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Building Social Capital and Creating Innovation in Organizations

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How do we create and build effective organizations? Are there specific steps that can be taken to establish organizations that have remarkable success in reaching goals, securing the dedication of members and being aware of environmental change and improving the quality and effectiveness of their efforts? What do specific organizational characteristics say about individual experiences in the organization? What do openness, trust and transparency in the organization say about the larger culture that surrounds an organization?

We have found that one can create and maintain strong organizations and detail some our several years of research in addressing these questions.

Some History

The scientific study of organizations is about one hundred years old. However formal organizations with specific goals, structure and membership are as old as civilizations and ancient remnants can be seen in many ways today including how wars and economic trade were conducted far back into antiquity.

War and Trade

At one time wars were uncoordinated violence between groups of persons, and markets were simply the interaction of two or three persons. As civilization proceeded, improvements in both forms of social action are evident. Military historians noted early in the First Millennium the superior hoplite-phalanx organizations originating in the Greek military somewhere around 1,000 BC, (Hanson 2000) and the further extensions of order and control introduced by Roman armies (Goldsworthy 2003) that led to military success and were imitated by other militaries in the ancient world and into modern times. Similarly anthropologists noted the sophisticated organizations of markets in Mesopotamia (Postgate 1994) and the pyramid-building organizations of the Egyptians (Aldred 1984) more than three thousand years ago. Such organizations were part of the key to the durability and majesty of those cultures.

Nation-State Building

Modern scholarship was most impressed by the nation-building efforts of Bismarck. Bismarck applied rational design principles to reconfigure the many independent feudal-based structures of German cities into a modern state at the close of the 19th century. Germany as compared to England, France, Spain or Austria did not have many decades of consolidation into a nation-state but rather emerged quite rapidly in the 19th century with many structural characteristics such as a uniform language, education system and labor guarantees that the older nation-states were pushed to imitate in the 20th century as they competed with the emergent Germany. It was the impact of those new rational structures of government that were a significant catalyst of Max Weber's examinations of formal organizations. These successes of civilization were based on early formulations of organizational principles.

Contributions from the Factory

A third source of energy for scholarship about organizations was the creation of industrial organizations to provide products and services by the industrialists in Europe, England and America. The factory model of producing things, including the assembly line, replaceable parts and large work areas under central control began to appear in England in the textile and metal-working industries in the 18th Century and Adam Smith in his landmark study, The Wealth of Nations, noted the remarkable wealth-building aspects of such organizations in 1794 (Smith 1937). Frederick W. Taylor (Taylor 1911) was the most visible observer and evangelist for promoting industrial-type organizations. He called his recording of how industrial factories emerged as scientific management and emphasized a rationally designed and controlled worksite with foremen as managers that laid out all work and directed its flow. It placed a premium on hierarchy and authoritarian control of all activities in the worksite removing both the autonomy and tools

of the workman with raw materials and the worksite owned by the factory. Significantly the industrial model of organizational design was a powerful metaphor quickly adopted not only by manufacturers, but also service organizations and government. Much of what is taught in business schools today as management theory is rooted in scientific management as it developed as a design for factory operations in the early 20th century.

Participation in America

A fourth source of influence on organizations and scholarship was strong strains of participatory democracy that characterized American culture from its earliest days. Influenced by the enlightenment in Europe and relatively free of the real and psychological controls of royalty, centralizing religious structures and land ownership dominated by a few, America developed with a strong emphasis on individual self-determination and freedom. The Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution along with the voting franchise clearly express these beliefs and instilled in the population a sense of individual efficacy and responsibility in securing freedom and happiness. Americans were quick to form organizations and use them to reach important goals. As early as 1836, de Tocqueville, (Tocqueville 1959) a French observer, commented on the strains toward equality, local organizations, and organizational effectiveness. The America he saw was populated by small farmers and businessman independent of the feudal structures that organized Europe. These Americans saw organizations as something they, themselves, created and were quick to create new organizations for new tasks.

