Creating a Culture of Excellence in Technical Institution

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Abstract Institutional culture is a multidimensional; it is built upon the human interactions and the institute artefacts that result from such interactions. In other words, it is the behavioural norms of an organization based on the assumptions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and priorities of its leaders and members. Very few institutions intentionally and thoughtfully create or design their culture. Else, the values of top management or the founders of the organization influence it. Many times the culture typically evolves from the tactical needs of delivering the products and services the organization provides.

This paper introduces the readers valuing about organizational culture. The main aim of creating a culture of excellence is purposefully and actively build capability for new ways of institutional working. It looks at the frontier, how we can reform the existing institutional culture and the specific challenges in the context of education sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

Each of the organisation possess its unique culture over a period of time. Aristotle rightly stated, "We are what we repeatedly do. Culture then is not an act but a habit." So how, then, does an organization create a culture in which the employees habitually support it? The first step is to understand the concept of organizational culture.

Many experts have defined organizational culture in several ways. It is described as "*the large number of unspoken assumptions and beliefs which*

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leaders in the organization share about the way they do things around there." Another way to define is "*an organisation's culture is what determines how people behave, when they're not being watched*." Essentially culture is "*the glue that binds an organisation together. It is the collection of values, beliefs, symbols and norms that the organization follows and that define what it is and how it does business each and every day*." In whatever way we choose to view it, organizational culture really matters. "*Culture is paramount because it is the way of life, affecting not only how an institute creates value but also how the institute is perceived*."

Brent Ruben and Lea Stewart (1998) defined organizational culture as 'the *sum of an organization's symbol, events, traditions, standardized verbal and nonverbal behaviour patterns, folk tales, rules, and rituals' that give the organization its character or personality*. They noted organizational cultures are the central aspects of organizations and serve important communication functions for the people who create and participate in them. In the classic book on organizational culture, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (1982), Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy provided extensive examples of organizations with strong cultures. They found four distinct characteristics such as,

   (i) A widely shared philosophy (e.g., "People are our greatest resource" or "customer service is our top priority"),

  (ii) A strong belief in the importance of employees (e.g., Through flexible jobs and work hours, absence of reserved parking spaces, or open-door management policies),

 (iii) The presence of heroes (i.e., A person or persons who exemplify the philosophy of the organization), and

 (iv) Rituals and ceremonies (e.g., birthday celebrations for all employees, company sponsored recreational outings, Pizza parties every Friday afternoon, and so on).

In judging any organization, various aspects of the establishment can serve as indicators of its culture. For example, modern technology establishments often seen to encourage employees to dress casually and to interact in an informal manner. This reflects an organizational belief that hierarchies inhibit creativity and make it difficult for people to do their best work. Contrast this view of organizational culture with a more conservative company in which employees adhere to a generally understood dress code of formal business attire and work in offices that indicate the status of their occupants by the size of the office and the relative quality of its furnishings. These establishments believe that formal networks of supervision lead to more productivity by allowing supervisors to monitor employee behaviour and provide guidance

and approvals when necessary to keep employees focused on their works and jobs.

In addition, use of language is a very important aspect of organizational culture and one that has been studied extensively by many scholars of communication. The type of language both reflects and influences an organizational culture. Stories are likewise an important wealth of organizational culture. Most people in organizations can tell several stories that are indicative of its culture, such stories about how past employees either succeeded or failed at their jobs or memorable moments in the organization's history. These stories may be communicated within the organization or outside the organization and to the community at large.

Katherine Miller (1999) moves beyond the prescriptive approach to organizational culture by noting that some researchers view organizational culture not as a thing but as a process that includes emerging and possible fragmented values, practices, narratives, and artefacts. Miller argues that the approach to organizational culture is taken by contemporary researcher's view culture as complicated, emergent, and not unitary. Usually the progressive and healthy organizational cultures can adapt to changing business needs and technological developments.

2. WHY TO BUILD A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE?

Excellence is a continuously moving target that can be reached through actions of integrity, being front-runner in terms of products/services provided, that are reliable and safe for the intended users. It is also meeting all obligations, continuously learning, and improving in all spheres to attain the moving target.In meeting the future requirements of various sectors of economy, it is extremely important that concerted efforts be made to improve the quality and productivity of industry and service sectors. This calls for promoting excellence in all spheres of institutional activities.

