Schein's Organizational Culture Model

Idea In Short

Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture emphasizes three layers - artifacts and behaviors, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts and behaviors represent the visible aspects of culture, while espoused values are the stated beliefs and norms. Basic underlying assumptions are deeply ingrained beliefs that shape behavior.

organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping the behavior, values, and practices within an organization. Edgar Schein, a renowned organizational psychologist, developed a model that helps us understand the layers of organizational culture.

Schein's Model Of Organizational Culture

Edgar Schein is widely recognized for his pioneering work on organizational culture. He defines organizational culture as:

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learns as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which 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.

Schein's model acknowledges that culture is complex and multifaceted, and it is influenced by various factors such as history, Leadership, and external environment. The model provides a framework for understanding the layers of culture and how they interact, helping leaders and managers navigate and shape organizational culture.

Schein's model of organizational culture consists of three layers:

1. Artifacts And Behaviors

2. Espoused Values, and
3. Basic Underlying Assumptions

Each layer represents different levels of visibility and depth within an organization, influencing how employees perceive and interact with the culture.

Artifacts and Behaviors

At the surface, artifacts and behaviors are the most visible aspects of organizational culture. They include tangible elements such as the physical layout of the workspace, dress code, symbols, rituals, and observable behaviors. These manifestations can be observed and analyzed to gain insights into the underlying cultural values and assumptions.

Artifacts serve as explicit representations of the organization's culture. For example, the layout of an open office space with collaborative workstations may indicate a culture that values teamwork and collaboration. Dress code policies can reflect the organization's formality or informality.

Behaviors, both individual and collective, reflect the norms and expectations within the organization. These behaviors may include communication patterns, decision-making processes, and approaches to problem-solving. By studying these artifacts and behaviors, one can start to uncover the underlying values and assumptions that drive them.

Espoused Values

The second layer of Schein's model focuses on espoused values, which represent the stated beliefs and norms that are promoted and communicated within the organization. Espoused values are often articulated in mission statements, vision statements, value statements, and other official documents.

Espoused values can also be observed in the explicit messages communicated by leaders and managers. They reflect the ideals and aspirations of the organization and are intended to guide the behavior and decision-making of employees. However, it is important to note that there can be a gap between espoused values and the actual behaviors exhibited within the organization.

For example, if an organization's espoused value is customer-centricity, it may emphasize

the importance of delivering exceptional customer service. However, if employees experience a lack of resources or support to prioritize customer needs, there may be a misalignment between the espoused values and the day-to-day reality.

Basic Underlying Assumptions

The deepest layer of Schein's model comprises basic underlying assumptions. These assumptions are deeply ingrained beliefs and values that are taken for granted and often go unspoken. They represent the core of the organization's culture and shape individuals' thinking, decision-making, and behaviors.

Basic underlying assumptions are often implicit and shared by members of the organization. They are formed over time through experiences, interactions, and observations within the organizational context. These assumptions become so deeply embedded that they are rarely questioned or challenged.

For instance, an organization may have a deeply held assumption that success is primarily achieved through individual competition rather than collaboration. This underlying assumption influences how employees perceive and approach their work, impacting team dynamics, cooperation, and overall organizational performance.

Implications And Application

Understanding Schein's model of organizational culture has several practical implications for leaders, managers, and employees. By recognizing the different layers of culture, organizations can actively shape and manage their culture to align with their strategic goals and foster a positive work environment. Here are some key practical implications and applications of Schein's model:

Assessing And Diagnosing Organizational Culture

Schein's model provides a framework for assessing and diagnosing the existing organizational culture. By examining the artifacts, behaviors, and espoused values, leaders can gain insights into the current cultural dynamics. This diagnosis helps identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, enabling targeted interventions and initiatives.

Culture Alignment With Strategy

Organizations can use Schein's model to ensure that their culture aligns with their strategic objectives. By examining the espoused values and underlying assumptions, leaders can identify any gaps or contradictions that may hinder the effective implementation of the strategic plan. Adjustments can be made to reinforce values and assumptions that support the desired outcomes.

Culture Change And Transformation

Schein's model is instrumental in driving culture change and transformation initiatives. By focusing on all three layers of culture, organizations can design interventions that address artifacts, behaviors, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. This comprehensive approach facilitates a deep and lasting shift in the organizational culture.

Leadership Development

Leadership development programs can benefit from Schein's model by incorporating a focus on cultural awareness and competency. Leaders who understand the layers of culture can effectively navigate and influence the organizational dynamics. They can align their behaviors and decisions with the espoused values and shape the underlying assumptions to foster a positive and productive culture.

Organizational Communication

Effective communication is essential for shaping and reinforcing the organizational culture. Schein's model highlights the importance of aligning communication efforts with the artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. Clear and consistent communication helps in conveying cultural expectations, promoting transparency, and building trust among employees.

Talent Acquisition And Retention

Organizational culture plays a significant role in attracting and retaining top talent. Candidates often seek organizations whose culture aligns with their values and work preferences. By understanding the layers of culture, organizations can communicate their cultural attributes to potential candidates, thereby attracting individuals who will thrive within the cultural context.

Mergers And Acquisitions

During mergers and acquisitions, understanding and managing cultural differences is critical to successful integration. Schein's model provides a framework for assessing the cultures of the merging organizations and identifying areas of alignment and misalignment. This knowledge helps leaders design strategies to bridge cultural gaps, foster collaboration, and ensure a smooth transition.

Organizational Learning And Knowledge Management

Schein's model highlights the importance of underlying assumptions in shaping organizational learning and knowledge management practices. Organizations can promote a learning culture by encouraging open dialogue, questioning assumptions, and fostering a growth mindset. Knowledge management efforts can focus on capturing and sharing tacit knowledge embedded in underlying assumptions.

Summary

Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture provides a valuable framework for understanding the layers of culture within an organization. By recognizing the interplay between artifacts and behaviors, espoused values, and underlying assumptions, leaders and managers can effectively shape and manage the organizational culture. This understanding enables organizations to align culture with strategy, drive change initiatives, attract and retain top talent, and foster a positive and productive work environment. By leveraging Schein's model, organizations can cultivate a strong and adaptive culture that supports their long-term success.