Contradictions in Organizations

These influences created characteristics and as well as strains in American understanding of organizations. Structural contributions, as readily summarized by the writings of the sociologist Max Weber (Weber 1947) note the efficacy of organizations in achieving goals, efficiently distributing resources, lasting beyond one person's lifetime and being relatively free of the domination of individual personalities. Yet these attributes can lead to an impersonality and rigidity that can make life for individuals restrictive and challenging, as well as subjects the organization to changeless rigidity. At the same time the strong American strain toward individual freedom, participation and restlessness can create challenges in organizations to achieve a common focus and effort. Being free and self-determining as a citizen and being compliant as an employee are the seeds of the contradictory experience of modern employment.

A satisfactory resolution of these often contradictory influences can be arrived at through the specific design of an organization and the culture that the organization creates. The design includes structures to ensure the participation of all members of the organization toward goals. Cultural attributes include a commitment to participation, excellence, mutual trust and continuous improvement.

Tools to Build Participation and Excellence

The 1950's were a period of rising prosperity as the nation recovered from the Great Depression and World War II. With pent-up consumer demand, little family, governmental or corporate debt and capable industrial plants, the economy and the society boomed. The 1960's were a period of great expectations and civic participation that ended in turmoil. John Kennedy proposed to focus the country on great goals in 1961 such as landing on the moon and dealing with the fact that large portions of America was still not participating in the prosperity of the 1950's. Cut down by assassination in 1963 he was succeeded by his Vice President, Lyndon Johnson. Johnson pledged to finish the goals of John Kennedy and added to them with pledges and successful legislation in voting rights, desegregation, extension of health care to the poor and the elderly and the War on Poverty. The War on Poverty continued the American experience that dated back to the founding of the nation with its emphasis on participation of citizens in defining and solving their

own problems. The theoretically most important of LBJ's initiatives was the Community Action Agency that sought to provide "pump priming" resources for communities to define local causes of poverty and mobilize communities in building better neighborhoods and better lives.

Organizational theory in America has always been influenced by the emphasis on participation and empowerment. It played significant roles in developing the local community groups of the 1960's and then in the sizeable state government growth that occurred in the 1970's. Many efforts occurred to create significant tools to further responsiveness, mutual trust, organizational success and participation in the 1970's through the use of tools to measure members of an organization assess the strengths and weaknesses of their organizations, and used the findings to create organizational-focused efforts toward improvement. In Texas and other southwestern states Michael Lauderdale (1999) and Michael Kelly (1999) began to devise and use such tools in the early 1970's to increase participation in public organizations as well as through work with various corporations including 3M, IBM, and Prudential and its collaboration with the Austin Regional Clinic and Norman Chenven. These were the background conditions and our earlier efforts that gave rise to our tools today for encouraging social participation and organizational development.

We see these efforts of assisting in the building of responsiveness and trust as energizing the fundamentals of social capital within organizations. Social capital refers to the relative level of trust and support among the members of an organization. With higher levels of trust among members of the organization, greater organizational creativity translates into higher productivity and more positive relations with clients and customers. Our experience is that organizations with high social capital are the most successful in achieving missions, being good places to work and aware of the environment. Our best known and widest used tool in these efforts is the Survey of Organizational Excellence (SOE). It uses population rather than sampling methodology to secure membership assessment of their organization's strengths and weaknesses in the core areas of the organization. It is distributed to all members of the organization.

The Survey is a tool to assess the opinions of members of the organization and to maintain a continuous dialogue of improvement. The development of the Survey of Organizational Excellence is responsive to these forces of organizational change and clearly rooted both in advances in social science and the broadening efforts of the culture to extend the democratic franchise to all. The Survey, itself, reflects several trends.

One is simply that organizations can and are becoming more creative, effective, and efficient. Dozens of efforts in almost all walks of American life are underway to create better organizations. Re-engineering and re-inventing concepts are common, as are many techniques to speed up processes, increase environmental response rates, involve staff more fully, and heighten product and service quality.

