

Corporate culture and organizational efficiency: A qualitative analysis of Staheli West

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Introduction

The ability to be more productive, more efficient, and more “excellent” (Grunig 2000) in a corporation has always been an interest in business. Researchers have been interested in what makes an organization more efficient since Henry Ford’s assembly line designed for mass production. Organizational executives are searching for any way that might contribute to their numbers, productivity, and effectiveness. However, only in the last 20 years have communication structures in correspondence with efficiency in corporations become closely scrutinized. Real interest in effectiveness began to develop and derive value from the tests and research on human behavior and organizations that started in the 1920’s known as the Hawthorne studies. (Boundless. “The Human Side: Hawthorne,” 2016) The Hawthorne studies consisted of a series of tests conducted at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company as a “refocus on managerial strategy” (para. 4). The studies were conducted in order to find whether financial incentives were the most responsive for employee involvement. These studies are some of the earliest looking into organizational efficiency.

However, organizations and how efficiently they communicate is nothing new. According to Eisenberg and Goodall (1993) in their book *Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity and Constraint*, communication in organizations has been going on for a long time. They refer to their own addition to the communication and organization field by citing Kenneth Burke who said that “communication can be likened to. . .entering a room in which conversation is already in progress” (Eisenberg & Goodall 1993 p. 54). They go on to paraphrase the metaphor saying that eventually an individual will join in not understanding the entirety of what was said prior, add what he/she has, and continue the conversation till he/she leaves. To

best understand the conversation behind this study, one must first understand that from “empire to hierarchy, resistance to domination, revolution to bureaucracy”, management of organizations has existed. While it is not imperative for this study to go back that far and evaluate what empires and nations have done, it is safe to say that there have been many ideas passed around as how to best allow for the most efficiency possible. Eisenberg and Goodall (1993) pose three problems that have always existed in this field that will be addressed by other scholars and intentionally addressed in this study. The “narrative” of organizational communication can be summed up into “three P’s” as these authors suggest. “Theories are partial, theories are partisan, theories are problematic” (Eisenberg & Goodall p. 56).

J.E. Grunig (2006) is one of the most recent scholars researching efficiency in organizations, intending to expand the horizons of their implementations and ideally change the narrative as described. Grunig has created the “excellence theory” that will be used and further explained in detail in the following sections. Grunig sums up a relevant point that communication structure in an organization needs to move past the idea that it is only an idea, but that it yields measurable results. This idea is backed by his predecessor in the field Daniel Denison, who claims that large businesses need to move past a mystical idea of corporate culture and start implementing fundamental theories based on behavior, structure, and practices and incorporate them into their climate (Denison, 1991, p. 175). Both scholars point out that a strong communication structure within an organization not only yields theoretical benefits, meaning benefits that can be talked about, but are measurable. While “measurable” is a term typically used in the realm of quantitative studies, these authors suggest that once applied over time and a series of examples, a certain pattern may become measurable. Denison and Grunig are asserting that there is more than greater self-esteem, healthier employees, and other seemingly

immeasurable conclusions that can be drawn upon to help indicate efficiency. Grunig and Denison go as far as to argue, and have worked to prove, that a strong culture built on actual artifacts, strategically placed, will lead to measurable returns on investment.

This study is interested in expanding on some of Grunig's more recent ideas on "excellence" by going back to re-evaluate Daniel Denison's inclusive yet simple theory from the 1990's. Grunig and other scholars mentioned here will help solidify the need for such a study, whereas Denison's theory will provide the framework for the gathered data to be evaluated. This study, like Denison's, is interested in appealing to both an academic audience, increasing knowledge in theory, as well as the professional audience looking to enhance a business outlook (Denison, p. 176). Like Denison, this study too is written with the intention to appeal to the academic reader, as well provide specific information on what to do in an organization for practicality to the business professional. The intention of this study is to look at corporate culture with the wide basis that has been set by many researchers using a particular lens to look at one particular situation to get a sense of both breadth and depth on the subject. Then to use said breadth and depth to provide insight on the effect of culture on efficiency, or "excellence" of an organization. Corporate culture, as well, is not a new concept in the business world. In evaluating a company's values, beliefs, practices, and structure defined as "culture", this study will investigate how one organization can be purposeful in contributing to their efficiency. Staheli West—a local Cedar City company—will be the organization through which Daniel Denison's theory will be tested.

Review of Literature

Corporate “culture” in its essence, is a term used to describe a variety of rites and rituals in which a company participates. To begin constructing the term, we use Denison’s clear definition from his book *Corporate Culture and Organizational Effectiveness*. Daniel Denison (1990) says that

Organizational culture . . . refers to the underlying values, beliefs, and principles that serve as a foundation for an organization’s management system as well as the set of management practices and behaviors that both exemplify and reinforce they have meaning for the members of an organization. (p. 2)

Corporate culture therefore could be determined and evaluated through many different means. These means may vary from ways a company may conduct a meeting, how they celebrate different forms of success, the way in which they deal with failure and/or stress, and how they evaluate themselves. This list is not conclusive, but provides an idea of how culture may be defined. This study does not intend to determine a conclusive list, but instead make a list of what is happening in an already successful company and seek to evaluate whether or not one of Denison’s theories, described hereafter, is present and/or still relevant in one particular organization. It is intended that each theme provided therein is evaluated to see if certain cultural rites, rituals, and practices meet a criteria laid out by Denison. The list will be created by observation and evaluation through focus group, then compared to what a culture needs to be doing, according to Denison, in order to achieve more productivity, efficiency, or excellence.

