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Personality of Organizations- case studies of 4 higher education institutions

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Abstract

This study attempted to examine the personality traits of higher education institutions operating in the TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). In this manner the study has focused on the perceptions of deans and head of departments as administrative staff and academicians employed in the faculties of education on the personality traits of their departments and/or faculties. Maximum variety sampling as a sampling strategy has been used. The research showed that the education faculties of the three had a peaceful and harmonious work environment. Administrators were democratic. They delegated their authority to the instructors and shared their responsibilities. The instructors were concordant with the administration. They were socialized and cooperative. Factors such as peaceful and comfortable work environment, sufficient equipment, recognition, and appreciation that came from the administrators for the instructors, and comfortable teaching, learning and research environment affected their motivation positively. Metaphors also revealed positive work environment.

Keywords: Organizational personality; higher education; traits.

1. Introduction

Natoli (2001) mentions that, like people, organizations have personalities, but the traits, or dimensions, are not necessarily the same because of the differences between organizations and people. He argues that while organization has reporting relationships, people do not. He also notes that an organization chart is an authority structure whereby those in a position of authority have the formal power to distribute to those in the hierarchy...Competitive world conditions lead higher education organizations to face with many challenges due to the rapid changes in the education sector. As one of the significant share of the service and manufacturing industry, higher education institutions, are in the huge competition in training successful people for the global market. Academicians with their academic performances, graduates with their qualifications, and administrators with their management styles will shape the education given in the faculties. They must all act as a team for the success of the faculty and the quality

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of education. Mainly, education faculties which are training teachers for future are playing important role for the countries. Thus administrator’s roles of those faculties have been changed due to the changes and needs of the competitive education environment.

A general theory of organizational administration must include the principles of organization that will ensure correct decision-making and effective action (Simon, 1976:1). It is clear that the actual physical task of carrying out an organization’s objectives falls to the persons at the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy (Simon, 1976:2).

According to Simon (1976), of all the modes of influence, authority is the one that chiefly distinguishes the behavior of individuals as participants of organizations from their behavior outside their organizations. It is the authority that gives an organization its formal structure, and the other modes of influence may best be discussed after this structure has been specified. Simon described authority as a relation that secures coordinated behavior in a group by subordinating the decisions of the individual to the communicated decisions of others. Thus, the exercise of authority in a group makes possible a large degree of separation of the decision-making processes from actual performance, or ‘specialization’ in decision making (Simon, 1976:134). Specialization in decision making is possible without the use of authority. A unit may be given a purely advisory or ‘staff’ status in an organization, and yet through its recommendations, actually make decisions that are accepted elsewhere in the organization (Simon, 1976:135).

Since top managers normally have the most impact on their organizations, it is wise, at least as a first step, to focus our attention on them (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1986). Educational leaders must guide their schools through the challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). Thus they need to occupy various roles in the school, provide direction and exert influence on others in order to achieve the school’s goals. Furthermore they need to use their power to influence the subordinates in order to increase productivity of their works. According to Mountford, (2004) power is the ability to control or influence others at lower levels of the organization. A core function of leaders is to carry the responsibility for decisions directly concerning followers (e.g., about promotions, allocation of duties, etc.) (van Knippenberg and De Cremer, 2008). One of the important challenge of today’s service organizations is their organizational structure. In this sense decentralized organizations are to gain more comparative as well as competitive advantage within their working environment. As Gómez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (2004) mentioned, in the traditional organizational structure, most major decisions are made at the top and implemented at lower levels. “The traditional top down form of organization is quickly becoming obsolete. It is being replaced by decentralization, transferring responsibility and decision-making authority from a central office to people, as it is more flexible to compete efficiently” (p.11). Cummins (2003) mentioned that, individuals in the public, corporate, educational, service, and non-profit sectors are expected to know not only what to do, but how to do as well. Therefore, proper organizational structure and hierarchy will lead employees to have greater vision on the duties they already had. Daly and Kleiner (1995) suggested that, managers must always remember that they are responsible for a subordinate’s performance. Before pinning blame on the employee the managers must ask themselves what they should to improve the employee’s poor performance. As it can be understood, employees are the core values of the organizations and its’ development.

