Spring 2019

Group culture in successful organizations

Courtney Cybert

Recommended Citation

Group Culture in Successful Organizations

_____

An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Honors College

James Madison University

_____

by Courtney Nicole Cybert

May 2019

Accepted by the faculty of the Honors College, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

FACULTY COMMITTEE: HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

_____   _____
Project Advisor: Luis Betancourt, Ph.D.   Bradley R. Newcomer, Ph.D.
Professor, Accounting   Dean, Honors College

Table of Contents

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Eta Delta chapter of Beta Alpha Psi and determine whether its group culture is enhancing or diminishing its success. Daniel Coyle, in his book, *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*, examined several successful organizations including the U.S. Navy's Seal Team Six, IDEO, the San Antonio Spurs, and Google. From his observations, he classified the characteristics of successful group culture into three traits: build safety, share vulnerability, and establish purpose. Through these traits, he places an emphasis on the idea that the interaction of group members, rather than the individual skills of group members, is what drives organizational success. In this paper, I will attempt to draw parallels between Beta Alpha Psi and these ideal traits, as well as identify any deficiencies in its existing culture.

Introduction

Beta Alpha Psi, an honor society for finance, accounting, and computer information systems majors, provides opportunities for association among members and practicing business professionals. The national chapter oversees more than 300 individual chapters on college and university campuses, each of which has cultivated its own unique culture. I have had the opportunity to serve as a member of the Beta Alpha Psi executive board for the past year as the Candidate Educator. It is my responsibility, as the Candidate Educator, to attract potential candidates and help them through the process to become members of the organization. I serve as the liaison between existing and potential members. It has been both a trying and rewarding experience. I have committed countless hours to improve the candidate process, hoping to positively impact Beta Alpha Psi as a whole. Although it has been a lot of work, it is extremely rewarding to successfully transition a candidate class through the process and into the

organization. I feel strongly about the organization and truly believe that it provides numerous benefits to its members.

Throughout this experience, I have been able to develop my own leadership skills and have learned countless different lessons about group dynamics. *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* is a fascinating and insightful text that reveals the culture and secrets behind highly successful groups. It has become evident through my time spent on the Beta Alpha Psi executive board that such concepts are extremely helpful and applicable to the real world. One of the first concepts discussed in the body is that people generally assume skilled individuals will combine to produce a skilled performance. Although Beta Alpha Psi is a prestigious honor society celebrating its 100 year anniversary, the performance of at the JMU chapter is far from perfect. Our executive board does not always operate flawlessly as a cohesive group. If it is indeed true that skilled individuals always combine to produce skilled performance, Beta Alpha Psi would perform exceptionally well because it is a group made up of exclusively elite students. However, as discussed throughout *The Culture Code*, group culture is much more important than individual ability. There are three skills necessary to create a successful group culture: build safety, share vulnerability, and establish purpose (Coyle, p.xix).

Build Safety

Belonging Cues

Safety is a crucial factor in creating a successful culture within any group or organization. Signals of connection should be used to generate feelings of belongingness and identity within the group. These signals of connection can be established by utilizing belonging cues, which are behaviors that create safe connections within groups. Some examples of effective belonging cues are proximity, eye contact, energy, physical touch, active listening, and humor (Coyle, p.8). I

found it interesting that a majority of these belonging clues apply exclusively to in-person interactions, even though group interactions tend to occur over many different mediums. The Beta Alpha Psi executive board does not traditionally have meetings where board members meet in person and interact. One executive meeting was held during my first semester as the Candidate Educator and there has been no meeting thus far during my second semester. Our main source of communication is GroupMe, where we can virtually connect by sending messages. It is difficult to utilize belonging cues such as eye contact, physical touch, and active listening when communicating solely through virtual messages. This lack of in-person interaction has slightly weakened the group culture of the Beta Alpha Psi executive board.

Although it is more difficult to send belonging cues when group members are not interacting in person, it is not impossible. Belonging cues have three distinct qualities: energy, individualization, and future orientation (Coyle, p.11). Energy refers to how invested members are in the exchange that is occurring. I personally believe that nothing is more discouraging than when someone doesn't match your energy in a conversation. A lack of reciprocated energy immediately deflates the excitement about the topic. Individualization refers to treating other members as unique and valued. I have found that people tend to appreciate it when you individualize conversations to their interests and remember things about them that you have discussed before. Future orientation means signaling that the relationship is going to continue. This removes uncertainty and allows members to feel secure in their relationship with the group. These qualities could easily be incorporated into virtual messages, which makes it possible to send signals of connection without having in-person interactions. These signals essentially send a message that says "you are safe here".