J.E. Grunig (2006) in pursuit of developing the excellence theory, and his “excellence team” were commissioned by the International Association of Business Communications to research “how, why, and to what extent communication contributes to the achievement of

organizational objectives” (pp. 157-158). This commission was the beginnings of the excellence study through which the team outlined a series of structures that show how internal communication needs to work horizontally as well as vertically. This outlined structure means that in place of employees only receiving information from their supervisors and in return sending their information back up the line, internal programs and offices communicate with each other more. This structure was outlined with the intention that internal groups would be able to cut out the middle man and be more aware of the responsibilities each was fulfilling to avoid overlap, gaps, or other inefficiencies. The excellence team provides four levels that an organization may look through as lenses to evaluate their effectiveness. The ability to establish a culture that is both recognized and understood by all of the organization’s stakeholders is one of those levels. While each level is interesting, the specifics on the rest of the levels do not build on the interest of this study, being organizational culture and effectiveness.

The excellence study goes on to assert that an organization must be capable of solidifying an interactive tone, or if following Denison, a culture conducive to “involvement” (Denison 1991, p. 7). This structure governs the way that internal stakeholders (production, advertising, marketing, management, employees in their various facets) address and work with one another. This structure also includes detail for external and internal stakeholders and their way to interact with one another. Finally, the structure provides understandable routines and direction to carry out tasks ranging from systematic productions to customer relations, all contributing largely to a “measurable return on investment” (Grunig, 2006, p. 158). The structure Grunig provides is fascinating and important to this study, because like Denison, Grunig helps this study to focus on making an organization’s culture less “abstract and mystical” and more “concrete and immediate” (Denison, 1991, p. 175). Grunig outlines measurable return on investment as several

defining factors that include, but are not limited to; reduction of litigation, conflict resolution, increase in loyalty, and customer/employee satisfaction, as well as tight knit functioning operations in the workplace. Regardless, Grunig's conclusions solidify and show in more current research the validity and relevance to one of Denison's key points—involvement. In particular, Grunig helps show that a successfully established and maintained culture will yield “quantifiable” results to a given organization as listed above.

Denison and Grunig are not the first to talk about the significance of organizational communication and certainly are not the only researchers to delve into wide range of influence of this realm of study. In their writing of organizational communication, Peterson and Pace lay a valuable foundation in the significance of evaluating the influence of organizational communication and an organization's ability to be efficient. While there are various forms of evaluating an organization and many templates of executive summaries to provide an organization after an audit, Peterson and Pace, in the appendix of their book, provided the framework necessary to asking appropriate questions that will be reflected in the questions I create for this study. (pp. 368-371) R. Wayne Pace, alongside Don F. Faules (1989) also produced a book on organizational communication that precedes Denison laying a path into some of the themes he created. Denison carries a familiar tone established by Pace and Fouples as they write, concerning leadership, “the goal of leadership, on the other hand, is to help others to regain, maintain, and enhance their motivation.” (p. 187) They then continue to lay out theories, theory X and theory Y that suggest different ways to view workers in an organization and mental processes behind how leaders may decide to lead. (pp. 188-189)

Another influential author in this realm is Pamela S. Shockley-Zalabak (2006) who writes on organizational change and communication suggesting that “organizational change is both

planned and unplanned” and that change when planned “are more deliberate and made with a desire to improve the organization and its overall functioning.” (p. 380) I, in this study, intend to evaluate the presence of themes that directly correlate with potential “measurable” results, like those listed by Denison, for the interest of the professional reader and like Zalabak aim to be more “deliberate” with a “desire to improve the organization”.

With the help of google analytics, Big Data, social media insights, business clouds, and other new digital technologies, the ability to evaluate and quantify communication efforts including corporate culture have been much easier to do making certain rites, rituals, and practices more justifiable and give real time numbers. This study does not seek to quantify such results or even to measure similar results for one organization but to simply evaluate whether or not the themes given by Denison are apparent at the organization and to what extent they are being met. There are even many variables that yield “soft” results, including customer loyalty and employee job satisfaction, that are too becoming more quantifiable with these technologies that only give more relevance to study in this field. Regardless, this study is interested in emulating that same tone, provided by Dennison, Grunig, and others mentioned here, that there is more value in looking deeper into organizational communication than may have been previously given to this field of study.

Life Leadership is a company specializing in producing development to professionals. The company is founded on the principles of the book called *Launching a Leadership Revolution* authored by Orrin Woodward and Chris Brady. In a short educational video of their program, the company shares statistics on what a typical business deals with that may be affected by the culture. They say, 70% of U.S workers are not engaged at work, “doing something they do not enjoy” (Brady & Woodward, 2007, life leadership media player). The video quotes Gallup polls

saying “disengaged employees are more or less out to damage their company, they monopolize manager’s time, have more on-the-job accidents, account for more quality defects, take more sick days, and quit at a higher rate.” On the same video, Woodward says that companies that struggle with disengaged employees, “suffer profit loss.” And lastly, the video quotes *Forbes.com* saying that “workers today want more, they want something different, they want meaningful work, and expect their employer to make work more rewarding in many ways”.

