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- Welcome Readers
- Effect of Cultural Pluralism in Aerospace
- Values, Social Responsibility and Citizenship in Aviation

An ACA Publication

Aviation Consulting Association

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ARTICLES

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The Aviation Business Professionals Association

By Carlos Vergas

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In conclusion, the entire staff at Aviation Consulting Association would like to welcome all of the readers to the Aviation Consulting Journal. Please enjoy both the article on *Effect of Cultural Pluralism in Aerospace* and the article on *Values, Social Responsibility and Citizenship in Aviation*. We welcome any comments you may have about our two articles and welcome any future contributors to our publication.

Effect of Cultural Pluralism in Aerospace

By Carlos Vergas

Abstract

The article analyzes the blend of differing cultural paradigms within global organizations in the context of aerospace organizations. It provides examples of divergent cultural paradigms including collective versus individualistic social perception and matrilineal versus patrilineal descent. The research presents recommendations to address, manage and leverage differences in an attempt to achieve organizational communication success.

The airline industry has a history of long-term profitability that is both marginal and cyclical (Doganis, 2001). In the last three decades, the airline industry has only sustained over six percent marginal profit for five to six years. The industry is inherently unstable due to the constant impact of developments, challenges and constraints. One of those challenges is divergent cultural paradigms and the breakdown on inter-organizational and extra-organizational communication.

Inter-group anxiety and racism are just two of the negative outcomes which lead to communication barriers. Divergent cultural paradigms lead to prejudices between multicultural groups. The by-products of prejudice are psychological pain, economic costs, lost opportunities and denial of the rights to liberty (Snyder & Miene, 1994). By nature the aerospace industry operates in a multicultural environment. The industry can not afford to overlook the communication breakdown resulting from cultural pluralism. In this context, cultural pluralism refers to the multiple basic elements of knowledge and values of multiple society members.

Introduction

The article analyzes the present condition of the blend of differing cultural paradigms within global organizations, and in particular in the context of aerospace organizations. It provides examples of divergent cultural paradigms including collective versus individualistic social perception and matrilineal versus patrilineal descent. The research presents recommendations to address, manage and

leverage differences in an attempt to achieve organizational communication success. The article is organized into four sections, (a) background, (b) divergent cultural paradigms, (c) recommendations, and (d) conclusion.

Background

The airline industry has a history of long-term profitability that is both marginal and cyclical (Doganis, 2001). In the last three decades, the airline industry has sustained less than six percent marginal profit for five to six years. The industry is inherently unstable due to the constant impact of developments, challenges and constraints. One of those challenges is divergent cultural paradigms and the effects on inter-organizational and extra-organizational communication. Cultural paradigms are ways of life by which societies are shaped (Tsiopinis, 2005). These paradigms are fluid, allow for influence and provide the ability to relate. Cultural paradigms provide individuals with the meaningfulness while living in the world.

Paradigm is an assumption about reality and feels true (Rupp & Page-Verhoeff, 2005). Reality itself is an assumption and provided by religion, philosophical traditions and sciences. Within those lines of thought, the perception of reality is a construct, projection or delusion.

Culture is the individual knowledge containing the belief, art, morals, custom and other traditions gained from society (Park, 2005). It is the set of unique spiritual beliefs, intellectual knowledge and traditional features of society. It is also a means of valuing human activity.

Cultural paradigms allow individuals to experience collectively the validation for living and the evolution and expansion of truth (Tsiopinis, 2005). The understanding of how others define truth and the reasons for a chosen method of definition provide a means of complete communication. In the aerospace industry, as with other business, inter-organizational and extra-organizational communication is vital to achieve success. Identifying communication barriers and reducing communication barriers will certainly benefit the aerospace industry.

Divergent Cultural Paradigms

The nature of prejudice differs across cultural paradigms (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2004). The interpersonal perspective associated with individualist cultures leads to interpersonal prejudices. The inter-group perspective associated with collectivist cultures leads to inter-group prejudices. The differences in prejudices affect communication and impact outcomes of individuals working in multicultural groups. The very nature of the aerospace industry leads to high multicultural group interaction and critical communication requirements.

Individualism and collectivism ranking of nations was documented 20 years ago (Hofstede, 1980). It is believed the individualist values are tied to the hunting and gathering activity. It is rooted in industrial Western societies where personal freedom is deeply ingrained and the individual rights are highly valued. The collectivists' values are tied to developing societies. Social scientists believe it to be tied to agricultural-based societies, such as East Asia and Japan. Within these societies, interdependence and other-focused self philosophy is valued (Triandis, 1989).