Showalter and Mulholland (1992) in their study mentioned that, in a change environment, unending improvement by all employees is repeatedly emphasized and supported. Thus, organization should focus on empowerment as a continuous improvement philosophy in the challenging and changing environment. Gómez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (2004) explained empowerment as transferring direction from external source (normally the immediate supervisor) to an internal source (the individual’s own desire to do well). Born and Mollenman (1996), defended that, “empowerment means both enlargement and enrichment of the jobs of employees”. It produces “Win-Win” situation for both managers and employees. It is believed that the need to empower the workforce can be critical when they feel powerless. In case of sense of powerlessness new strategies and tactics are used by the organizations (Appelbaum and Honegger, 1998). The authors in their study mentioned that, “empowerment leads transforming all the various images, hopes, fears, expectations, and desires to contribute toward a way of talking about the organization and it affairs that the majority can commit to. Given the variety of benefits attributed to empowerment on both the individual and the organizational level which include increased productivity, enthusiasm, morale and creativity; higher quality products and services; improved teamwork, customer service and competitive position; increased speed and responsiveness; and, lessened emotional impact of demoralizing organizational changes and restructuring, it is easy to see why it has enjoyed such popularity” (Appelbaum and Honegger, 1998). Yukl (2002) states that, decisions are more difficult due to the sheer volume of issues and activities and the lack of detailed
knowledge a manager is likely to have. Because larger units are likely to have a more bureaucratic structure, managers must cope with more constraints (e.g., rules, standard procedures, and required authorizations) (p.35).

According to Chow (2002), one of the important aspects of organizational outcomes is socialization, i.e., like induction and orientation, prepares an individual for a smooth transition between jobs or organizations. Socialization is the process by which an individual acquires the knowledge and skills needed to perform his or her job. It is a change process involving the transmission of important norms and values to employees. New employees have a strong desire to be accepted; they attempt to internalize the way things are done in the organization. Through this process, employees learn and perform the desired behavior. It helps the organization meet its need for productive employees while enabling new employees to meet their needs. Employees enter an organization with a set of expectations about their future and career. He suggests that, positive work outcomes develop when one’s expectations are confirmed. People also differ in their needs, values and personalities. The pattern of the socialization process can also be explained by cultural differences. Differences associated with national culture may also create cross-cultural variation in socialization process. Organizations in different cultures may utilize different socialization tactics. Thus, successful socialization differs across culture (Chow, 2002). Organizations tend to achieve equilibrium in their social structure. This means that people develop an established set of relations with their working environment. They learn how to deal with one another, perform their jobs, and what to expect next (Newstrom and Davis, p.271). Moreover it is important for the employees in an organization to team for the positive organizational and individual outcomes.

In multi-case study the aim is to examine the personality traits of the education faculties of four universities in the TRNC (Turkish Republic of North Cyprus). The following research questions guided the study:
1. How do the socialization processes work in the cases of the education faculties of four higher education institutions?
2. What is the management style and organizational structure of these faculties?
3. How is the motivation of the instructors and administrators employed in these faculties?
4. What are the metaphors of the working environment of the instructors and administrators employed in these faculties?

2. Method

The aim of this study is to examine the personality traits of the education faculties of four higher education institutions operating in TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). Yet since the study is still in progress, data from the forth university have not yet been collected. After the study is completed it will be modified by the researchers. For this study the researchers benefited from Vincent Natoli’s five personality traits (2001) i.e., employer authoritarianism, punitiveness, employee, conformity, participation and organizational socialization. Multi-case study approach has been used. The researchers preferred maximum variety sampling as a sampling strategy. This strategy has the following advantages: (1) each case based of the particular sampling can be defined in detail, and (2) to expose different values and common themes between the cases in which there are important units of measurement (Patton, 1987, cited in Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006, p.107). The sample of the study comprised four participants from U1, six from U2, and three participants from U3. For this research four universities which had education faculties have been selected: Near East University (NEU) is located in the capital city of TRNC, has eight departments and over three thousand students who study in the faculty of education. This university was established in 1988. Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) is the oldest university on the island with twenty-nine years background and has thirteen departments and nearly three thousand and five hundred students in the faculty of education. Girne American University (GAU) which was established in 1983 has three departments and six hundred students who study in the faculty of education. The last institution, Cyprus International University (CIU) as the youngest institution was established in 1998 and has four departments with nearly six hundred students in the faculty of education. The researchers collected data through semi-structured interviews. During the analysis of the study deans and head of departments as administrative staff, and instructors as the study participants are identified by the letters as D, HD, AS and numbers are used to differentiate them from colleagues in the same category such as, D1, HD1, and AS1. The universities are also categorized with letters as U1, U2 and U3.
3. Findings

Administrative staff and instructors of the education faculties of four Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) universities were asked questions on the following issues: socialization, management style and organizational structure, motivation, and the working environment. The researchers expected that the answers of the participants would give a picture of the personality of their organizations. The data were broken into manageable categories followed by themes. The participants were coded as follows:

- U1 administrative staff (dean and head of department) D1 and HD1 respectively; instructors, AS1 and AS2.
- U2 administrative staff; D2, HD2, HD3 and instructors, AS3, AS4 and AS5.
- U3 administrative staff; D3; and instructors AS6 and AS7.