While there are potentially endless factors affected by a solid, purposeful, culture, this study is focusing on themes present in one organization potential ramifications of those themes. Another researcher chose to verify what Grunig has laid out, and because Denison’s theory that will be used for this study is a bit older, this study gives more weight as to why Denison’s words still carry value and relevance. Ni Chen (2008) utilizes Grunig’s excellence studies to evaluate a series of Chinese corporations in comparison to western style corporations. Among the many hypotheses he was looking to test, Chen made the argument that more than the public relations department, internal communication between employees and CEOs as well as employee-to-employee communication, or group-to-group communication, is essential to the effectiveness and excellence of a corporation. Mentioning that depending on the size of an organization, factors may differ slightly, but if the resources are available:

Two-way approaches, especially symmetrical ones, do appear to warrant higher degree of employee job satisfaction, higher national standing of the company, higher stocks prices, higher levels of trust and openness between management and employees—all being indicators of organizational effectiveness. (Chen 2008, p. 174)

Both Chen and the excellent team found that “communication managers should be involved in decision making at the highest possible level” (Chen, 2008 p. 179). Chen took both

qualitative as well as quantitative approaches to test his hypotheses utilizing in-depth interviews of communication departments (often just one person within the organization) focus-group meetings, and a sample survey. His findings were similar to that of Grunig, but that Chinese corporations had not been integrating and managing communication programs to facilitate this process. He went on to say that Chinese corporations are still in the early stages of integrating public relations and other internal communication structures (Chen, 2008 p. 179).

The point that Chen provides is first there is value in Grunig's theories, and second the approach emulates what Denison did in his research that provides framework for this study. Denison chose to do, in 1990, what he calls a "qualitative and a quantitative approach" in order to "provide both quantitative evidence and qualitative understanding about the relationship between culture and effectiveness" (p. 3). Denison surveyed 34 organizations and presented results in a set of "statistical generalizations about the impact of various aspects of an organization's culture over time." Five of these were looked at in "considerable detail through a series of case studies that focus on the history and background of each corporation, and the firm's culture, management practices, and effectiveness" (p. 3). Chen and Grunig, like Denison, came to similar conclusions, that studies needed to address "the problem of 'no evidence.'" The newer studies shown here only ratify what Denison has stated, as well as providing more insight that will not be particularly important to this study, but contributes greatly to the field of organizational communication. This study looks not to replicate what Denison has done, which was very extensive and done with resources that are not available to this study. Instead, this study will take Denison's final theory, as a whole, and look at a current, arguably effective, and successful organization and determine whether or not there is a significant comparison to the themes present there.

There is, in fact, a measurable value in creating a solid corporate culture that will lead to greater efficiency in telling a corporate story and telling it well. This idea is an aspect that Denison and Grunig both mention as playing a key part in corporate culture. The following studies show that the way organizations establish rites, rituals, routines, traditions, policy, etc., allow employees to be creative and independent, but to have a structure that provides base, somewhere to start, and unity to their actions both with one another and in external matters.

Roundy (2010) takes on the task of evaluating how well narratives contribute to mergers and acquisitions, which refers to the economic decisions to either buy out another company and become one, or to completely merge equally replacing all existing stock (assets, programs, clientele, leadership hierarchy, etc.) in the two companies with a new and combined stock. In this process, Roundy says, “There is also a ‘human side’ to M&As (mergers and acquisitions), which is laden with employee consequences and can influence both the individuals and the organizations involved.” He continues, “including layoff, acclimation to new corporate culture, and the introduction of new forms of management and work roles” (Roundy, 2010 p. 88). In his article, Roundy continues to lay out the importance of employee commitment to the organization as well as an understanding of their own part in the large structure. In relation to mergers and acquisitions in particular, Roundy specifies, “mergers and acquisitions have a particularly strong, negative effect on employee commitment” a term he defines as follows; “individuals’ emotional attachment to their organization” (p. 88). Understanding that there is a connection between corporate culture and measurable efficiency indicators (in this case employee attachment to an organization) is crucial to the organization’s ability to proactively enhance its effectiveness. Roundy lists a few of the measurable efficiency indicators; “organization citizenship behavior, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and job performance, and a negative influence

on turnover and absenteeism” (pp. 88-89). While understanding how companies merge is not the focus of this study, this information provided by Roundy only gives more weight to the need for such studies in organizational culture. If executives were aware of what is taking place during mergers and acquisitions, they could be more proactive about setting programs in place to avoid the severance of emotional attachment to the organization, or more broadly the change in culture; i.e. what was “right” or “good” in the company, what “worked”, what did employees expect, etc.

Roundy is yet another author who shows the clear need to understand corporate cultures and their effect on efficiency. He adds to the conversation that there are tangible outcomes that give value and worth to the time and attention spent on studying and implementing them. How to merge cultures and the ramifications on employees and other stakeholders from such a merger is a great example of the need to be proactive and thoughtful of an organization’s culture. Often CEOs and organizational leaders find making decisions in changing policy can be difficult if based merely off conversations and theories. That is why it is so important for this study to verify repeatedly the implications on the “real world” to help appeal to our professional audience. It is difficult to make large changes in an organization, but a CEO is going to feel more prone to do so when numbers of growth in sales, and reduction in litigation from previous quarters are available. The inability to test some of the theories in the first place to prove their worth is what has kept communication consultants at bay when clear changes in communication structure needed to take place. An example is evaluating whether or not a certain structure can make employees happier or more satisfied. Even if a researcher could design a survey that may properly attempt to measure, the human factor will always be there, including false responses, participation by fear or resentment, etc. Researchers have also run into the problem of defining certain “soft” concepts differently. Therefore, the need to move past measuring soft concepts is