During the kinship debates of 1960s and 1970s, it was argued the classifications of patrilineal or matrilineal descent had a certain discourse and relation with society (Schubert, 2005). It was argued patrilineal descent is indicative of control and dominated by men. Matrilineal descent was indicative of women's lack of power and authority.

One of the most important aspects of cultural differences is tied directly to individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1990). Another cultural difference is related to matrilineal or patrilineal descent. The differences among societies generate stereotypes and prejudices in values (Snyder & Miene, 1994). These two dimensions of divergent cultural paradigms generate differences which erect barriers impacting efficient inter-group and inner-group communication in the aerospace industry.

Collective Social Perception

Collectivism refers to societies where collective consciousness is emphasized. This paradigm is established through interdependent actions and displayed as having interdependent

values. It is illustrated through the cohesiveness within group members, mutual obligations, concern for the group's well being and having great group loyalty (Hofstede, 2001). With collective social perception, the emphasis is placed on effort toward gaining benefit for the entire group.

Inter-group and inner-group anxiety is caused by prejudices between the minority or majority situations of collectivist and individualist groups. Group anxiety is the negative results due to the rejection from inner-group members' perceived dissimilarity (Stephan et al., 1998). For example, inter-group anxiety may exist when a Mexican group (collective social perception) has negative stereotypes toward an Anglo-American group (individualistic social perception) (Stephan et al., 1998). Group anxiety is a barrier to efficient multicultural group communication.

Individualistic Social Perception

Individualism refers to societies where the single person consciousness is emphasized. This paradigm is established and illustrated with the belief of independent values. For example, an individualist group would have individual goals, view itself as having the right over others and immediate group members (Hofstede, 2001). The individualistic social perception is to place emphasis on effort to generate personal gain.

Several prejudices exist in individualist dominated groups or organizations. Racial minority claims for discrimination in the workplace are one example (Robertson & Block, 2001). For example, these prejudices can be viewed as racism (Gaertner, 1976). Racism is another barrier to efficient multicultural group communication.

Matrilineal and Patrilineal Descent

In the past, anthropologists made the assumption matrilineal descent afforded women a greater level of prestige, power and authority (Brettell & Sargent, 1997). The authors argued, among horticulturalists, women have higher status in societies characterized by matrilineal descent. Most recently, authors have made the argument the descent system is not the driver as much as the organization of the domestic group. Hirschon (1983) wrote despite the system, husbands remain the unchallenged heads of households. These

differences in view points also contribute to divergent cultural paradigms which create barriers to efficient multicultural group communication, especially with multicultural group members of both sexes.

Recommendations

Several steps can be taken to address dimensions of divergent cultural paradigms which lead to communication breakdown between individuals and groups. Two actions are recommended to address the communication breakdown. The corporate culture needs to be open to divergent cultural paradigms and the policies and procedures in place need to support the divergent cultural paradigms.

First, an organizational diversity corporate culture that is open to individualist and collectivist viewpoints will minimize the negative effects of prejudices (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2004). The open diversity climate will help bring down the barriers causing communication breakdowns. The selective recruitment, employee orientation, reward systems, informal communication and organizational feedback need to present the organization internally and externally as one that is open to multiple cultural paradigms.

In the workplace, simple and subtle actions within the interaction among people produces stereotypes and prejudices due to perceived differences in race, lifestyle and workplace values (Snyder & Miene, 1994). The byproducts of prejudice are psychological pain, economic costs, lost opportunities and denial of the rights of liberty (Snyder & Miene, 1994). The second action is to put in place policies and procedures designed to address individuals' cultural orientation as individualistic or collectivistic and from either matrilineal or patrilineal descent. These policies and procedures will help address the barriers preventing effective multicultural group communication in the aerospace industry. Again, the policies and procedures need to be present in the human resources systems. Leadership and the organizational character need to support these policies and procedures as authentic and credible. Lastly, policies and procedures must incorporate the adaptability to change to address future environmental changes.

Conclusion

Inter-group anxiety and racism are just two of the negative outcomes which lead to communication barriers. Divergent cultural paradigms lead to prejudices between multicultural groups. The by-products of prejudice are psychological pain, economic costs, lost opportunities and denial of the rights to liberty (Snyder & Miene, 1994). The aerospace industry by nature operates in a multicultural environment. The aerospace industry cannot afford to overlook the communication breakdown resulting from cultural pluralism.

