inevitability of human error than we were, and they were impressed that we were doing something about it."

The mission is primary for generative systems

- In generative systems there is a basic humility on the part of the organization that its task is primary and its internal dynamics are secondary. The mission is *first*.

The Redstone incident

- In the 1950's a missile failure led to a profound examination of the Redstone missile's guidance system. But the answer lay with an engineer who had unknowingly caused the failure, and came forward to describe what happened. Wernher von Braun sent him a bottle of champagne for solving the problem.

Von Braun's emphasis: Honest information flow

- Von Braun: "A 'bug' in a guided missile does not care how the development agency has been organized, or who was responsible for what."
- The key is using information to provide the necessary teamwork to make it all happen.
- The mission is primary.

Teamwork and information flow in MICS surgery

- A study by Pisano, Bohmer, and Edmondson looked at the introduction of cardiac surgery in 16 hospitals.
- Definite differences existed between the highly successful introductions and those less successful. The key was role of the leading surgeon in preparing the team for the new techniques.

The keys to success with MICS

- The successful teams had leadership that emphasized:
 - The novelty of the MICS procedures
 - The importance of preparation for the first and subsequent operations
 - Why the team was selected
 - Speaking up was encouraged

Interpretation of MICS successes

- The open, explicit, and thoughtful approach of the better surgeons helped get the team over the hurdles of learning new procedures.
- In contrast the casual, unprepared, and authoritarian approach of the less successful teams led to confusion, doubt, and ultimate failure.
- "Speaking up" was key to the success of the better-led teams.

Lessons

- The leaders of organizations shape, by word, gesture, and deed, what their teams will see as primary.
- The leaders' emphases will shape the culture of the unit.
- The culture in turn will use information in ways that further the leaders' goals, whether this is good for the organization's mission or not.

What should be the model for a medical unit's own culture?

- A "culture of conscious enquiry" where all understand and have access to the information that allows them to do the job well. Everyone is on the same page and shares the same mission.
- Leaders who cultivate the openness, honesty, humility, and competence that is shown by high-performing teams in medicine and elsewhere---and who emphasize that information should serve the mission, not the welfare of a department nor the glory of an individual.
