

Organization Culture – “of the people, by the people, for the people”

The **Gettysburg Address** by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln and is one of the most well-known speeches in United States history. It was delivered by Lincoln during the American Civil War, on the afternoon of Thursday, November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, four and a half months after the Union armies defeated those of the Confederacy at the Battle of Gettysburg. Lincoln concluded his speech by saying “ this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth”.

Taking a cue from that speech, I opine that organization culture, very much like what Lincoln said, is “of the people, by the people, for the people”. Good individuals contribute to creating a great organization culture because they want to enjoy working in a culture that promotes and reinforces their levels of happiness and engagement within the organization. Their efforts have a cascading effect amongst others in the organization, which usually builds up as a powerful force resulting in a very strong Employee Value Proposition and overall organizational excellence. In short, organization culture is the cumulative effect of the values and principles of everyone in the organization which is reflected in their behavior towards each other in the organization, their customers, their stakeholders and to society at large.

So, in the organizational context, who are these “good” people? One can argue that there is nothing like good or bad – it’s all situational or contextual. One can also give a very complex definition of “goodness” as defined in philosophy or religion.

As far as I’m concerned I’d like to keep this discussion simple and propose that we follow the normal societal indicators of “good” people, namely, those who, in the organizational context are honest, empathetic, kind, principled, trust worthy, respectful, helpful and have the courage and conviction to practice these values without fear. Of course, one can add a few more adjectives to this and argue that such a “superman” cannot exist. However, the point I’m trying to make here is simple – ordinary people like you and me are “good” people at home, within the community and in the society. We bring this innate goodness within us into organizations and create a culture where we want others to be good to us as we

are to them. So, if you agree to that (and you may not), it's evident that you and I are responsible for creating a great organization culture. It's not the leader or your manager or your colleague who defines culture in an organization – I do and you do! We make the organization stress free and happy! This is demonstrated everyday in our behavior within the organization - our sense of propriety and appropriateness, our responsibility, our accountability, our sense of dignity and respect for others - in all our interactions with superiors, subordinates, peers, customers and multiple stakeholders. The resultant organizational excellence is aptly reflected through higher collaboration, tremendous passion and a powerful sense of entrepreneurship. Needless to say, customer loyalty is guaranteed!

So, as organization members, we must ask ourselves the following questions –

- 1) Is my 'goodness' reflecting in my normal day-to-day behavior? Is it reflecting in my countless interactions with others in the organization, and outside through formal and informal communication? In my emails? In my phone calls? In my sales pitch? In my customer service? How can I take responsibility of my behavior? How do I understand my "blind" and "dark" side? (Johari Window?)
- 2) Is my "goodness" cascading within my team? How do I assess that?
- 3) Can we train ourselves and others in being "good"? Can it be learned?
- 4) Are we creating fundamental processes or platforms that support and reinforce "good" behavior and help to make it repetitive?
- 5) Is simplicity, objectivity and transparency in our innate goodness being leveraged by the organization in HR processes like recruitment, performance management, corporate social responsibility, enterprise sustainability and leadership development?

Of course, there would be more questions like these. But at the end of the day, we all desire a peaceful, happy, stress free work culture. What prevents us from trying to achieve one? Interestingly, this is a 'loaded' topic and I'll post my perspective on this soon!

Meanwhile, I do hope you are going to give some thoughts to having the "good" people in your organization create and facilitate a healthy organization culture!