A second trend is the realization that vigorous government entities are essential to a healthy economy, safe communities, and a citizenry that respects public institutions and in turn is well served by those institutions. Increasingly common is the perception that strong and capable governments help build strong economies and communities.

A third trend is that all organizations, public and private, today exist in a complex and rapidly changing environment that demands the highest levels of adaptability and creativity. This trend has resulted in the call for "learning or thinking" organizations. These are organizations highly adept at understanding new conditions, changing, and adapting to a new environment. To create and sustain these thinking organizations requires very different roles for leadership and all members of the organization. Indeed power and authority themselves must be recast as not vested at the top of the hierarchy but appropriately dispersed throughout the organization. Leadership becomes dispersed, not localized, as does responsibility to every single employee.

A fourth trend is one that has been with the country since the beginning of the American experience. That trend is toward the full participation and responsibility of each member of the

organization for the condition of the organization. The bedrock of American democracy is the voting franchise and the right of each citizen to have a full voice in the affairs that affect him or her. Citizens as employees or as clients are vigorous proponents of individuality and self-determination, and that extends to the spirit of organizational life in all organizations. The idea of a regular survey to have every member of the organization assess organizational conditions and goals is fundamental to the democratic impulse. It seeks to enhance the sense that each member of the organization has in the importance of individual actions to improve the organization and increase trust and reciprocity among all members of the organization. As trust is built within the organization, employees become more active in their communities in mutual efforts. This building of trust is the process of increasing the store of social capital in organizations and the community. The history of the Survey of Organizational Excellence reflects these trends and illustrates how these trends are changing organizations, and the relationships between members and the organization and the larger community.

The ultimate goal of the Survey is to assist organizations and individuals in becoming more capable, efficient, and innovative. It is a tool to enhance trust and reciprocity in the organization and then extend it into the community. Much of the teamwork and reciprocity of an earlier America may have been lessened through the impact of large, impersonal organizations, bedroom communities, and the busy, demanding lives of most Americans. As the Survey process encourages trust and reciprocity within the organization, the members are more likely to model this way of relating in other organizations of the community. Thus, the organizational employee helps "prime the pump" of the process of building civic responsibility, trust, and participation in every community of the state.

Efforts with The State of Texas

Much of the development of the Survey of Organizational Excellence has been with agencies of the State of Texas. Efforts with the state accelerated when Governor Clements called for such survey efforts to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of state agencies. Subsequent governors and legislators added to this original charge and in 1988 such assessments were required by the Legislature as part of the requirements for every agency seeking state appropriations. The function of the Survey as providing a means to enhance social capital can be seen in comments from prominent proponents and users of the Survey. Barry McBee has served in leadership posts in several Texas State agencies including the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission and the Attorney General and now is a senior official in the University of Texas System. Much of Barry's service began as Texas moved from being almost solely dependent on oil as the greatest source of wealth to more emphasis on international trade, especially with Latin America. He noted, "the SOE provides a basis to build organizational openness to assist Texas in being a gateway to opportunities in Latin America instead of fear of the unknown."

John Opperman, currently Vice Chancellor at Texas Tech University and special assistant to Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst has observed that tools such as the Survey help build a fund of trust in an organization to undertake widespread and fundamental changes when they are needed. John was a major architect of Texas Budgets in the late 90's and is one of the state's most visible experts on higher education funding and concerned with the long time development of social and human capital for the state.

John Barton is a long time member of the Texas Legislative Budget Board that responds to legislative responsibilities to build budgets balanced by need and revenues and a national expert on investment budgeting. John has long seen the Survey and related tools as enhancing and making explicit the dollar investment in the future that employees' salaries and benefits represent. For John such tools help create an active resource that builds and extends organizational responsiveness and creativity.

