OBTS Conference 2016

Session Title

**Understanding Service through a Multi-tiered, Multi-level Framework**

**for Teaching and Applying Culture**

Abstract

This session will examine service as a cultural artifact, a behavior that reflects cultural values and assumptions. In doing so, we will tie into Edgar Schein’s well-known framework that culture consists of three elements from the most tangible (artifacts and values) to the most tacit (assumptions). We will expand that framework to recognize that cultures as social systems are nested within each other. The result is a 3 x 3 matrix encompassing Schein’s three elements along with three levels of socio-cultural integration: society, organization, and group. Session participants will discuss service examples using this analytical tool.

Keywords

Culture

Cultural Analysis

Service as a Cultural Artifact

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**Teaching Implications**

Culture and cultural analysis are usual topics covered in most undergraduate and graduate courses in organizational behavior. Anyone teaching a class on culture should be familiar with Edgar Schein’s framework that culture consists of assumptions (the least tangible), values, and artifacts (the most tangible). This session will introduce an expanded framework that recognizes these levels of culture within a system while acknowledging that people live and work in multiple social systems nested within others. These levels reflect different degrees of sociocultural integration – societal, organizational, and group. Any cultural artifact or behavior can be analyzed within this 3 x 3 matrix.

Many years ago Ruth Benedict pointed out that a distinguishing feature of cultures is patterned behavior and processes. Cultures are holistic in that elements of culture fit together and can be understood only in the context in which they appear and function. Schein’s framework of three distinct elements is often misinterpreted by those who fail to see the patterns in culture. Cultural elements (such as assumptions, values, artifacts, traits, behaviors, norms, traditions, etc.) are not independent but interdependent and patterned. Cultural analysis needs to recognize the links between elements while acknowledging that they are nested in multiple cultural systems.

As a behavior, or set of behaviors, reflecting certain cultural values, “service” can be examined both across different cultural systems as well as within them. Small group work will offer participants the opportunity to discuss examples of service using the 3 x 3 matrix. The result will be a deeper cultural understanding of service and, as well, familiarity with a robust framework for cultural analysis.

**Session Description and Plan**

At the beginning of the session, attendees will receive a hardcopy of the 3 x 3 matrix for cultural analysis. This framework will be explained and discussed and participants will then meet in groups to use it in developing and explicating their views and perspectives on service. The session will conclude with report outs from each group and a review/discussion of shared insights including ways to use the matrix in classroom teaching.

* Introductions, explanation/discussion on cultural analysis and a 3 x 3 matrix (20 minutes)
* In small groups, participants discuss their cultural understandings of “service” using the matrix (20 minutes)

* Plenary session with report outs, discussion, and wrap-up (20 minutes)

**Application to conference theme**

The session will use a cultural lens and a framework that expands on Schein’s view of culture to more fully understand our views and practice in/of service.