Institutes can become excellent when they are innovative and are especially competent at continually responding to the change of any sort in the environment. As per Chandra (1993) the factors contributed in building excellence includes commitment to policies nurturing on-going excellence, laying a clear strategy and development of a strong work culture. A matching strategy of organisation that exhibit unrelenting quality improvement, creative thinking, close to customers, teamwork and group reward system.

An organization with a culture of excellence is not only the best place to work for, but also an agent of positive social change. Apart from excelling in what it does, such an organization is capable of uplifting the human spirit and having its influence felt for generations. There are several

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well-known approaches to achieve this. There are three key principles involved in changing the people to improve teamwork, changing the process to reduce waste, and changing the mind-set to enhance the culture. Thus, transformation of people is the first step towards transforming the organizational culture.

Organizations can actively pursue in two broad categories of excellence. They are:

a) *Customer Excellence* – *This has to do with those attributes that are a direct interest to your customers, such as quality, price, reliability, functional ability, customer service, satisfaction, reputation etc. The institutions can design and offer demand driven programmes.*

b) *Business Excellence* **–** *This has to do with those attributes that are a direct interest to your organization, such as growth, market share, profitability, predictability, longevity, culture, etc. The institutions can offer consultancy services and by introduce continuing education programmes for various industry personnel.*

The major outcomes of such cultural change, includes

a) Establishes clear accountability for creating and sustaining the desired culture;

b) Clarifies a vision, purpose, and values that employees can relate to;

c) Energizes individuals about their job, their purpose, and their contribution;

d) Increases organizational alignment and focus, encouraging a sense of community;

e) Aligns three aspects of an organization: its values, performance expectations, and systems.

3. BUILDING CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Existence of strong culture is another element of excellence, which relates to the means. In the context of this paper, culture denotes the quality of the people working in the educational system and the sum total of their behaviour that arouses an interest what is regarded as excellent. It is observed on the literature surveyed; it indicates that excellent institutions are marked by strong culture. Some characteristics of such culture have been: commitment to on-going quality improvement, tremendous innovativeness, autonomy, unrestrained entrepreneurship, family feeling, standardization of norms, close to the industry/

customer and productivity through people, value driven, respect for the individual, shared vision of objectives, strategies, problems and their solutions.

Based on ideas and views expressed in diverse works, there are various approaches being advocated and practiced by experts, research scholars for building a culture of excellence. The key drivers in the education sector are given below.

3.1 Creating Strong Mission, Vision, and Values Statements

The key drivers of cultural excellence begin with organization's foundation. Most organizations have inculcated in the practice of strategic planning. After the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) exercise, the next step in the strategic planning process is usually to formulate statements reflecting the mission, vision, and values of the organization. This is the foundation for creating your culture of organizational excellence. Thus, "An institution's culture is determined by the priorities it sets". Therefore, the institutions mission, vision, and values must reflect expectations of excellence in all of the statements.

Mission statements are the guiding force of how a business operates. These statements describe the essentials on who, what, why, how, etc., of the organization – with a maximum of five sentences. The vision brief describes where the institution is going, and the values statement defines what the business stands for. Thus, employees must understand them to the extent that they govern their activities.

3.2 Hiring Exceptional Employees

One of the most essential components of all of this, however, is how every individual in the institution supports its priorities. Individuals who set high standards for themselves and have high expectations for others are at the core. Hire those who do not have high standards and you will not get higher performance. The understanding is an organization is excellent that has excellent employees who understand and support the organization's priorities.

The book Who: The A Method for Hiring by Geoff Smart and Randy Street, says that "A player" is the one who not only is a talented "superstar," but also one who can fit into the culture of the company. The best way to develop a culture of excellence is to hire someone who "fits" by having the competencies to do the job and the ability to support the mission. If an organizational culture of excellence is what you want, you have to find those candidates who "get it" as reflected in their past behaviour.

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3.3 Communicating Expectations Clearly

The next component of creating a culture of organizational excellence is to communicate high expectations- repeatedly and over and over again. It is often seen that large majority of employees feel they do not know what is expected of them by their immediate supervisors. This failure of institutions management is an inability to be specific and to consider diversity, when it comes communicating with employees.

