Organizations
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Organizations exist for the purpose of satisfying some perceived need in the world. As the world changes so do those perceived needs. Thus an organization should never be static but always dynamic in order for it to continue to have a reason for being. Unfortunately it is the nature of humanity, and therefore organizations, to resist change. Therefore any given organization must be led by a vision that constantly looks to and prepares for the future. This in essence is the process of agile organizational development; a spirit of consistent evolution to anticipate and adapt to variable world environments.

The founders of any organization must define its attributes based upon requirements derived from the perceived need. Policies, plans and procedures will be established to enable adequate governance of the organizations operation. Human resources should prescribe necessary credentials for labor to perform the required tasks.

All of the aforementioned requires the founders to assess the market conditions to determine the need; that is, they must interpret the environment to derive accurately the market needs that must be satisfied. As the world changes then management and entrepreneurs must decipher the winds of change and estimate what must be done within the given organization to adjust to that change.

At the same time that the world externally is changing the organization will also be changing. Personnel turnover and the increasing experience of workers will change the corporate landscape. In addition the attitude of associates will shift as internal and external forces change. The ability of a manager to read these variations can mean the difference between success and failure of a company.

Reading, interpreting and understanding the character of an organization's native and foreign impact elements must become a skill that those in positions of responsibility

judiciously apply. Recognizing the varying state of the corporate world, with regard to the customer/consumer relationship, and life world, with the regard to the corporate associate's wellbeing, enables leadership to facilitate product and service evolution and human asset development to the greatest degree possible.

Scott and Davis (2006) speak to the need for organizations and their principal part in our current environment. The similarities of the myriad entities in the world as well as the variety make an exhaustive study both problematic and thought-provoking. They rely on the research of a breadth of time and space to devise a thorough going treatise that is fundamental yet not simplistic.

The first four chapters delve into the rudiments of an organizational system; identifying specific basic types as rational, natural and open. Each of these types can be further divided into sub-systems generally identified by the type of management. Thus an entity seen as a rational system might be classified as having scientific or bureaucratic management. The scientific would rely on processes like system engineering where a specification is derived from the requirements of a customer which then drives the design, development and deployment of a product our service.

Whereas, a bureaucracy, according to Weber (Scott and Davis, 2006), would be founded on the basis of authority at the top of the organization. This could be a traditional authority derived from long standing cultural or religious positions. We see this in the various nations and tribes where there is a hereditary succession as well as hierarchical religious organization where the highest level of authority is elected by the leadership or a vote of the faithful followers. It could also be legal authority, which is founded upon documented rules, rights and responsibilities of the membership. In theory this would be

what we have in any of the various forms of democracy. The final form of a bureaucracy

would be based upon charismatic authority. This can manifest in nations where a head of

state with a winsome personality is able to rouse enough of the population to give him or

her full control to legislate by fiat and define a management structure which serves to

maintain control of the system. In mind we saw this to a certain extent with Hugo Chavez in

Venezuela and Fidel Castro in Cuba before that. But it can also happen in religious

organizations such as the infamous "Praise the Lord" club run by Jim and Tammy Baker.

The key feature of all bureaucracies is the strict set of boundaries to functions of

members. It is perhaps only anecdotal but I had an experience while in the US Navy which

illustrates this all too well not to tell the story. In 1988 I had a computer in my office on the

USS Enterprise on which I maintained a database of the documentation applicable to the

operation of the nuclear propulsion plants. One day the hard drive (a gigantic 20 MB)

stopped working. In order to buy a new one, since there were none in the standard Navy

supply system at the time, I was required to get petty cash from what was known as the

impress fund. To do this I first had to get a signature from my immediate chain of command

which consisted of a division officer (a Lieutenant Junior Grade), our "principal assistant"

(a Lieutenant Commander) and the reactor department officer (a Captain). After this I had

to have a signature from a senior enlisted member of the ships supply department and then

a midgrade officer therein. I then had to go to an office located in a small trailer on the

naval base in Alameda, California. Happily, at that time we were tied to a pier there, so it

was basically down the street. The trailer was located inside of a warehouse which had

been a hangar for aircraft. None of this was well marked so it was hard to find. When I

finally got into the trailer I found 6 civilians, each at their own desk. When I stepped in they

all ignored my existence for about 30 seconds until I announced what I needed. I was then

directed to one of the individuals who looked over paper work wrote something in a binder

initialed a box on a form I had brought, handed it to me and told me to see another person

at the other end of the trailer. In the end, each of the six people had to do something with

the form and annotate some log that they each had. I then went to the base disbursing

office to collect the cash; $220. This is what I would call bureaucracy gone awry. But it

shows how each person had their very specific part in the process and each could not (or

would not) do what the others did.

