# People and Organizations

## Deciphering and Using Organizational Culture
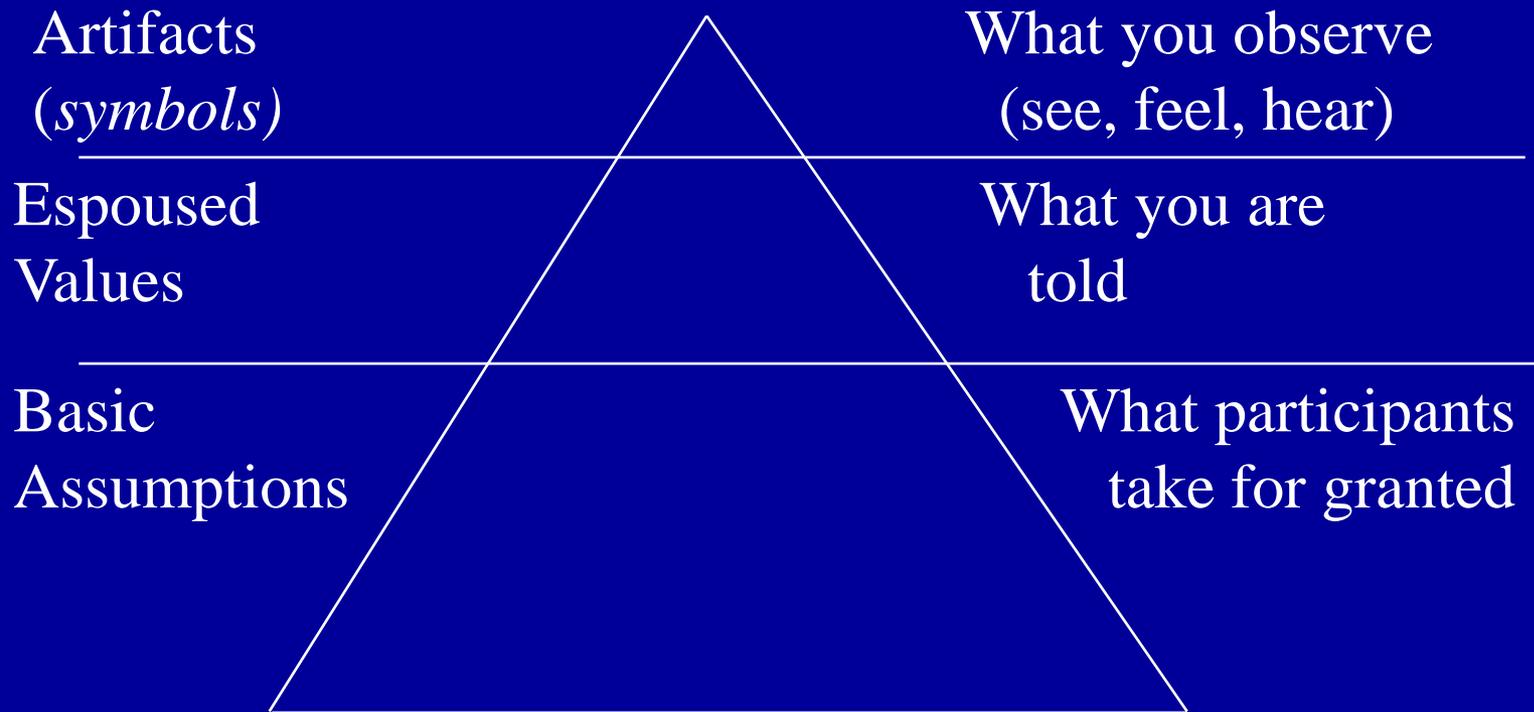
## Session 8

# Organizational Culture:  Basics

- A Working Definition:  "The way we do things around here"
- Or, in a word:  "Tradition"
- Cultures are:
  - Passed on generation to generation, usually by stories and word of mouth
  - Sometimes unstated—have to be learned by immersion (anthropologists, ethnographers)

# Layers of Culture

- ***Artifacts***
  - Observable features of a setting—things you can feel, see, smell, touch, hear, etc.
  - Symbols
  - Surface clues but often multiple meanings
- ***Values***
  - Deeply held norms, ideologies—traditions
- ***Assumptions***—taken for granted factors that shape behavior

# Schein's Model of Organizational Culture

Artifacts
(*symbols)*

What you observe
(see, feel, hear)

Espoused
Values

What you are
told

Basic
Assumptions

What participants
take for granted

# Example of Espoused Values: The Generic Mission Statement

- "We are a fast-moving, flexible, innovative, customer-oriented global company that delivers real value to our shareholders by our unrelenting focus on performance and the unswerving dedication of our world-class, dedicated employees."

# How do you get at basic assumptions?

- Mismatch between what you observe and espoused values: e.g. "we value our employees" and yet the company down-sizes in a time of record profits

- What happens in (or leading to) a crisis or disaster?

- Thoughtful informants

# The Culture of Disneyland as Experienced by "Guests"

- Examples of Artifacts:

  – Use of space: "weenies" – things that draw the eye and pull visitors along a pre-set path

  – Lines whose length is concealed by "snaking" and which appear to keep moving, and entertainment/distractions for those in queues

# Disneyland – Espoused Values

- Commitment to Quality: quality of the facilities, the "guest" experience

- Fun – "the happiest place on earth"

# Basic Assumptions

- Childhood is the happiest time of life, and everyone wants to return to it

- Guests value a controlled, predictable experience of an idealized world in which they are subtly guided and looked after

- The Disneyland experience is basically universal

# Culture as Experienced

- How do employees at Disneyland cope with the Disney culture?

# MIT Artifacts & Their Meaning

- So, what artifacts capture MIT's culture?

  – What deeper values and assumptions to they convey?

  – What stories help to perpetuate or illustrate these values----shape our *TRADITIONS*?

# Subcultures at MIT???

- What are distinctive MIT-subcultures? How do they "deviate" from the MIT norm?
  - Your department
  - Student living groups
  - Sloan? How would you describe Sloan's culture and how is it different?

# *Using* Culture in Organizations

- Beware--The Iron Law of Change
  - Failure to understand the culture means you will get burned by it if you try to change things

- Using Culture to Achieve Change
  - How can I use the culture to achieve change?
    - The Case of MIT Women in Science

# Counter-Cultural Change

- "Outsider on the Inside" (aka, an intern)
  - Breaking the "rules" and pretending not to know any better
  - Using temporary status—not going to be here anyway so who cares?
- In on-going relationships
  - Be Explicit about it
  - Takes a long time—cross generations
  - Often requires changing people
  - The "greenfield" site strategy

# Making Change Happen at MIT

- If Chancellor Clay came to you and said…

"Our tolerance for student hacks on the Dome has to end. Our lawyers tell us the risks are just too high and these pranks obviously take time away from students' academic work."

1. How would you convey to him what hacking means to MIT?
2. How would you convey the significance of the Dome to hacking?
3. Assume he is determined to proceed. What should he do to make this change happen? Prepare and be ready to deliver a 3 minute speech to the Undergraduate Student Assn to convince them of the need to make this change!

# Summing Up

- Analyze the Culture—get to know it
- Test interpretations—find an insider
- Test ideas—know if your ideas will bump up against cultural values, assumptions
- Develop change strategies that use the culture
- Consider if changing/challenging the culture is
  - Necessary to the success of your idea
  - Possible
  - Worth the risks
  - And keep your resume up to date!

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