When a Principal of educational institution says "take great care of the customer" to a team of employees, each team member will have a different perception of what great care means. A culture of excellence reveals that the organization has taken the time to provide specific expectations to the extent that there is clarity about what needs to happen. So, instead of a generic statement about great care of customers, a high performing organization may say to employees: "We expect employees to take great care of the customer by offering additional services without the customer having to ask." A desire for excellence obligates the institute to determine specifically what is expected and then communicate it clearly.

Clarity of communication requires an acknowledgment that diversity influences understanding. The biggest diversity issue that affect understanding in this context are the preferences coming from the different generations working in the institution. From the communication perspective, their preferences must be considered, so that all generations get the specific message of the institution's expectations in a way, they best understand it. Younger generation employees need more explanation about how and the reasons why they need to do and what you expect. The older generations will do it because you asked them. It is still helpful to give them more information, but not as essential as it is with the younger group. However, both groups need to know what your desired outcome is, and in as specific terms as possible.

3.4 Engaging the Expectations for Excellence

The final component to create a culture of excellence is to immerse the expectations of excellence in everything that is done by the institutional leaders. In every discussion, email, document, and the process must support our expectations of excellence. It includes the behaviour of everyone in a position to influence the behaviour of others.

The employee engagement for expectation include reinforcement of behaviours that support excellence. Reinforcement is not just about recognition; it is about consistent exhibiting, asking for feedback, celebrating, and challenging. The institutional leaders must walk the talk and be exceptional role

models for excellence. In addition, reinforcement means asking employees for their feedback on how to do things better and celebrating when they succeed. It also means challenging employees to problem solving and to continually do better.

Regardless of financial settings, it is possible to create a culture of excellence. It requires a commitment to strong institutional mission/vision/values, hiring exceptional faculty/staff with high standards, communicating expectations clearly, and immersing the organization with these concepts. Then, comes the pride of being part of something great. These functions include providing employees with a sense of individual and collective identity, contributing to growth of the institution, and fostering cohesiveness among employees.

4. SUGGESTIVE ROAD MAP FOR CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The education system is dynamic in nature. They face many challenges in responding to societal, technological and economic changes in the local and global environment. The challenge is how to bring excellence in education system and to reposition it in response to the global forces driving change in a knowledge-based economy. All educational institutions need a vibrant and progressive culture and climate of continuous innovation. The culture and ethos should promote respect as well as healthy and productive attitudes towards learning, life and work.

The institution must also develop an ethos of ambition and achievement, striving for the maximum for every learner. As per Blanchard, *Driving Results through Culture Change* research demonstrates the amazing impact of a high performance, values-aligned culture on customers, employees, and stakeholders. Many establishments have generated these results from the culture change process. Today a road map to cultural transformation is a proven process for creating a high performance, values-aligned workplace. The cultural transformation road map includes mainly in four stages as shown below.

The cultural transformation is articulated in order to (1) promote the objectives of institutional excellence; (2) implement practices and lifestyle oriented to the development of culture of excellence at institutional level; (3) increase awareness and deepen understanding among all the employees of the inherent responsibilities in benefits of cultural transformation; and lastly (4) explore new ideas and sustainable creative solutions in making institution's day-to-day operations aligned with practices for achieving the excellence.

Taking account the objectives stated above, the four-phased cultural movement for excellence implementation is enunciated as illustrated in the following figure.

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On the other hand, one challenge that is still significant in creating culture of excellence is by measuring it, since it will reflect an objective evaluation of the whole scenario. Some of the critical factors may be used for its measurement may include, a) Institutional leadership, b) Delight the stakeholder, c) Student focus, d) Management by facts, e) Process improvement, f) People-based management, g) People performance, h) Continuous improvement, and i) Improvement in culture etc.

5. WAY FORWARD

The history of institutional change communicates us that a simple recipe does not work. Change remains very difficult. We need to understand that reforming institutional culture is not simple because:

(i)   Open minds are needed to keep pace with rapidly changing reality. The reality is leaping ahead of our collective development. We need new thinking and new ways of working together in order to keep up. Most institutions are behind in developing what they need to move up the hierarchy of culture.

(ii) Change requires new mind-sets, not just new skills.Institutionshave become well-informed developers of individual leader competencies. In doing so, they have over-relied on the human resource function to manage change through individual expertise& its development. Institutional leaders will have to consider the need to advance both individual and collective leadership mind-sets.