Rational systems as the basis of an organization can easily be seen as the norm in

the corporate world as well as public institutions. Having very specific goals (Scott and

Davis, 2006) is an obvious ear mark of these two types of groups. The goal of a commercial

entity is to make a profit by producing a product or providing a service to a target market.

A key part of this is the profit motive without which the corporation would not be able to

exist. There was a statement made by an industrialist named Collis P. Huntington, who

founded a ship building company in Newport News, Virginia. In this statement there was

the line "...We shall build good ships; at a profit, if we can, at a loss if we must, but always

good ships...". By the time I came to work for this company, this statement had been cast in

bronze and attached to a boulder which was displayed in front of the executive office

building. But shortly thereafter it was relocated to a nearby park named after Huntington.

Apparently the management of that time didn't like the idea of losing money. So, "The

Rock" (as employees affectionately referred to it) had to go. In the end the purpose for the

company's existence was all that mattered. And of course the policies, procedures, et al,

were defined to that end.

Some public and social entities, on the other hand, occasionally experience what in the systems engineering world is known as "scope creep". Scott and Davis (2006) refer to this phenomenon where the purpose of an organization no longer exists but the membership endeavors to keep things alive by adjusting the purpose or coopting into the realm of another organization. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a good example of this. Since the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the opening of the "Iron Curtain" the purpose of NATO essentially no longer existed. So, now it is a de facto special operations force of the UN. This assumes that the UN supports what the NATO membership wants to happen, or vice versa. Absent this agreement the UN has very little ability to wage war with its sparse ill-equipped forces.

In some respects one would say that this adjustment of purpose can be a good and proper thing to do. However, it is possible that, as Scott and Davis (2006) state, "The necessity of survival can override the morality of purpose". They say it so well; I had to give a direct quote. But this is the occasional tack of too many entities which have addressed their purpose so well, that the need no longer exists.

The natural system all but epitomizes this aforementioned statement of Scott and Davis (2006). Such that the purpose of the organization morphs as the operational climate changes in order to maintain its validity and in the end support the membership. Patagonia is a good example of this kind of organization. In the beginning Yvon Chouinard started making his own climbing equipment. He then established a business called The Great Pacific Iron Works to market his wares. This eventually blossomed into an outdoor equipment store (where I purchased my first backpack, sleeping bag, hiking boots and climbing shoes) and then the Patagonia brand was launched to market a clothing line. As

far as can be seen it appears that the original purpose for these organizations was so that

Yvon could go rock and ice climbing on a regular basis. It morphed to also be

environmentally friendly to the rocks they were climbing and now is a supporter of

environmental ethics groups including protecting the giant sequoias of northern California,

demolition of the Matilija dam to open the route of the stealhead, now an endangered

species and many others.

The open system appears to be the most difficult to adequately define but is at the

same time flexible enough to survive fluctuations in the operating environment. These are

more focused on the complexity and variability of its structure and the looseness of the

component part's interconnection (Scott and Davis, 2006).

The statement "Great universities do not arise in deserts or other sparsely

populated areas" identifies the most obvious of examples of an open system. Without a

doubt the organization of higher education is an open system. And each university is an

open system in itself. The administration, faculty, students and alumni are loosely

connected, each for their specific purpose. Each of these components also changes with the

outside environment and internal mechanisms. An institution which has not engaged in

morphogenesis but only morphostasis is not likely to survive unless it is propped up by

some endowment or sacrificial effort by the aforementioned components. It would be

difficult to imagine what we would be doing if it weren't for the adoption of distance

learning by Fielding and other institutions. Without the online environment it is probable

that there would be far less individuals with professional credentials. The introduction of

information technology is only a small part of the morphology of Fielding. Each thesis and

dissertation which challenges the status quo and questions concepts long held as

sacrosanct changes the institution and I believe it is for the better. An institute of higher

learning should not be a place where those long dead are all but worshipped and their

works praised and cited ad infinitum. But the institute of higher learning should be a place

where deviation from the old path and forward thinking is encouraged and elevated. This is

the open system, immaculate.

Each of these types of organizational system rarely operates in a vacuum. There is

almost invariably overlapping of each. The rational system might have a good old boy

network in the background. This would work as a natural system born as a result of

common social or personal interest and friendships which grow as the individuals work in

the same role of an organization over time. An open system can erupt within upper

management of a corporation when they publicly speak of the need for austerity which is

imposed upon the employees but then give themselves bonuses and larger stock options.

And perhaps there is a manner in which an open system would house a rational component

or a natural or any possible combination of the three as well as the differing style of

management and levels defined by Boulding (Scott and Davis, 2006).

In the end an organization is a sum of many parts assembled for some purpose

whether well-defined or vague. Its shape might be graven in stone or like Jell-O. And its

continued existence may not be predicated upon it having a relevant purpose any more

than the desire to be.

References:

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