3.1 Perceptions on the Socialization Processes

In U1, the researchers interviewed the head of (which department??) and three instructors. Concerning socialization processes in their faculty. Participants expressed that activities out of the academic program such as conferences, sight-seeing, lunch/dinner gatherings, special day celebrations, recreational activities and general gatherings, are bringing the staff together working in the faculty.

HD1 explained the importance of the socialization activities as follows: “Even morning service [University’s bus service] brings us closer... there is no clear distinction between social and professional life”. These two quotes from HD1, stress the importance of interpersonal relationship. He also mentioned that …the experience and know-how of the administrative staff and everyone’s acknowledgement of their responsibilities contribute to the efficient progression of tasks. Additionally, HD1 stated that the related departments have their own orientation sessions for the new staff that joins to the university.

All 6 participants from U2 agreed that social activities such as; sight-seeing, social events, conferences and gatherings help to bring staff closer and they believe that communication is maintained through these type of activities. Thus these help them to be motivated and being more productive in their working environment. Otherwise it would not be possible for them to feel motivated and create positive effect on their students.

AS5 expressed the importance of the teeming process as: “Individuals may feel alone if we do not have these activities, he/she may feel alone.”

The need for socialization stated by AS4 as follows: “In the previous university there was a department where they did not have these types of events and everyone was almost annoyed by each other. The head of department organized a sight-seeing event and forced everyone to attend. After the third sight-seeing, the relationships started to change; everyone started to talk and get to know each other. Thus this created a peaceful working environment and of course people stared to work and produce together.”

Regarding the adaptation of the instructors to the organization, three instructors mentioned the absence of orientation and stated that they gather information about the organization from their colleagues. Contrarily, D2 and HD2 from the administrative staff claimed that they had orientation and information sessions. Another participant stated that they have it through the means of messages:

HD3 expressed the importance of orientation in the organization as follows: “We are sharing our knowledge and experiences”... When I first started to work the information was given to me by the secretary and I was upset. According to me it did not suit my statue as an instructor to get information from the secretary. Thus as an administrator it is important to explain the rules and requirements of the university to the new instructors.”

Furthermore, in the U1 the participants expressed that everyone’ should know their responsibilities for the efficient progression of the tasks.

D3 who is one of the three instructors from the U3 expressed individual opinion on the benefits derived from social gatherings and found academic activities satisfactory enough for teeming. One of the participants expressed
that there were opportunities for Individual Activities in the university. Another participant stated that she was unaware of any existing activity within the faculty which provided the opportunity for the instructors to establish interpersonal relations and to socialize. Also, all three participants agreed on the absence of any program for the new staff’s adaptation to their workplace. On the other side, an administrative staff, (D3) did not think that such activities were necessary.

Education faculties in general are the most crowded faculties of the TRNC universities. Instructors are having heavy work loads with minimum twenty hours lecturing in a week and many other working responsibilities, such as research, supervising to students, conferences and etc. Therefore social activities are needed to relief the staff from work stress and to motivate them. Unless these activities do not take place in their working environments, many behavioral outcomes such as, unhappiness, less productivity, and turnover.

Perceptions on Management Styles and Organizational Structure

The participants from the U1 stated that decisions within the faculty were made by the related committees. According to their responses, the committees had representatives from the related groups and during decision-making process the committees performed well. Thus they agreed that there was a democratic working environment and participative management in their faculty. As it is asked to the participants what happens if they do wrong, three instructors said that they are given verbal warning. AS1 stated that in such cases punishment should be given. From administrative staff D1 explained his opinion as follows: “You cannot solve things with punishment. A onetime mistake cannot be punished. You have to calmly evaluate the situation and try to solve it through dialogue; otherwise you harm the person’s motivation. Thus, the person also harms both himself/herself and the organization.” The participant also expressed the need for two-way communication and participative structure.

All the six participants from the U2 agreed that there is a two-way communication and participative structure in their organization. D2 and HD3 stated that the faculty dean is the mediator between the rector’s office and the faculty staff. Also, they mentioned instructors’ awareness of their responsibilities and said that they had initiatives in decision-making. Furthermore, the mistakes within the organization (faculty) are corrected through dialogue and warnings. HD3 also stated that there is a hierarchical structure in their faculty which creates discipline. D2 said: “There is not even one right-doing in the spirit of our organization.” All the instructors agreed that their dean’s management style was very democratic.