Albert Hawkins and John Barton played the key roles in moving the SOE from a sampling strategy to a census for all state organizations and employees in 1993 and 1994. Albert led in both

the offices of the Legislative Budget Board and the Governor's Offices of Budget and Planning to extend the effort to state colleges as well. Albert endorsed the creation of the Governor's Conference on Organizational Excellence that was convened in the fall after every legislative budget session to develop strong organizational focuses on state opportunities and challenges. John helped create the metrics for the Texas star award to recognize the best performing state agencies with the award provided at the Governor's Conference. John continued the focus upon the SOE as an important tool in assessing the quality of human resources and is a national presence in using concepts of investment budgeting in state accounting. Albert was Secretary of the Cabinet in the initial Bush cabinet and returned to Texas where he serves as the Commissioner of Health and Human Resources.

Bill Kuntz and Brian Francis have applied the tools and transformational principles of the SOE in two different state organizations. Reviewing their repeated success using the SOE, they noted that they saw some additional changes in staff. They said, "We found that employees became more competent and were eager to extend this feeling of competency to other arenas. One of the more amazing things was the vast increase in the number of people participating in the annual United Way Drive and the increase in total dollars generated! We had not anticipated this aspect of return from organizational improvement." A member of the Texas Legislature, Representative Jim Pitts, observed, "They are a model agency and I would hope that other agencies in the State of Texas would look at TDLR and see how things turn around from probably a dead on arrival agency to an agency that is flourishing."

The board chairman, Robert J. Huston, of a large state organization offered this assessment. "As we strive toward excellence in the Agency's operations, the Survey provides a reality check from those who know best –our people. The Survey results provide invaluable information on our strengths and weaknesses, and serve as a guide for continued improvement."

Commissioner Eduardo Sanchez, former head of the Texas Department of Health and now a professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, sees the Survey as a means to get an assessment of the organization. He, says, "Our goal is 100% employee response, so we can really evaluate TDH's strengths and areas that need improvement."

Varied Users of The Survey

To date the Survey has been used by over 500 different public and private organizations with more than 800,000 instruments distributed. Its operation is directed by Noel Landuyt, Nicole Duson, and Myndi Swanson. About three fourths of that number of survey instruments has been distributed via the Internet, and that is rapidly becoming the preferred modality for distribution. The Internet provides far more rapid rates of scoring and return of data and is more economical than the pencil and paper versions. Having begun in Texas, the Survey is used in several other states including Missouri, Florida, Rhode Island, Vermont, California, New Hampshire, and Arizona. It is also used with various levels of government including cities, private agencies, and businesses. It is included in the directives for establishing the formal strategic plan for all state agencies in Texas as required by the Offices of the Governor and the Legislative Budget Board. Data benchmarks are now available for many types of organizations, organizational levels, and demographic characteristics. The existence of these benchmarks provides important comparisons for all organizations as well as permitting longitudinal examinations of each participating organization.

In 29 years the Survey for the State of Texas has evolved from a concern about employee attitudes expressed by a governor to a tool endorsed by five governors from both major political parties and the leadership of the Texas Legislature. A continuously improving tool, it is used to quantify human resources in organizations and assist in establishing goals for improvement. It is available as an optically scanned instrument as well as a secure HTML version through the Internet. Benchmarking data and practices among agencies are available as well as comparison information with a cohort of highly advanced high technology

and health care businesses.

The Survey data and participation have begun an important chain of events in building a general atmosphere of heightened importance of organizational performance in state government in many states in addition to Texas. Dozens of specific applications of agencies using the data to pinpoint problems, involve employees, and improve processes have been established. The Survey Website chronicles this change process. The Survey findings are made a part of each organization's strategic plans where the organization uses the data to detail the organization's strengths and weaknesses as perceived by employers.

