Organization Change

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*B*eginning in February 2001, we have posted on the Institute's Web site at < www.soi.org> regular installments in a series reviewing the theory and practice of organization change. The principal author of this review has been Laura Leigh Rolofs, former assistant concertmaster of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra and a candidate for a master's degree in organization change at American University/National Training Laboratories. Laura has completed her work on the series, and we thank her for her continued leadership.

In *Harmony* #12 (April 2001) and *Harmony* #13 (October 2001), we reviewed the first four content installments:

◆ Roots, Growth, and Development. An overview of pre-World War II birth of organization-change ideas and studies.

◆ Branches and Blossoms. A discussion of the growth of the field of organization change over the past 35 years, with a review of emerging themes.

◆ Open Systems Concepts. A review of the broadly strategic orientation to organization change that began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s.

◆ Open Systems Applied. Use of an open system model to help understand and assess orchestras as systems.

Since publication of *Harmony* #13, we have posted three additional installments on aspects of the concept of organizational culture. We present here an abbreviated review of those postings, and encourage you to visit the Web site to read the articles in their entirety.

Organizational Culture

Over the past 25 years, the concept of organizational culture has gained wide acceptance as a way to understand human systems. This way of looking at organizations borrows heavily from anthropology and sociology and uses many of the same terms to define the building blocks of culture. A prominent theorist of organizational culture, Edgar Schein, an emeritus professor at the Sloan School of Management of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offers the following definition:

The culture of a group can now be defined as: A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.[1]

In other words, as groups face the basic challenges of integrating individuals into an effective whole and adapting to the external environment, they engage in a type of collective learning which creates the set of shared assumptions and beliefs we refer to as "culture."

Another well-known theorist, Gareth Morgan, a professor at the Schulich School of Business of York University in Toronto, describes culture as ". . . an active, living phenomenon through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live."[2]

Elements of organizational culture may include:

◆ Stated and unstated values.

◆ Overt and implicit expectations for members' behavior.

◆ Customs and rituals.

◆ Stories and myths about the history of the group.

◆ Shop talk. The typical language used about and by members of the group.

◆ Climate. The feelings evoked by the ways members interact with one another, with outsiders, and with their environment.

◆ Metaphors and symbols.

Morgan identifies four essential strengths of organizational culture as a method to assess human systems:

◆ It focuses attention on the human side of organizational life and finds significance and learning in even mundane aspects, such as the setup of an empty meeting room.

◆ It makes clear the importance of creating appropriate systems of shared meaning to help people work together toward desired outcomes.

◆ It requires members—especially leaders—to acknowledge the impact of their behavior on the organization's culture.

◆ It encourages the view that the perceived relationship between an organization and its environment is affected by the organization's basic assumptions.[3]

Schein posits that cultural analysis is especially valuable in dealing with aspects of organizations that seem irrational, frustrating, and intractable. "The

bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them."[4]

Note Schein's use of the plural, "cultures." As we have learned from open-systems theory, members of a group culture may also belong to subcultures within an organization. This is certainly true in many orchestra organizations, in which the subcultures have had different experiences over time, and group learning has produced very different sets of basic assumptions. Because organization members interpret the behavior and language of others through their own cultural biases, each subculture's set of beliefs, values, and assumptions becomes that group's "reality." Behavior which a subculture perceives as inconsistent with its own biases is considered irrational, or even malevolent.

The organizational culture model suggests reinterpreting conflicts as products of different sets of experiences. Rather than starting with an assumption that something is "right" or "wrong," an approach using the organizational culture model would suggest that subcultures examine the assumptions that underlie their behavior, honor the experiences that led to those assumptions, and then investigate whether those assumptions still work well.

Because culture is so deeply rooted in an organization's history and collective experience, change requires a major investment of time and resources. As many orchestra organizations have discovered, assistance from a facilitator outside the system may be advisable because it is difficult for insiders to view their "reality" as something they've constructed and to see meaning in things they take for granted.

Change Process

Participants in orchestra organizations that have undertaken serious change processes will be the first to agree that this is difficult, time-consuming work. The report in this issue of the process facilitated by the Institute with the Philadelphia Orchestra outlines a detailed example (page 18).

