

ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE: MODULE ONE

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When I look back at my career so far, the most profound experiences surround culture, collaboration, and community. Since I began my graduate studies, I have been deeply interested

in the idea of community as it relates to both organizational leadership and employee experience. The readings we have explored in class thus far have further impacted my belief in the significant role communities play in an organization. The importance of "communitas" (Trujillo, 1992, p. 359) – a strong, vital sense of community in the workplace - cannot be overstated.

I have experience with corporations who publish a set of principles intended to guide an organization's culture and decision making. Since beginning this class, I look at how they shape organizational culture very differently. I have adopted a broader vision when considering these principles and their impact on culture; Trujillo (1992) underscores the necessity of interpreting data through the lenses of the romantic, functionalist, and critic worldviews.

When I evaluate company culture through the romantic lens, I see how published "Guiding Principles" (such as those used in my organization) becomes the actual voice of the company culture. My organization's Guiding Principles aim to impact our decision-making paradigms and build on lessons from our company history. These principles, in theory, shape our ways of working, and strengthen our cultural norms. The romantic ideal would mean these principles shape every decision we make, and in turn, influence the way we interact with one another. Through this lens "... every conversation is embedded in both the past (history, rules, and resources) and the future (expectations)" (Conrad & Poole, 2012, p. 13).

The functionalist perspective prompts a review of what values are being reinforced (Trujillo, 1992, p. 366) by these principles. When I turn a functionalist lens onto my organization's Guiding Principle of "*Create What's Next*" (Warner Bros. Discovery, 2022), I see how the organization wishes to embrace the values of curiosity, experimentation, and utilizing mistakes as learning opportunities. Through this lens, I am excited to see the potential for a "...

particularly rich sense of community" (Trujillo, 1992, p. 359) being established through the company commitment to these values.

The critic perspective prompts me to think of instances where the desired or ideal corporate culture does not translate into our everyday interactions and decision-making. In fact, there are times where the way we operate is not reflective of these corporate ideals. This may negatively impact the larger employee community who become disengaged when the idealized corporate culture is not experienced. This aligns with the fundamental paradox identified by Conrad & Poole (2012) in that "... the notion that organizations normally run like 'well-oiled machines' not only is unrealistic but can be damaging to organizations and to their members" (p. 10).

Systems thinking emphasizes the interconnectedness of several aspects within community, collaboration, and company culture – according to Conrad & Poole (2012) there is a “dynamic interdependence of parts” (p.36). Applying a systems thinking lens illustrates that changes or events in one area can have ripple effects across the entire organization. Systems thinking has altered my perceptions on how my organization will often search for a singular root cause when significant issues arise, or a project/program does not produce expected results. The reading we have studied so far helps me to see the deliverables I am working on through a systems lens. The application of systems thinking illustrates that “... it is not possible to find a singular simple cause for events or problems in the system” (p. 36).

In applying this type of thinking to a community of stakeholders linked in a cross-functional team, the ideals of empowerment and ownership are enabled. Endless possibilities can be created when all members of a community feel empowered in taking on personal ownership and responsibility which is “... critical to effective systems” (Conrad & Poole, 2012, p. 37).

The systems thinking lens leads me to evaluate the powerful role of internal communications in communities, and their impact on organizational culture and effectiveness. Since this class began, I have been looking closely at how senior leadership in my organization wants to set the communications stage, and the gap in terms of how these communications are perceived and understood by employees. Downs & Adrian (2004) maintain the "... audience's perceptions of your communications matter" (p. 7), and often, "...messages sent are not necessarily what is received" (p. 4). I have witnessed several leaders approach internal communications from a "set it and forget it" philosophy, devaluing the importance of continually evolving and adaptable internal communications mechanisms. Internal communications in our organization are currently fractured and inconsistent in style, content, and level of engagement from the intended audience(s).

By conducting a communications audit, I am learning how I can play a pivotal role in bringing awareness to the organization in terms of those gaps. I hope to highlight several themes from Downs & Adrian (2004), including, "... communication should be thought of as an ongoing, dynamic process" (p. 3) and bring awareness to leadership that "... employees cannot buy into ideas that they neither know nor understand" (p. 31).

References

Conrad, C. R., & Poole, M. S. (2012). *Strategic organizational communication in a global economy*. Wiley-Blackwell.

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Trujillo, N. (1992). Interpreting (the work and the talk of) Baseball: Perspectives on Ballpark Culture. *Western Journal of Communication*, 56(4), 350–371.

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