necessary. We go back to Grunig again who provides these factors of “measurable” return on investment to show that there are ways to quantify the needed communication changes. Apart from the studies aforementioned, Grunig says “reduced costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, and negative publicity” as well as “reduced risks of making decisions that affect different stakeholders; increased revenue by providing products and services needed” (Grunig 2006 p. 159) are a result of organizational communication changes. It may be argued that there is an even larger list of measurable returns on investment. That list may be associated not only with strong communication structures, but factors that constitute a strong corporate culture as a whole. (Denison, 1990). This idea is well characterized with Roundy’s (2010) work, meaning that culture aspects, like good corporate narratives, may as well prove to add to measurable returns on investment, while contributing to a strong public relations or human relations program. Catering to more aspects of culture, as laid out before, may result in establishing stronger relationships with all stakeholders involved.

To continue the narrative and to help give some breadth as well as depth to the current research in the field, we look at what HR is doing. Jari Syrjala (2009) makes a suggestion that the best way to learn how a corporate integration is experienced, and how well it is incorporated, is to evaluate those whom it affects most. She says, “we were interested to learn how the change affected their wellbeing and what conclusions might be drawn for the purposes of practical HR strategy management” (p. 263). She contextualizes her reasoning stating “people’s feelings and experiences of wellbeing are a fundamental part of the texture of everyday life, which are mediated and reflected by their personal stories.” Through interviews and in an attempt to capture the idea of a “socially-constructed reality,” her study was able to analyze stories of three personnel groups of the corporate integration process. In that study, Syrjala finds that “there is no

such thing as a single, solid, unitary phenomenon of organizational change” (p. 264). Depending on the personnel, the group found different motives and underlying themes in the stories told. She concludes with an acknowledgement of the importance of this type of research, mentioning the first study conducted on organizational stories by Gabriel in 1998 who did not attract a large audience (p. 281). She cites another researcher speaking on the same Gabriel study who says “the approach seemed to confuse researchers at the time” (Czarniawska, 1997, pp. 55-56). Syrjala continues claiming that her study “generated a large number of narratives, each of which provides a partial answer to our research question by revealing how interviewees perceived the organizational change situation” and leaves an opening for more research on the matter.

These are but a few studies that have begun to notice the impact of communication in organizational effectiveness, and more the impact of corporate culture and narratives on that efficiency. A clear opening has been created for a variety of new facets that research may continue to develop. Through this literature, one may find that the value in organizational communication is growing and does contain and contribute measurable worth to a company. The ability to define what makes a company successful is what each of these studies has worked to more clearly set out. Yet, it has been, and continues to be, difficult to streamline and generalize a fix-all type structure to all companies. How to better facilitate the changes necessary to establish a list of characteristics and qualities for a successful company often changes with the dynamic of the company. More particularly each study reinforces parts of what Denison’s theory addressed in 1990.

While each of the studies mentioned in this section brought new concepts to the table that will not be used for this study, each gives more reason to believe that what Denison has provided is not out of style or too old to hold value. While alluding to Denison throughout this review, his

theory has been reserved for this moment to provide the point of the review of literature; it is this theory that will spearhead the study. While Denison's book was published before the majority of these studies, and frankly, before most of the studies examined, Denison's theory is the perfect route for this study to evaluate some of the key concepts most of these other authors addressed. Denison suggests a theory that consists of a series of four hypotheses that he hopes will "address [the] problem of 'no evidence' by taking both a qualitative and a quantitative approach to studying the impact that organizational culture can have on performance and effectiveness over time" (Denison 1990, p. 3). I, like Denison, feel that it may be impossible to come up with a streamlined process for all companies to become more efficient. Instead, to keep looking at what successful organizations are doing, and then attempt to put those rites, rituals, behaviors, etc., into themes or ideas that can be guidelines that in turn may be implemented by all. Establishing themes in the manner just described eliminates the problem that organizations are different and therefore have different needs and different means to meet those needs. Establishing themes, in turn, allows for researchers to agree that organizations are different, but that there are certain guidelines that can be modified to meet differing needs. Denison has laid out four hypotheses that give a good base to these potential themes or categories. His four hypotheses are; involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission. Using these hypotheses, Denison evaluated 34 organizations through survey and five through focus groups and interviews to determine whether or not the efforts and developed culture of the organizations could be somehow included in one or all of these categories.

The first of the four is the involvement hypothesis. In its essence, the involvement hypothesis has to do with "self-management" or the ability to incorporate participation and involvement with each employee in the company. This hypothesis suggests that the more one is

involved with his/her internal group, employees, and organization as a whole, the more sense of “ownership and responsibility” (Denison, 1990 p. 7) one would feel. Denison cites Ouchi (1981) who he says “described high-involvement organizations as having the characteristics of a ‘clan’ rather than a formal bureaucracy” (p. 7).

Second, the consistency hypothesis, maintains that a strong culture is influenced by key central values understood widely throughout the company, or a “clear set of ‘do’s and don’ts.’” Denison states, “a shared system of beliefs, values, and symbols, widely understood by an organization’s members, has a positive impact on their ability to reach consensus and carry out coordinated actions” (Denison p. 8). This hypothesis can generally be summed up with everyone agreeing on norms and expectations, and having a clear understanding of what they are throughout the organization.