Research Derived From The SOE

Twenty dissertations and many scholarly papers have been derived from the SOE. Lauderdale (1999) provides the history of the development of the Survey and design. Some of the dissertation topics are discussed in this paragraph. Noel Landuyt looked at applications of the tool to higher education focusing on the concepts of quality and individual learned helplessness (Landuyt 1999). Yeojin Lee examined women's progress and satisfaction using SOE data. Kyonne (2006) and Yoon (2008) looked at retention and worker satisfaction. Montana (2007) from working with and following Poole (2003) used several SOE Constructs to identify measures of social capital and related those to organizational member experiences. Montana (2007) used several SOE Constructs to identify measures of social capital and related those to organizational member experiences. Kelly (Bolm 2003; Kelly (2001); Kelly (2001) developed concepts of employee alienation, stress and mentoring that are reflected in scales and applications of SOE data in organizations. Shannon Gilland and Troy Griggsby, along with Katie Yowler, led initial efforts to move the instrument to internet versions; full adaptation of that process, as well as internal security, email distribution, and inference engine programming, has been the accomplishments of Nicole Duson.

Newer Related Tools

Several additions to the original Survey have been developed. Prominent are tools to assess customer satisfaction with the organization and its services or products and a 360 degree assessment to improve supervision and leadership.

Understanding the environment through asking customers

During the 1990's and into the early years of this century many businesses have had increased concerns about how their customers view them. To a significant degree this comes from heightened competition both from domestic companies and from entities around the world. Such competition is most visible in autos, and since the 1970's Japanese manufacturers have successfully displaced both American and German automakers as producing products with the highest customer satisfaction.

Texas began requiring formal customer satisfaction assessment from its state agencies in 1998 and The Organizational Excellence Group was asked to develop internet procedures to assess those perceptions. This customer satisfaction assessment has become an additional activity that our group does for some organizations that seek to have quantified data about how customers/clients perceive them.

Creating a Leadership Model

In the last decade we have returned to concerns that dated back to our research in the 1970's about procedures to quantify leadership skills through training and staff development. Our most significant tool is a variant of a 360 degree assessment that provides feedback to leaders on how they are viewed by superiors, colleagues, and supervisees. We include a specific "best practices" leadership model and coaching instructions. The leadership model improves social participation in the organization and provides measured leadership patterns and normative directions to improve leadership.

Conclusion

A traditional approach to dealing with such problems within organizations has to do with dismissing employees and curtailing, re-organizing, or discontinuing programs. Does an alternative exist? Yes! But, it requires creating new struc-

tures that can transform existing organizations to ones that can cope with new circumstances.

For nearly three decades we have conducted an evolving effort beginning with initiatives to improve Texas state government organizations. With time we have had the opportunity to work with other states and many private entities. In the early years of our efforts the call was to make the employees more representative of the population of the state and to increase the level of effort among employees to improve the quality of services. Our theme to address these requests has been to improve the leadership of the organizations and broaden the definition of leadership to all the members of the organization.

Our methods as we have developed them include providing tools to improve leadership's understanding of where problems lie, increasing opportunities to participate in problem solving among all employees, and taking steps to broaden the understanding of the challenges the organization faces to all the members of the organization. Over the years we have concluded that great efforts are needed in every organization to increase the level of creativity and participation in the organization and to improve the degree of understanding that each organization has about its clients, its customers, its environment. Only through such efforts can organizations expect to survive the relentless changes and challenges they face.

As the years passed and our experience grew, we increased the focus of our efforts on the characteristics of the organizations, not just the attitudes of the employees. We began to see the norms and the culture of the organization as being the most important factors in determining how well an employee worked, how satisfied the employee was, and how clients, customers, or citizens viewed the services or products of the organization.

