

Outlining the organization – creating culture across boundaries

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Abstract. The article aims at viewing organizational processes related to boundary drawing, to the transmission and retention of values and ideas, and to management as primarily representing processes of conferring meaning to the organizational experience. It is recognized that practices of conferring meaning often transcend spatial boundaries, and that dispersed groups of organizational members therefore may share the same social world. The notion of culture as a set of meanings constructed and negotiated in social interaction also implies that the social reality of the organization is continuously created, recreated and changed in the social interaction of employees.

Introduction

Increasingly, forms of organizing question our rooted understandings of organizational life, as they ignore conventional boundaries for communication and interaction. Located in different cultural contexts, and confronted with a mosaic of influences, they often try to transcend differences of various kinds and to promote shared meanings in spite of geographical or cultural distances. Outlining an organization is a venture into the ambiguities and puzzles of organizing, into the efforts of trying to make sense of a kaleidoscope of events. Having done fieldwork at a computer company on three different geographical locations, I have been intrigued by the processes of trying to consciously create, distribute, and maintain a distinct corporate culture across national boundaries. While it is established knowledge in the social sciences that culture is a phenomenon built up through people confronting and dealing with each other in everyday social interaction, by more or less unconsciously taking on perspectives shared by others, reacting to them and questioning them, the conscious efforts to shape and transmit culture across borders has generally speaking received little attention. This article is an effort to order my own impressions as to what goes on when a company tries to shape the process of conferring meaning¹.

One of the most salient features of culture creation, if I may use that term, is reflecting upon the identity of the company and staging boundaries between oneself and one's environment, drawing lines of difference and similarity. To inquire into this process has been my first concern. Secondly, I have been interested in how perspectives

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