The third hypothesis is titled the adaptability hypothesis. In this hypothesis, Denison says while “the first two. . . focus almost exclusively on internal dynamics of an organization, they say little about the external environment” (p. 12). Denison separates what this hypothesis entails into three parts. First, that an individual must be able to “perceive and respond to the external environment.” Two, that one must be able to “respond to internal customers. . .other department, division, or districts”. And third, “the capacity to restructure and reinstitutionalize a set of behaviors and processes that allow the organization to adapt” (p. 12). In its essence, this third hypothesis is looking to see how an individual, or the organization as a whole, can recognize what is going on and then make necessary changes to accommodate.

The fourth and final hypothesis is the mission hypothesis, which has to deal with “a shared definition of the function and purpose of an organization and its members” (p. 13). Denison argues that this hypothesis is the area that will provide “purpose and meaning” and

“clear direction and goals that serve to define the appropriate course.” His results were in favor of his hypothesis, with what seemed to be minimal variations. Denison concluded that the results of both the quantitative and qualitative studies showed that there was value in the inclusion of what these hypotheses had to offer. This particular study is interested in how these hypotheses match up with an up and coming, successful, local business in Cedar City, Utah, Staheli West.

Staheli West is a unique company that began theorizing ideas for a new farm product in 1984. The company did not officially begin selling its niche product until 2010, from which they have begun to grow. Apart from a product that was clearly needed by all who worked in the industry, something changed within the company in the last few years that has allowed this company to increase their sales by 300%. Clearly, the company is creating and participating in some certain characteristics that are allowing it to be successful. The intent for this study is to

1. Evaluate the current structure provided by Denison to see if Staheli West is utilizing characteristics outlined in his four hypotheses.
2. Separate what Staheli West is doing into themes, to evaluate them against Denison’s four hypotheses structure. However, to now be aware of anything in addition that might be inclusive of another theme/hypothesis in an attempt to make the theory more conclusive.
3. Determine if the intentions of the company are doing what they were intended to do, ensure all criteria are being met with actual rites, rituals, stories, etc.

Method

To start, I use Eisenberg and Goodall (1993), who provide an appendix in their book. The appendix is entitled “A Field Guide to Studying Organizational Communication”. In this section, the authors provide a short outline on how to go about an organizational study. While I do not intend to use all the criteria laid out in the appendix, some of the information will provide this study with a basic framework. The authors suggest to provide a “one-page proposal detailing the purpose and time frame” of the study (p. 362). They suggest an offer of the final paper, and “agree that nothing [I] discover will be disseminated to the public without prior written approval by the company.” Among other suggestions, I intend to provide a privacy statement, and a statement including the inability of executives to make firing or restructure decisions based off the study. This and other confidentiality statements will be given to ensure that my being at the organization will have no effect on everyday work, and to elicit the truest responses.

Staheli West recently has undergone a process through which it has hired a third party consultant to evaluate its communication structure. In its evaluation, the third party has included many criteria that the company should adopt: a shift in marketing, advertising, self-awareness as a company, identity, long and short term goals, and evaluation techniques. Justin McArthur, a communication representative for the company, mentions that one of the key points brought up by the consultant was that Staheli West is not a “hay-steamer company” but in fact a “people improvement company that happens to sell hay-steamers.” Some products of the evaluation include new programs taken on by the organization including a 5S principles evaluation sheet, a set of pillars that make up a vision statement, and a few other programs dealing with safety and efficiency.

McArthur himself was introduced to the business as he began a marketing plan as a graduate student to build commercials portraying the life change that the machine catalyzes in many farmers every day. These are now available for viewing on YouTube and other locations.

The company also instituted the use of a generalized organization structure of all the individual parts used to build the product. The process is emulated after the Toyota car company. This newly instituted process is used to give every part its own place, and to eliminate any part or tool that is not needed. It also suggests that anything that does not have a place to be given a place or to simply be removed. This program is intended to make the environment healthy, clean, and purposeful allowing for more positivity throughout the organization. These are only a few rites and rituals I have discovered to provide context; they are not conclusive and will not be evaluated until the results and discussion of this paper.

All of these factors happened within the last few years. For the sake of the study I will assume that apart from the product itself, each of these factors contributed in some way to 300% increase in sales earlier mentioned. Sales are not the only factor that help determine efficiency in the company for this study. While sales contribute to the quick growth, the more an individual looks at the organization, the more he/she will find great relationships with its external constituents, customer loyalty, low litigation costs, high job satisfaction, low turn-around rate in employees, and other factors. The method intended for this study is characterized again by Eisenberg and Goodall who assert, “field research is qualitative in nature. The quality of it is largely dependent on the insights discovered by the researcher. By contrast, many worthwhile organizational studies are quantitative. . . deriv[ing] conclusions from facts” (p. 364). Like Denison and others, this study will be governed by a qualitative tone in efforts to see how particularly the culture of Stahili West is related to themes outlined in Denison’s theory, and to

potentially add one voice to the pattern Dennison began to see with the quantitative nature of the success numbers correlating with his qualitative categories. The reason for the complexity is to not only evaluate whether Denison has a valuable model, but to help offer suggestions that may be replicated or expanded to achieve greater return on investment for other organizations.

