

Women and Work

A Handbook

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Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to an organization's "ways of doing things" as reflected in the regular activities of its members and the various artifacts that have come to symbolize the organization. Numerous factors serve to give an organization a particular feel and look, and these can include rites (such as Holy Communion in the Catholic Church), ceremonies (such as commencement at Harvard University), dress (such as the conservative blue suits of the IBM sales force), stories (such as the history of the founder that is imparted to the new Mary Kay recruits), symbols (such as McDonald's golden arches), buildings (such as the distinctive style of mosques), slogans (such as At Ford, Service is Job Number One), expressed values (such as Rotary International's commitment to "service above self"), leadership style (such as that of Lee Iacocca), and various other aspects of an organization's operation. The culture of an organization is thought to shape the experiences of its members—how they feel about the organization and how they feel about themselves. The feminist contention that gender is a cultural phenomenon and that various elements of sexual discrimination are rooted in the culture of a society, has led feminists to examine the character of organizational culture and its part in the processes of sexual inequities.

The association of culture with the generation of values, a sense of belonging, commitment, and identity encouraged management to study the relationship between organizational culture and efficiency. North American and British management interest in organizational culture developed in the context of sharp competition from Japanese companies. Since 1980, numerous books and articles have been written on the subject, beginning with a focus on the differences between Japanese and American culture (Ouchi 1981) and subsequently ranging over a variety of issues concerning the nature of organizational culture. Most of these studies failed to deal with the issue of gender, presenting organizational culture as a nongendered phenomenon and, in the bargain, ignoring the dominant role of men in the construction of the cultures of organizations. Ouchi (1981), however, notes that the large Japanese corporations exclude women from their tenured ranks.

Feminist studies of organizational culture have revealed numerous links between an organization's "way of doing things" and sexual discrimination. The

way that an organization is structured, for example, can influence the way that women experience the organization and feel accepted by it. A relative absence of women in the middle and upper levels of management can create a negative impression that discourages women from attempting to better themselves within the organization (Kanter 1977). Indeed, the very character of organization—with its stress on male-associated factors of formality, lack of emotion, instrumentality—acts as a barrier to female opportunity.

What an organization does and how it does it is closely associated with its system of production, with its technology. Attitudes to training, skill, production abilities, and knowledge can influence female opportunities and experiences of the workplace. The identification, by those responsible for organizational recruitment and promotion, of types of skill, physical strength, and knowledge as male attributes inhibit the chances of women to be allowed to undertake certain tasks (Stiehm 1981).

Organizational language, style, and system of communications can signal a sense of competence and acceptance to those involved. Women may feel less included in the organization where an overwhelming number of communications signal maleness. Examples of male-associated signs include dominant use of the male pronoun and other male references (such as chairman) throughout official documents, memos, and other communications; the use of motivational and other organizational metaphors that draw upon male-associated sports and military references; use of demeaning and derogatory terms for women (such as "a bitch of a machine," "the girls in the office"); little or no use made of positive (that is, active, authoritative) images of women in presentations of corporate image; male control of the communications system (that is, male chair persons); formal and informal dress codes that stress traditional male notions of femininity (such as pressure on women to wear dresses rather than slacks). The use of informal channels of communications and activities to conduct business is often detrimental to women where those channels are based on "old boys networks" and where the social activities of an organization are built around expectations of men only participation (such as golf).

Organizational culture at any point is an outcome of the activities of those involved. In the process women are far from simple recipients of cultural experiences. Women have responded in various ways to the problem of male-dominated organizations, including acquiescence, individual resistance, the development of female culture, and the establishment of separate women's organizations. Feminist research into organizational culture has generally been concerned to help women identify ways in which they can overcome and change cultural barriers to female opportunity.

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Organizational Sexuality

Organizational sexuality refers to the relationship between organizational arrangements and the construction and manipulation of sexuality. Sexuality, at its most basic level, can be defined as a person's sexual self; those aspects of a person that make him or her sexually attractive to another. Despite the fact that sexual attractiveness can take various forms, dominant (male) images of heterosexuality persist, within which the creation and exploitation of female sexuality is a particularly pernicious aspect, but which also involves homosexual and lesbian harassment (Schneider 1982). Evidence of widespread sexual harassment in the workplace, and the exploitation of female sexuality (such as in advertising and sales techniques) has led feminists to examine the role of organizations in regard to sexuality.

Acts of sexual harassment are among the clearest examples of sexual behavior at work. At its most explicit, sexual harassment involves unwanted attention of a sexual nature, whether through acts of a physical, verbal, or otherwise suggestive nature: The overwhelming majority of cases involve the sexual harassment of a woman by a man. Studies of sexual harassment at work indicate that there is a relationship between the incidence and type of harassment and the character of the workplace itself. Some workplace environments, for example, either encourage or fail to discourage sexual harassment.

Power is a central issue in sexual harassment. Organizational arrangements create countless contexts or power inequities in which men occupy the majority or the only positions of power and authority. In many cases of sexual harassment organizational power is a factor, where the woman is bothered by an organizationally more powerful male or has to rely on a male power structure to intervene to prevent harassment. In several industrial counties the invidious character of sexual harassment has been recognized and legislation has been established to deal with it.

Less recognized as a problem is the manipulation by organizations of female sexuality. In addition to the clear and blatant use of female sexuality in advertising, numerous organizations utilize certain female looks, voice, style of dress, and behavior to sell their products or services. A prime example is the airline industry where various companies have required female flight attendants to present an image of attractiveness and attentiveness (Hochschild 1983). Other examples include the sexual imagery often expected of female receptionists, secretaries, and restaurant and other service-oriented positions that deal with the public. Not surprisingly, sexual attractiveness is frequently a factor in the recruitment practices of those organizations concerned with sexual imagery, but it can also influence the recruitment decisions of other organizations. Guteck and Cohen (1992), for ex-