

Organizational Culture

15.301 Managerial Psychology

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Organizational Culture

- Shared assumptions a given group has developed to deal with the problems of external adaptation and internal integration
- “The way we do things around here” (and why)
- Historical (transferred to newcomers)
- Moral force (normative: what is right and good)
- Associated with intensity of common problems
- Associated with stability of the group
- Changes across time, but slowly and in small steps

Culture Is Everywhere

- In 1953, Japanese primatologists in Koshima saw an 18-month old macaque carry a sweet potato to a stream and wash off dirt. Soon, her mother and two friends were washing potatoes, and soon others, except older males. This practice continues today.
- Three generations of bottlenose dolphins off Brazil have taught their young to drive fish into fisherman's nets, doing a rolling dive to indicated where the men should cast their nets, and then feeding off the fish that the nets stun.
- Only chimps in Gombe, Mahale and Kibale in Uganda perform rain dances, dragging branches and slapping the ground and charging during a heavy rain.

Schein's Model of Culture

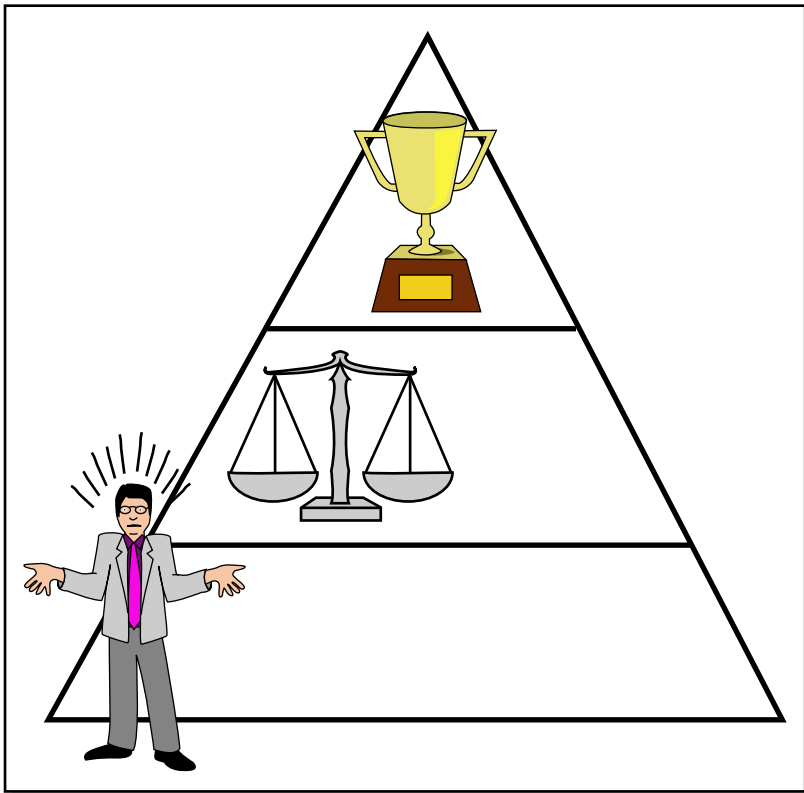


Figure by MIT OCW.

Artifacts: what you see,
objects, structures

Values: strategies, goals,
philosophies, justifications

Assumptions: taken for granted
beliefs, mental models, habits

MIT Values

“MIT has a distinctive mission and history that set us apart from other American universities. When the Institute was established almost 150 years ago, science had essentially no impact on the curriculum that was followed by most American university students... I believe the world has never needed MIT as much as it does now. The major challenges of our age are increasingly shaped by science and technology... With MIT’s expertise in interdisciplinary problem solving, the Institute has a unique opportunity, and a deep obligation, to make a critical difference – by creating the innovations, fueling the economy, and educating the leaders the world needs now. In addressing these needs, we draw on an unwavering drive toward excellence, a spirit of innovation, a culture of collaboration, and a commitment to making an MIT education accessible to all who have the talents and ambition to benefit from our programs.”

Susan Hockfield, President, MIT Bulletin (course catalog), 2005-6, p. 5

MIT Assumptions

- What does the MIT culture assume about:
 - People
 - Research
 - Work
 - Success
 - Time
 - Knowledge
 - Etc.?

Investigating Assumptions

- It may be difficult to uncover underlying assumptions that people take for granted
- Sometimes insiders have deep knowledge, but outsiders have perspective
- One way is to ask insiders to deconstruct their own culture
- Another is to look for contradictions, e.g., between espoused values and artifacts or behaviors

How Does Culture Change?

- Natural evolution as adaptations
- Managed evolution (org'n development)
- Challenges to cultural assumptions
 - Scandals and disasters
 - Charismatic leaders as role models
 - Infusion of outsiders, merger/acquisition
 - Coercive persuasion (turnarounds)
 - Technological “seduction”

The Disney Culture

- How many of you have been to Disneyland or Disneyworld? How many times?
- What do you notice about the place?
- What do you notice about the people?