Our work became directed not simply toward how the employee viewed the organization but how we might direct our efforts to improve certain aspects of the organization. We have begun to conclude that we must work toward building organizations somewhat different than those of our past and we call those organizations "transformative." By transformative, we mean organizations that have high levels of skills to create new services and products when needed and organizations that are highly attuned to a changing environment. We have begun to identify core "transformational principles." These are the attributes that we felt must characterize organizations that would be successful under conditions of change that will characterize all American organizations for decades to come. These seem to be what is necessary to create organizations that can appropriately transform themselves to meet new challenges and transform members to meet ever higher challenges:

Transformational Principles

- Members not Employees. Organizations must have high levels of support and involvement of all employees in the organizations. Employees would be seen as members of a common enterprise not simply as "hired persons." Membership orientation is critical to getting the full involvement and commitment of people.
- Strong Teams. Organizations must place a high priority on having strong teams with members capable of continuously examining services or products with an emphasis on quality and improvement. Careful and continuous critique of all efforts is encouraged as a central property. This is in contrast to people being independent and indifferent of each other.
- Respect not Command. Rather than using command and authority to direct employees, leadership throughout the organization would be developed so that members would respect leaders for greater knowledge and decision-making ability. The source of leadership legitimacy comes from capability not formal assignment of position.
- Limits on Hierarchy. Social distance among all levels and divisions of the organization would be minimized with an emphasis on shared responsibility, success and failure and destiny. In-

creased levels of hierarchy lessen effective communication and can produce feelings of alienation at lower levels.

- Holographic. Tools and training would be incorporated to increase member understanding of the organization, how it is funded, the quality of its efforts with a goal of having every person knowledgeable even expert in the business of the organization. We use the term "holographic" to express this property.
- Candor. Leadership would seek to share with members as much as possible about the organization and its activities and in turn expect high levels of responsibility, understanding and commitment from members. Transparency and candor are critical properties.
- Nimble. With high levels of strong teamwork, team members skilled in thoughtful critique of work and with decision-making spread through out the organization, quick access to information would lead to improved organizational response time in dealing with challenges and greater likelihood of innovation.
- Intellectual Growth. Investments in staff development would be encouraged but with the development sharply and prudently focused not upon the needs or desires of employees but upon requisite skills and abilities critical for the organization. Employees would be encouraged to increase other areas of educational and professional development but the resources of the organization would focus upon organizational needs and priorities.
- Premium on Information. Investments in training and technology would be made to facilitate ready communication and access to information throughout the organization. The general assumption is that the more information is available and the more ready the access then individual actions would be more highly informed.
- Learning Organization. Information technology investments would move the organization toward becoming a learning organization. Information is seen not as a scarce and controlled resource but an open imperative needed and available to all members of the organization.

These have become our working principles to build stronger, more creative and more successful organizations. The SOE is the tool to initiate regularly social participation as well as to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. The aggregate data of the SOE has many uses for the organization. Simple overtime percentages of those that participate in the SOE is a quick and rough indicator of trust and engagement. The subscales of the SOE provide information about areas of strength and weaknesses; by looking at units in an organization one can determine parts of the organization that operate best. Such information builds understanding and pride in what is done well. It also suggests where attention is needed. We urge organizations to use the data to start dialogues with organization members to take focused steps on improvement.

As organizations understand themselves better, one typical step toward improvement is improving leadership. We developed our approach to the 360 Assessment to assist in that activity. Our 360 uses the conventional technology to have each leader rated by the supervisors, peers, and supervisees, as this the fundamental working team. We add a theory-based quantification to the traditional 360 so that each respondent is provided information on how the person leads and what steps lead to a more successful leadership approach. Both the SOE and the 360 are internal tools that help organizations measure internal characteristics. Organizations do not exist in a vacuum and thus all organizations need techniques for gathering data about the work environment. One part of the environment includes clients and customers and the customer satisfaction assessment is one tool that our group uses to assist organizations in regularly gathering customer data and reducing it to quantifiable numbers.

Building social capital and successful organizations starts with participation. Social capital means trust and reciprocity. It means transparency where actions are open. Innovation occurs with high trust conditions and with committed members who think critically and who are willing to take risks. Social capital must be built continuously in the organization and in the organization's environment. Our approach has always been one of developing partnerships with organizations that choose to use these tools and take the path toward developing organizations that have these transformational properties. We have always felt that building stronger organizations is a work much like gardening- a process that requires years and patience.

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