(iii) Clear expectations and beliefs. Lack of clear expectations and beliefs control an institution and prevent any meaningful change. Years of valuing institutional hierarchy, status, authority and control — even if unstated — can lead to assumptions and behaviours that are out of date, unnecessary,
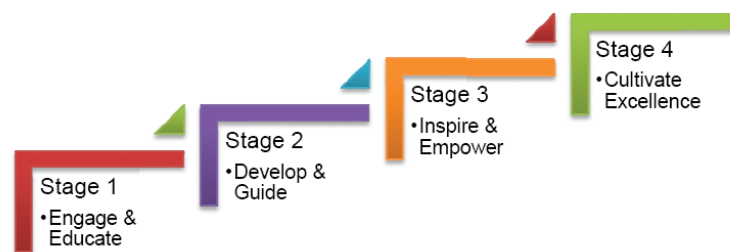

Figure 1: Four Stages of Cultural Transformation.

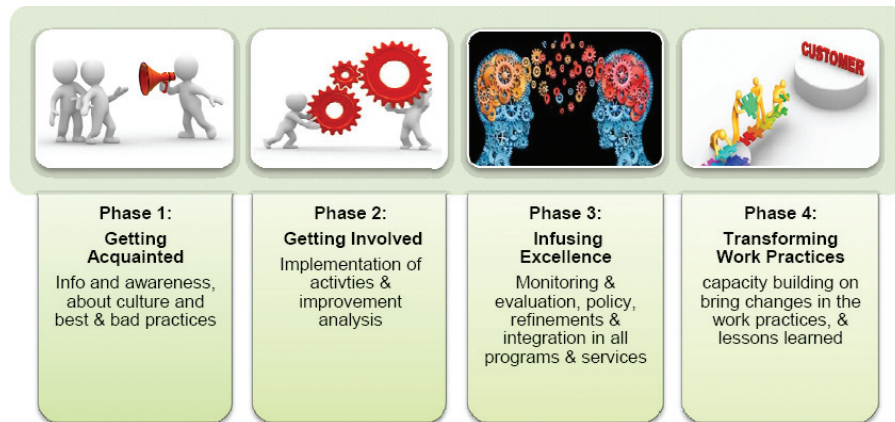| Phase 1: Getting Acquainted	Phase 2: Getting Involved	Phase 3: Infusing Excellence	Phase 4: Transforming Work Practices
Info and awareness, about culture and best & bad practices	Implementation of activties & improvement analysis	Monitoring & evaluation, policy, refinements & integration in all programs & services	capacity building on bring changes in the work practices, & lessons learned

Figure 2: Four Phases of Creating Culture of Excellence.

unhelpful, and at odds with stated goals and strategic direction of the institution.

(iv) Institutional change requires leaders to change. Change the culture — change yourself. That is the new reality. Senior faculty who are instrumental in the institutional transformation also experience significant personal change. The commitment to personal change is a fundamental part of their readiness to take on the leadership and management challenges of change for a sustainable future.

(v) It require thoughtful hard work. Developing new beliefs and mind-sets is hard including the work practices. Developing a new mind-set is much harder than managing workflow and the reformation.

To end with, excellence is not a temporary success, here today, gone tomorrow. What distinguishes the excellent institutions from the rest is their ability to stay competitive and in leadership positions in their field for a long while. A strong institutional culture makes this possible, providing it stability, and at the same time, providing it with enough flexibility and dynamism to ensure relevance and effectiveness. An institution culture is stronger, if there is apt between its shared mission and values and the strategies it adopts to achieve them.

6. CONCLUSION

Moving an institution towards excellence improves tremendously its competitiveness in an ever-changing marketplace. It calls for strong discipline and commitment. It involves the management of innovation and change

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through a systematic approach for excellence. The institution aiming for excellence will have to build a continuous improvement culture in its entire people; arguably, it is more in tune with excellence than an institution with a great performance.

Creating a culture of excellence is about delivering market demand driven programmes and services with good results and relentless pursuit in the way those results are achieved. Nevertheless, it should not be about spending too much time debating the precise meaning of institutional excellence. Nothing will actually happen in the education sector, until we all do something.

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