D3 and AS7 who participated from the U3 mentioned the existence of two-way communication in their organization. AS6 believes that the administrator does not delegate responsibilities to his staff. He added that if the administrator shared his responsibilities with his staff this would give them empowerment and the staff would participate in the decision-making process and feel a sense of ownership. Another participant, AS7, mentioned that there was no communication in the faculty; the participation was not at a satisfactory level and said that the staffs were not included in the decision-making process; therefore defined the organization’s style as centralized. The instructors of U3 said that the management style of their deans was democratic.

In general study participants agreed that their faculties were democratic; there was participation and two-way communication and the decisions were not made only by the administrators and but shared with the staff. It can be concluded that the faculties of all three universities had democratic and collaborative management styles which was concordant with the instructors.

Motivation of the Academic Staff

To understand how the behavior of the individual becomes a part of the system of behavior of the organization, it is necessary to study the relation between the personal motivation of the individual and the objectives toward which
the activity of the organization is oriented (Simon, 1976:16). When the participants were asked about their motivation, one participant from the U1 stated the importance of the cadre system. According to the participant contractual system has a negatively affects the motivation of the staff.. One participant (D1) mentioned the need for peaceful work environment and having necessary equipments which s/he believed would have a positive impact on the instructors’ motivation. He added that all these characteristics were present in their faculty. One of the participants (HD1) said that their efforts were recognized and appreciated by the administration. Their performances were also awarded. One of the participants (AS6) mentioned that in their faculty the factors such as comfortable teaching, learning and research environment, and non-intervention of others to their work positively affected their motivation. One participant (AS7) complained that the examination schedules prepared without informing the instructors.. The participant also mentioned that the new students registered to the university very late and added that these problems affected their motivation negatively. It could be argued that in general the majority of the participants agreed that they were motivated and this increased their productivity and effectiveness in their workplace.

*Metaphors of the Work Environment*

The participants were asked to describe their work environment using metaphors. Two participants (D1 and AS2) from the U1 described their work environment as “happy”, HD1 described it as “positive”. The participants also described their organization with the words; “Garden-Train-Sugar-and-Family”. From the U2, two participants AS4 and D2 described their work environment as “peaceful”, whereas HD2 and AS5 described the work environment as “harmonious”. Participants HD3 and AS4 used the word “democratic” to describe their work environment. All four participants from the U2 used words “Wolf – Leo – Clock – Transfer to Adolescence – Peace – Harmony” to describe their organization. One of the participants (AS6) from the U3 described their work environment as “reasonable management, comfortable but not institutionalized”, whereas another participant AS7 described it as “depressive, dark, airless environment”. On the other hand, they described their organization with the words “Core – Octopus – Forest and Trees”. It could be argued that most of the metaphors indicated positive work environment in the education faculties of the three universities.

4. Conclusion

Most of the participants believed that they had a peaceful and harmonious work environment. The management styles were not authoritarian but rather democratic. The administrators delegated their authority to their instructors and shared their responsibilities. The instructors were concordant with the administration. They were socialized and cooperative. Factors such as peaceful and comfortable work environment, sufficient equipment, recognition, and appreciation that come from the administrators for the instructors, and comfortable teaching, learning and research environment all affected their motivation positively. Metaphors also revealed positive work environment in the faculties of education. Therefore based on the general results of the study the following organizational traits can be derived.

**Organizational Traits of the Education Faculties of Three Higher Education Institutions in the TRNC**

- Social
- Concordant
- Democratic
- Cooperative
- Comfortable
- Affirmative

The traits showed some similarities and differences with Natoli’s (2001) personality traits. The Education faculties of the three universities were found to be social which is similar to Natoli’s organizational trait of socialization. In our study the administrators’ management styles emphasized the delegation of authority and were found to be democratic rather than authoritarian. The education faculties of the three universities had positive work environment where administrators did not punish their instructors if they did wrong. This situation showed how the environment is affirmative which is completely different from Natoli’s trait of punitiveness. Similar to Natoli’s trait of conformity we found the traits of concordance and cooperative.
5. Limitations of the Study

This research had been conducted during the mid-term exams week and the researchers aimed to reach 28 faculty staff employed in four universities. Faculty staff of EMU could not participate to the research process. Only three instructors have attended from the NEU. The researchers will keep up the research process to gather data and reach the expected sample size.

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