To evaluate, the timeline of the study is as follows:

Weeks 1-9

This period consisted of copious observations and field notes of conversations, topics of interest, interactions between employees, and key goals and company interests taking place in general meetings. These meetings took place weekly on Monday's and include every employee. All field notes took place in this setting as this meeting is an environment that represents a basic weekday. The meetings included conversations between all employees, discussing goals, intentions, rites, rituals, and will allow for a basic foundation of understanding of how the company functions. Doing this helped me more appropriately develop the questions that would better evaluate participants responses and categorize them accordingly.

Weeks 10-12

This period consisted of conducting focus groups (upon mutual agreement) that will be using questions and concepts derived from the observations and field notes produced in the first nine weeks. These groups allowed the study to take what is happening and evaluate how the employees feel about those key topics and conversations. This step further allowed for a better understanding of what is truly happening rather than simply what is intended to happen.

Weeks 12+

This period consisted of analyzing the responses and findings from notes, coding responses to evaluate themes that will then be compared to Denison's theory, and finally write up

and present an executive summary that includes the substantial applicable findings to Staheli West. The coding process took place by generating 6 pages of transcript through notes and recorded responses transcribed from three audio files. I went through each response color coding themes until I reached a thematic saturation, unable to create new themes leaving outliers without a theme.

This project is not to be used for any type of employment decisions (i.e. firing or re-arranging of employees). The project is designed to learn more about corporate culture and in turn provide Staheli West with some particular information to their organization on how they might increase efficiency and effectiveness. As per research question one, this study also intends to evaluate how conclusive is Denison's theory. According to Leslie Baxter (2004), there are certain criteria a theory needs to meet to be good or credible. While this study is not in any way quantitative, it rides on the slightly quantitative nature of Denison using his theory over and over evaluating many different organizations. Therefore, as part of the evaluation, the theory's reliability and validity will also be evaluated. Meaning that while this study intends to serve a specific purpose to Staheli West and its efficiency, will also evaluate whether or not Denison's theory is still "yielding the same results"—reliability, as it was originally intended as well as "evaluating what it is supposed to"—validity (Baxter, 2004 pp. 123-125). While these terms are generally used in a quantitative study, I am recognizing that there is value in determining if there is not some aspect of Denison's theory that is uniform. I argue that through this study, I will not be able to determine exactly what rites, rituals, practices (culture) establish these themes "perfectly", but that these themes are apparent and may be arguably apparent in other successful organizations. Anything proprietary is not be published herein, results have been shown to my graduate committee for my personal evaluation purposes. Published material has kept all

information that may be unique and particular to Staheli West out. This study does, however, show the value of Denison's theory in the evaluation and include discussion on that value.

The final report given with all proprietary information has been given to Staheli West in the form of an executive summary that includes what was found happening within the company, as opposed to what was intended to happen both in accordance with new programs and procedures. It includes examples of coded responses that will portray themes. These themes were evaluated against Denison's theory. Comparison and contrast then take place to indicate how well the theory does what it is intended to do and any additional information that may be found. It will also analyze how well the corporate culture was working for the employees and how well the organization is meeting some of those needs Denison outlined. In so doing, I was able to evaluate whether or not the described functions that were intended by the executives are indeed set in place and meet with the criteria Denison provided. It is important to this study not only to find what may be the "ideal" situation, but what is actually happening. Much of this study consists of copious notes of actual rites and rituals taking place in the everyday and how they help ensure that these four categories do exist. It also includes the employee's reaction of that culture through focus groups. And finally, if the culture (rites, rituals, beliefs) meet with what was intended.

Choosing to evaluate the company in this manner was done with the purpose to create a systematic way of analyzing responses through triangulation. I took observation, focus groups, and a thematic analysis to evaluate what exactly was taking place. From there I took the information gathered it, compared it to the theory and was able to bring that back to the company for the most effective and systematic application.

To initiate and ensure that this study is most effective, Staheli West was originally contacted and presented with a document that explained the criteria and what the study intended. This document included statements of safety and voluntary participation as well as laying out the structure of the project, statements of anonymity and confidentiality, and the purpose and method. It also included a list of needs to accomplish this task. They include: access to employees in regular work day for a 10-minute interview or 30-minute focus group (upon mutual agreement), access to general meetings, shadowing employee options, and assurance of understanding to employees that my presence has no effect on an employee's future at Staheli West. Over the first nine weeks, not only were field notes taken, but a relationship was cultivated to help employees feel less threatened and more prone to answer honestly. Executives were not in the focus groups, again, to allow for the most honest and real answers associated with the concepts and programs learned over the course of the first nine weeks. The document provided to Staheli West, as well as the compiled questions that were a direct result of the nine weeks of field notes, are included hereafter.

Question bank for interviews/focus groups Staheli West Capstone Project

Note: This project is not to be used for any type of employment decisions i.e. firing or re-arranging of employees. The project is designed for me, Quinn Thurman, to learn more about corporate culture. Anything proprietary will not be published, results will be shown to my graduate committee for my personal evaluation purposes. Names will not be used. Published material will keep all information that may be unique and particular to Staheli West out. The published document will only include structure of the study/project, general concepts and ideas that are learned, and conclusions drawn up by my person. Answers in their truest form are encouraged for the most productive results. Participation in focus groups are completely voluntary, if at any time you feel pressured to answer or participate you may leave without penalty. Focus groups will be recorded to aid with transcription of answers.