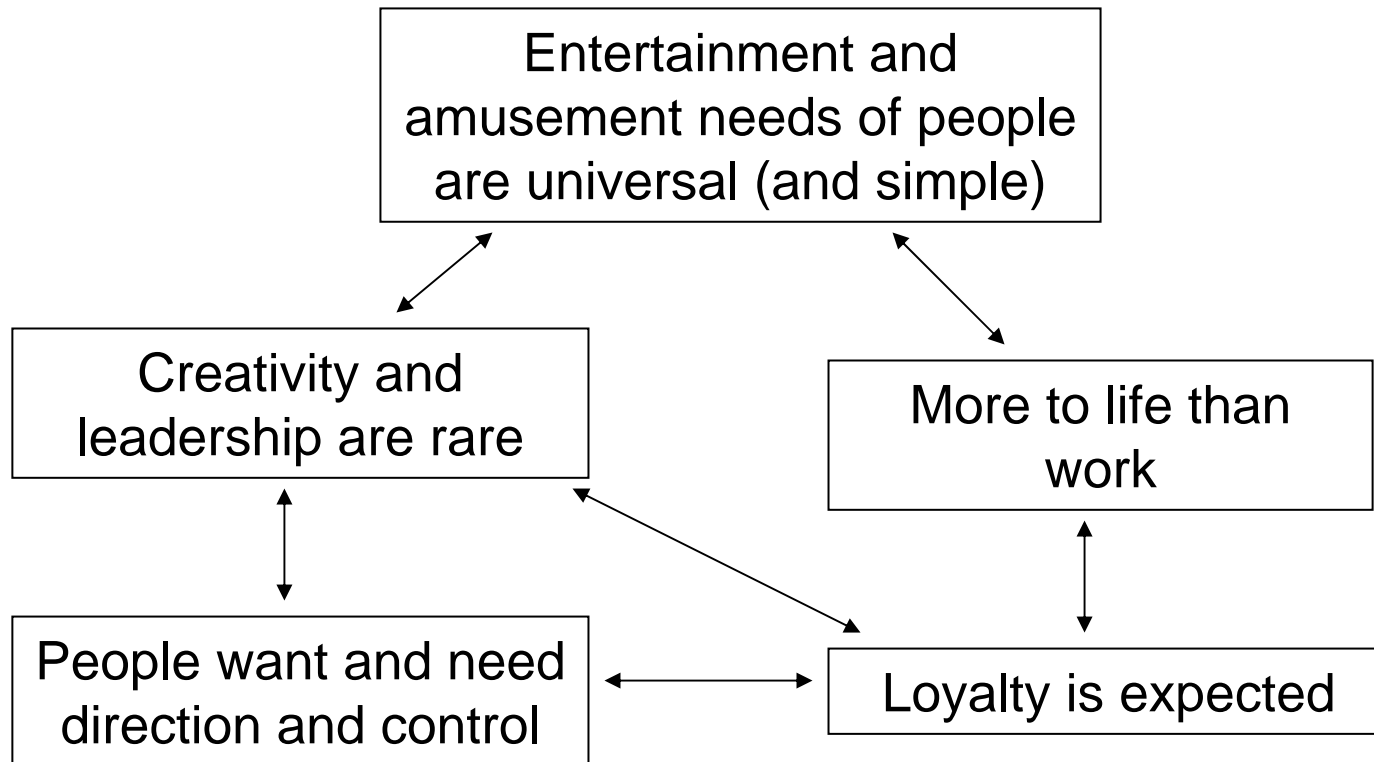
A Strong Culture

News stories:

- 8 Jungle Cruise skippers fired for “veering from the company’s official script and telling their own jokes to park guests.” Official Disney statement: “We entertain our guests with quality family entertainment and put on performances every day. Our goal is to deliver a consistent quality show daily.”
- “A week ago the Disney Co. ordered John Magness, a 65-year-old Navy veteran, to shave off the moustache he has worn for more than 40 years to comply with company grooming rules or be fired from his job as first officer of the Queen Mary, now a Disney tourist attraction in Long Beach, California. He did not shave. He was fired.”

The Disney Paradigm

John Van Maanen



EuroDisney

- After a big success with Tokyo, in 1992 Disney opened outside Paris
- Attempt to transplant Disney culture
- Worker control through overtime, firings, part-time work vs. mandated 39 hr week
- 3000 of 12000 workers quit in first week
- Fast food, bolted chairs, no wine with meals – what is the cultural message to customers?
- You see an American with a big smile, what do you think? In LA, it's "hello"; in Europe, ?
- What can be done to fix this?