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Values, Social Responsibility and Citizenship in Aviation

By Carlos Vergas

Abstract

The article is a comprehensive analysis of Southwest Airline's value system and how these values are present in the organization's long-term and short-term initiatives, as well as, its relationship to stakeholders and the greater community. Based on Southwest Airline's practices, recommendations are made in which its values can be better developed, articulated and exemplified at the executive level without compromising the organization's ability to succeed in its market. The article is organized into seven sections, (a) agency problem representation, (b) values affect performance, (c) stakeholder relationships, (d)

competitive advantage, (e) corporate citizenship, (f) recommendations, and (g) conclusion.

Introduction

Despite the airline industry's inherently unstable profitability, Southwest Airlines remains focused on organizational values, social responsibilities and corporate citizenship (Rigsby & Greco, 2003). One of Southwest's competitive advantages is its unique approach toward customer value. Southwest's integrity of its operating principles is a reflection of how it approaches customer service. The company has developed its manager's competencies in judging an applicant's personality to the same level as assessing core business skills (Rigsby & Greco). Right from the recruitment process, Southwest demonstrates its values openly allowing applicants to pursue the relationship or remove themselves from consideration. The values are appreciated by the applicants' right from the hiring process. The expectations at Southwest are very clear; the business environment should be fun. The internal social responsibility and corporate citizenship is demonstrated by its increasing values and strength of depth of management after the departure of Herb Kelleher.

Agency Problem Representation

Agency theory explains the organization of relationships where the principal determines the work and the agent undertakes the work (Scott 2003). The theory suggests under situations of incomplete information and uncertainty two agency problems arise. The problems are adverse selection and moral hazard. Adverse selection is the state where the principal cannot be certain if the agent accurately represents his/her ability to do the work he/she is paid to perform. Moral hazard is the state where the principal is not certain if the agent has applied the maximum effort to perform the work assigned.

For Southwest, achieving competitive advantage means asking for superior performance from front line employees (Katzenbach & Santamaria, 1999). For example, its baggage handlers know the huge effect their work has on customers from the initial interview. These employees are paid low wages and have reduced

hope of advancement, but care about the company's performance. Southwest is able to strengthen collective pride in their frontline employees by focusing on values after training ends. The company posts hundreds of documents and photos highlighting the company's accomplishments in the lobby of its headquarters building. Southwest draws employee inspiration from its business accomplishments.

Southwest emphasizes group success and freedom (Ellet, 2002). Employees accomplish what needs to be done and do not allow job boundaries to get in the way of providing good service. For example, pilots help load baggage as needed during time constraint situations. For Southwest, the freedom means the broad latitude employees need to accomplish the job to generate the best results for the company.

With Southwest, the corporation determines the work to be done and the employees undertake the tasks required to accomplish that work. The airline carefully recruits candidates who want to work in a fun business environment, focuses on values beyond training and empowers the employees with the broad latitude to get the job done. It also shares business accomplishments with employees to generate inspirational behavior from its frontline employees. With this strategy, Southwest attempts to address the problems of adverse selection and moral hazard.

Values Affect on Performance

Corporate values impact the organization's success as the direction for the behavioral path of the organization (Rigsby & Greco, 2003). The values are integrated into the organization through a process of definition and continual communication. The challenge is to properly and efficiently align practices, systems and processes to support the corporate values.

Southwest achieves success with values integration by properly communicating its values and beliefs during the recruitment process and beyond (Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett, & Condemni, 1999). It takes into consideration the requirements of all its stakeholders. The air carrier not only aligns its processes and practices with those values, but it has also reinforced these values through its corporate communication. Southwest continually ensures all employees understand the importance of

its values. Lastly, the air carrier takes the right steps to integrate its core values with its strategic planning.

The integration and credibility of its core values have produced over 50 consecutive profitable quarters (Corridore, 2003). The air carrier has been a leader in the highly volatile and unprofitable airline industry. Southwest Airlines has continually made money during good and poor economical conditions. The successful integration of its values and beliefs aims to continue the out performance of the competition in the years to come.

Stakeholder Relationships

Stakeholder relationship management has received much attention lately regarding the viability of stakeholder theory (Gittell, 2001). Despite the debates, the stakeholder relationship framework offers the boundaries of markets in which a firm operates. In the case of Southwest Airlines, the service markets are with its customer stakeholders, the labor markets are with its employee stakeholders and the capital markets are with its ownership stakeholders. The successful management of the stakeholder relationship framework leads to success in performance (Rigsby & Greco, 2003).