- What does the term “core” mean to you?
- Sum up the concept 5S program?
- How often do you use the 5S program?
- How do you think it fulfills its purpose?
- How do you feel about the slogan “changing agriculture, changing lives”?
- What do you think the core beliefs can do for the company?
- How is the vision statement used in your work?
- If you have questions or concerns how are they heard?
- How are your questions and concerns addressed?
- Do you feel your meetings are productive?
- Do you see changes taking place that you talk about?
- Do you think everyone plays a significant role?
- What happens if someone doesn’t do his/her part?
- What major events or activities are you aware of happening throughout the year?
- What purposes do these achieve?
- What do you do during the “low” months?
- What does “sweep” mean to you?
- Can you describe the story that “started it all”?
- How often do you use six sigma?

Document Provided to Staheli West

Staheli West Project Quinn Thurman

Southern Utah University

Prior Note:

This project is meant to be mutually beneficial. If at any time the project begins to feel as though it will not be serving both parties, Staheli West may ask to negotiate and change terms. Questions and time for discussion will be given time at the end of the presentation.

Anonymity and confidentiality:

This project is not to be used for any type of employment decisions i.e. firing or re-arranging of employees. The project is designed for me, Quinn Thurman, to learn more about corporate culture. Anything proprietary will not be published, results will be shown to my graduate committee for my personal evaluation purposes. Published material will keep all information that may be unique and particular to Staheli West out, it will only include structure of the study/project, general concepts and ideas studies and learned, and conclusions drawn.

Purpose:

The purpose of this project essentially can be simplified to a communication audit. As Staheli West has recently undergone a process including a consultant, there are many factors that have recently become a part of the business' culture. My research gives a base for a general understanding of what such consultants may do and more particularly aspects of a corporate culture that should exist to help them be most efficient. In the end, I hope to be able to provide Staheli West an "executive summary" that will bring all my observations and findings together and provide the company with a window into what is actually happening. Rather than the idealistic view of where they may be, or where the consultant had them projected to be, this project seeks to find that "middle ground" of what rites, rituals, conversations, etc., are actually taking place.

Method:

To do this the aforementioned purpose and the study in general, I will be conducting two forms of data retrieval. The timeline is as follows.

Weeks 1-5 observations and field notes of conversations taking place in general meetings.

Weeks 6-8 conducting focus groups or personal interviews (upon mutual agreement.)

Weeks 9-10 analyze findings, write up and present report to Staheli West.

The final report will consist of a summary of what was found actually happening within the company both in accordance with new procedures and otherwise. It will also analyze how well the corporate culture was working for the employees and what was said and done by individuals (anonymous). It will also include some research findings to help provide some insight into future possibilities/options to Staheli West.

Needs:

- Access to employees in regular work day for a 10-minute interview or 30 minute focus group (upon mutual agreement)
- Access to general meetings
- Shadowing employee options
- Assurance of understanding that my presence has no effect on employee's future at Staheli West.

Results and Discussion

Responses were recorded both through audio recording and specific note taking, including quotes. Utilizing all the data, colors were associated with specific groups to aid in the use of interpreting the data afterward. An executive summary was prepared for the organization that then took the coded responses, explained how they supported the theme created for them, and finally what that meant for Staheli West. First, in this section a short synopsis of what was found, without any specific details of the company, including whether or not the four hypotheses were found. Second, an analysis and interpretation of what that information means to the organization and in turn what it means for this particular study. Third, a brief description of what else may be learned from the results. Fourth, a short summary of implications that were encountered and ideas for future study.

Coded responses did result in similar “types” of categories or hypotheses as Denison described. While new names could be given to them that more or less describe the nature and function of each theme, the four labels that Denison gives his hypotheses do work with the coded data found in this study. While asking general questions pertaining to the content, discussions, key topics, responses could still be placed in categories resonating with Denison’s hypotheses. It may be argued that knowing of Denison prior to the study may affect the coding process, while this subject is addressed in the implications section, this idea does not hurt the value of this study as we are simply interested in looking at whether or not the four categories outlined by Denison can be found at Staheli West through the triangulation process described. Research question one was concerned with whether or not Denison’s theory was measuring what it was meant to measure (validity) and if it did so consistently (reliability). It can be confirmed that Staheli West, a generally successful, young, yet rapidly growing company, was meeting each of these

categories in some degree. Each theme could be well established by the responses recorded. This information helps support Denison's findings, suggesting that yet another arguably successful company is also in some way or another addressing these four areas of culture. Which means that, apart from assessing the extent at which each area is being met, there is value in the four as they are. While we cannot project these qualitative findings to a large population, this information does suggest that because successful companies are in some way meeting these criteria, at various levels, then a company that is intending to increase success, as it has been defined in this study, could emulate certain rites, rituals, beliefs, and culture in general that would meet such criteria and expect "successful" results.

After recognizing that there is value to Denison, the next intention of the study was to evaluate whether or not Stahili West was meeting each category as well as Denison's established criteria. Through examples of responses, each established category was laid out to Stahili West in the executive summary provided and then explained how well they met that criteria. In relation to research question three, we provide information as to how this structure can now be applied back to the company to help increase the ability to have success.