Any change process must include several basic steps (and may include many more):

◆ Uncover core values and beliefs. These will generally include stated values and goals, but a thorough process must work to uncover values and beliefs that are embedded in organizational metaphors, myths, and stories, as well as in the behaviors of members.

◆ Acknowledge, respect, and discuss differences in core values and beliefs among the organization's subcultures.

◆ Find the incongruities in conscious and unconscious values and beliefs and resolve by choosing those to which the organization will commit.

◆ Establish new behavioral norms (and even new metaphor language) that clearly demonstrate the desired values.

◆ Repeat these steps over a long period of time. As new members enter the organization, ensure that they hear clear messages about the culture they are entering.

It is difficult to identify organizations that have "completed" successful culture change. And perhaps that is just as well, as culture change should be an ongoing process. But one can cite many examples of change-in-progress. In the symphony orchestra field, we have reported on several in"*Harmony*:

◆ Milwaukee Symphony (October 1996, with an update in April 2001),

◆ New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (April 1997, with an update in October 2001),

◆ Hartford Symphony Orchestra (October 1997, with an update in October 2000),

◆ Pittsburgh Symphony (October 1998, with an update in October 2000),

◆ Kansas City Symphony (October 1998),

◆ Oregon Symphony (October 2000),

◆ San Francisco Symphony (October 2001), and

◆ The Philadelphia Orchestra (April 2002).

Metaphor

The metaphors individuals use when speaking about their organizations provide a rich source of information about organizational attitudes and beliefs. Metaphors are also a potent way for those attitudes and beliefs to perpetuate themselves. Long-standing metaphors can function as emotional anchors. As they are passed on to new members, they help maintain a sense of "how things are around here," for better or worse.

Some theorists and practitioners of organization change believe that one can use metaphor as a powerful point of influence, recreating or reframing less functional imagery so that it aligns with the values and direction of a changing organization.

For example, it may be helpful to introduce an entirely new structural metaphor into an organization in order to look at old issues in new ways. Most orchestral organizations still retain the conventional structural metaphors of the corporate world—those strongly vertical images of pyramids and ladders. These metaphors are not a very good fit for an orchestra organization because they tend to reinforce the idea that one group is permanently on the bottom.

One orchestra organization that deliberately embraced a new metaphor is the Oregon Symphony. As detailed in the October 2000 issue of *Harmony*, the Oregon Symphony began a change initiative with the help of Professor Saul Eisen of Sonoma State University. At Eisen's suggestion, the organization adopted

a "starfish" metaphor to represent its structure and relationships. With its implications of interconnections among equally important parts, the starfish became a concrete symbol of the organization's emerging core values. The metaphor also dramatized the vital importance of communication: if a starfish's central nerve ring (the organization's communication system) is severed, its arms will react independently and it won't be able to function at all.

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) adopted a change process that is, itself, a compelling metaphor: Hoshin. The highly structured planning process, developed in Japan, means literally, "shining compass needle." This is a rich image, with implications of journeying together toward a desired destination, guided by a navigating instrument that is visible to all. As PSO volunteer Linda Sparrow said during the roundtable, which was published in the October 2000 issue of *Harmony*, "Hoshin has become much more than a planning technique for the Pittsburgh Symphony. It has also become synonymous with our culture."

Consider the metaphors you use to describe your overall orchestra organization and its subcultures. Are they accurate? Positive? Organizations can move toward positive culture change by rethinking or replacing older, less functional metaphors and creating new imagery.

For lists of recommended readings on these and other organization change topics, please refer to the Organization Change section of the Institute's Web site at < www.soi.org> . To receive "Key Notes," the Institute's periodic e-mail bulletin which will alert and link you to interesting material recently posted on the Web site, just e-mail your name and orchestra affiliation (or other affiliation) to < keynotes@soi.org> .

Notes

[1] Schein, Edgar. 2001. Organizational Culture and Leadership. In *Classics of Organization Theory*, edited by Jay Shafritz and J. Steven Ott. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers, pp. 373-374.
[2] Morgan, Gareth. 1997. *Images of Organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 141.
[3] Morgan, p. 149.
[4] Schein, p. 375.