Southwest Airlines has become a model for providing reliable service to its customers in difficult operating conditions profitable (Gittell, 2000). The success is attributed to its intense focus on stakeholder relationship framework. For example, Southwest invests in relationships with its unions and with its supervisors. In addition, the air carrier invests in relationships with its fuel suppliers producing the fuel hedging required to outperform the competition. These relationship investments have strengthened the relationship with its ownership stakeholders.

Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage is the ability to outperform the competition in providing a product or service customers will value (Peter & Donnelly, 2002). Companies analyze their respective industry and determine to implement a cost leadership strategy or a differentiation strategy. Southwest Airlines in many ways chose to implement both a

cost leadership strategy and a differentiation strategy.

First, Southwest Airlines created a competitive advantage by operating as a low cost carrier (Flouris & Walker, 2005). It stresses efficiency and offers a no-frills service. It has managed to continually strive to be the cost leader in the industry and to keep costs down as a priority. The management staff stresses the importance of costs to all of its employees. Southwest keeps labor costs low by paying below average in comparison to industry pay scales. The air carrier also uses its financial flexibility to fully hedge against oil prices and keep fuel costs lower than its competition. Southwest also flies only one type of plane to keep maintenance, training and spare parts costs low.

Second, as a differentiation strategy, Southwest operates as a point-to-point carrier versus a hub-and-spoke system (Payne, Christopher, Clark & Peck, 2000). Unlike other carriers, Southwest identifies markets that are strong enough to support flying without hubs and serves them directly. Its customers stand to benefit with direct flights versus connecting flights. This point could also be argued as a cost cutting strategy because hub-and-spoke systems are more costly to maintain and need a higher level of passenger traffic to succeed. The point-to-point system also allows for faster turnaround times, keeping planes in the air longer and improving operational efficiency.

Corporate Citizenship

Corporate citizenship refers to the relationship and partnership of the corporation with the community (Hair & Bush, 2003). It is the corporate contribution back to the community. Corporations give back to the community by partnering with nonprofit organizations, by forming separate entities to contribute directly or by sponsoring community driven activities. Southwest Airlines has lead by example in demonstrating corporate citizenship in the airline industry.

Southwest Airlines exercises its corporate citizenship in various ways. For example, on November 10, 2004 Southwest joined with H-E-B to celebrate H-E-B's 100th anniversary by delivering the largest food bank donation in a single day (TateAustin, 2004). Throughout the year, Southwest Airlines is devoted to every community it serves by offering donations in the form of tickets

to family members (Southwest Airlines). In other instances, Southwest Airlines organizes house build-outs for the needy or raise money for community needs.

Recommendations

With every organization there are two factors that drive success, the strategic component and the behavioral component (Rigsby & Greco, 2003). The vision statement addresses the strategic component. The value statement addresses the behavioral component. Southwest Airlines has been a model for other airlines to follow when engineering the behavior component of their respective strategic plan.

Other air carriers may enhance their behavioral component of the strategic plan by focusing on the integration of their respective values and beliefs. Airlines will achieve success by aligning their processes and practices with the values and beliefs. The proper value integration can be achieved by performing the following steps (Rigsby & Greco):

1. Communicate the values and beliefs clearly.
2. Take into consideration all of the stakeholders.
3. Align the processes and practices with the values and beliefs.
4. Reinforce the values and beliefs throughout the company continually.

Second, air carriers need to measure the outcome of the integration of the values. Airlines need to track the financial or production performance against the values integrated. Value credibility can be achieved by performing the following steps (Rigsby & Greco):

1. Consistent values and beliefs implementation company wide.
2. Business strategy does not violate values and beliefs.
3. Day-to-day operations are consistent with values and beliefs.
4. Correct any inconsistencies.
5. Reduce and eliminate any distrust.

Conclusion

Southwest's value system is present in the organization's long-term and short-term initiatives. Its relationship to stakeholders and the greater community are strong and consistent with its values and beliefs. Based on Southwest Airline's practices, and inferred, its value system is well integrated into its strategic plan. Southwest is a leader in the industry through its efforts of a very well integrated behavioral component into its strategic plan (Beauchamp & Bowie, 2003). Within an industry that is inherently unstable profitability, Southwest is focused on organizational values, social responsibilities and corporate citizenship. The social responsibility and corporate citizenship internally is demonstrated by its increasing values and strength of depth of management after the departure of Herb Kelleher.

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