Involvement

The nature of the questions that led to answers supporting the existence and strength of this category pertained to individual's and group's thoughts and feelings toward the company. While there were certain details in place that aided Stahili West in reaching the criteria laid out in this hypothesis, responses had shown that where employees actually felt they were as individuals and as a company was not where they had hoped to be. Meaning while there were programs in place that would address some of the ideas Denison outlines in this category, according to employees those programs are not doing what they are intended. Responses did

show that there was improvement in this area over time, but that there was still a lack of “ownership and responsibility” in some cases across the organization.

Consistency

In the consistency category, there were many responses as to how well the established programs were doing what they are supposed to do. The questions that reveal most responses coded in this category dealt with perception, thoughts, and feelings toward the rites and rituals, the “do’s and don’ts” of the company. The responses also proved that this category does exist in the company and while there were many programs, meetings, and rituals taking place in the company, not everyone was clear on what they were. There were many responses that were positive in the support of company’s “do’s and don’ts,” however, some responses indicated that there exists a lack of mutual agreement in some of those areas.

Adaptability

The adaptability category was similar. Here the study looked at responses that came from questions in regards to other departments. While most were respectful and understanding of other departments, responses coded in this category suggested that many individuals felt infringed upon and not heard. While these first three categories all had a similar tone of positivity and an underlying current of lack of unity, each in its own respect has significant knowledge and information that it could provide to the success-seeking leader. The details and specific responses associated in constructing each category provide a clear understanding, and in some cases, an actual path to eliminate some of the difficulties. Unfortunately, those specifics are private to Staheli West and cannot be further explained herein.

Mission

The final category, on the contrary, the mission hypothesis, which was also well established by the coded responses, produced a very positive and unified response. Coded results in this category suggest that the company is doing well with its shared understanding of function and purpose as a whole organization. This information is also beneficial to the company, as they know to keep doing some of the rituals they have been in this area. It also provides some insight as to what specific success patterns are associated with what they are doing well.

In regards to research question two, all four categories provide different areas of insight that can help this company, and arguably other companies, see a bigger picture. While the details such as programs, meetings, internal structures, etc., are all intending to complete a particular need of the company, the four categories provided by Denison, allow for executives to come back and evaluate what they are doing to verify that what they intend to happen is actually taking place. If more companies began to utilize Denison's theory, or choose to build from it, it is predicted that the monotony and confusion that can sometimes exist in the abundance of cultural artifacts can be lifted while they look at four key areas that need to be met.

Implications

The implications of this study also provide value to future researchers. While it was the intent of this study to evaluate the validity and reliability of Denison's study, it is difficult to really see all that is taking place in an organization when looking through an already very narrow lens. There may also be arguments that there was too much being looked at in one study, that one of these questions could have merited enough focus to provide this study with valuable results and applicable information to the field of organizational communication. Also, there is always room for improvement on establishing the particular data included in proving success in the

business studied. An argument may also be made that this study cannot be fully completed, or reach its full potential, until a follow up is done where Staheli West implements some practices that directly correlate with these aspects of Denison's hypotheses that were not being fully met.

Conclusion

Understanding corporate culture and its influence on success is worthy of both empirical evaluation and qualitative inquiry, this study while only looking at one organization adds one agreeing voice to Denison's theory. Organizational communication is becoming more important, relevant, and supported by research and is proving to be very influential to business professionals. In short, I was able to find value in Denison's hypotheses. While this study, through its reach, does not allow me to argue that they are inclusive, and that implementing their criteria is the only route to success, I can say that when looking at one successful company I was able to find some level of each theme described in the theory. In other words, because this is not a quantitative study, I am incapable of making the suggestion that there are certain rites, rituals, practices that every organization can take part in and in turn be deemed "successful". However, that while involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission may be different for each successful organization, I argue that these themes are found in successful Staheli West. I can also suggest that when evaluated, looking at actual things taking place in a company culture, whether through survey, interview, or focus group, if one or more of the areas is lacking, efforts made to better meet the criteria laid out will result in "successful" ramifications.

I found that Staheli West was meeting each of the hypotheses at differing levels. While responses showed that each theme existed, by participant's attitudes and opinions of certain aspects responses also suggested that there was room for improvement in some of those areas. This resonates with some of the difficulties in new programs and practices mentioned by executives in the beginning of the study. Some responses didn't fit any category established by Denison, but were too insignificant in number and potency to carry on their own category that was not in some way addressed by the existing four. Responses also portrayed a lack of quality

in some of the areas, which contributed to the existence of that area, but also allowed for consultation on potential ways to better achieve the criteria in that area. This information allowed the study to address all three research questions. Research question one asked whether or not the theory provided had efficacy and measured what it intended. Again, while I cannot conclude whether or not it is all inclusive of success, I can conclude that it does in fact give criteria that is in accordance with success. In regards to research question two, I feel that upon evaluation, coded responses submit that there is room for improvement in some areas that I suggest will help lead to greater success in accordance with the list of criteria provided. Finally, in relation to research question three, I can conclude that several rites, rituals, beliefs, programs, meetings, etc., do have effect on these areas, and suggestions were given on how Staheli West might more appropriately meet that criteria with different or modified versions of those rituals.

While this study does not include a follow up, evaluating the new efforts made to meet the criteria laid out in Denison's hypotheses, and in turn the provided executive summary, I can conclude that there is value in evaluating whether or not intentions of executive are actually being carried out and perceived by employees the way they were originally intended. That evaluation can then more clearly help determine whether or not these four areas are being addressed, which will in turn aid the company in more effectively meeting said criteria.

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