Another important way to send belonging cues and build safety is to actively invite input from group members. Often times, certain group members will not give their input unless specifically asked for it. This usually happens if there is a shy member in the group who is afraid to speak up. It is important to make sure that each member feels that they are important to the group and that their opinion is valued. One way to ensure that every member has a voice is to call on people directly. This may seem intense, but I have found that most people tend to feel valued when someone asks specifically for their opinion. It sends a signal that they are safe to share your opinion here. When I first was elected to my position on the executive board, I was too intimidated to speak up in the executive board GroupMe. Since I was both new and inexperienced, I was nervous to give input and share my opinion with the entire group. The first time I spoke in the GroupMe was after one of the other executive board members asked a question specifically directed towards me. This individual attention made me feel welcome in the group and empowered me to share my opinion.

Personal Up-Close Connection

Physical closeness is highly related to the belongingness cue of proximity. It has been found that personal, up-close connections can help build safety and improve performance. Research done by Thomas Allen, an MIT professor, actually revealed that placing peoples' desks closer together has a significant impact on creating a successful team dynamic. (Coyle, p. 70). The visual contact between team members due to this proximity is key. Each member is actively reminded that they are part of a team. This enhances motivation because people don't want to let their team members down. An interesting aspect of this is how dividing vertical separation has been proven to be. This essentially means that if team members are located on different floors, the amount that they will interact decreases dramatically. It seems almost foolish that people

would let a few floors keep them from interacting, especially since elevators make different floors in a building extremely accessible. However, I have experienced situations in which team members on different floors seemed extremely distant. Increased separation is detrimental to team performance because it leads to a decrease in communication between members.

A lack of personal, up-close connections is a serious problem for Beta Alpha Psi, for both the executive board and the organization as a whole. As previously discussed, the executive board does not hold regular meetings. Similarly, there are no chapter meetings where all Beta Alpha Psi members can come together and interact. The only time members actually see each other is when they attend the professional meetings that Beta Alpha Psi hosts. However, these professional meetings don't necessarily foster interaction between members. Rather, the members sit and listen to a presentation. This lack of physical, personal connection leads to a weak sense of belonging. There is no one place or communication medium in which all Beta Alpha Psi members are connected. The only connection between members is the Beta Alpha Psi Canvas page, which is more a source of information than a place for people to interact. The executive board considered implementing a chapter GroupMe as a start to fostering personal connection between members. Even though a GroupMe would still lack the physical closeness that is key to building safety, it would be a step in the right direction. I believe that Beta Alpha Psi at JMU would be a stronger organization with more enthusiastic participation if its members had the opportunity to physically interact with each other. It would feel more like a cohesive organization than a random gathering of qualified people.

Collisions

Another important aspect of building safety, championed by Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh, is the occurrence of collisions. Collisions are simply personal encounters that occur by chance

(Coyle, p.66). Although by definition, these collisions occur by chance, organizations can create spaces that maximize their happening. For example, Tony Hsieh closed off the only side entrance to the Zappos building so that everyone was forced to come in through the same entrance. An even simpler way to facilitate collisions is to replace four-person tables with ten-person tables. Collisions are key to successful group culture because they are drivers of creativity, community, and cohesion. These encounters are typically laid back since they are neither planned nor structured. People generally feel safer in these casual situations which helps them develop connections.

The College of Business building, Zane Showker Hall, is a great place for collisions between Beta Alpha Psi members. All members are business majors and therefore have the majority of their classes in the same building. I have often seen executive and non-executive members conversing in the hallways and the lobby between classes. This is an advantage for the organization because members are casually interacting in a safe environment and creating connections. Although most business majors complain about the overcrowding in the building, this actually further facilitates the occurrence of collisions. Since so many people are condensed in such a small area, it makes it more likely for members of the same group to run into each other.

Beta Alpha Psi also facilitates collisions by requiring its members to complete ten professional hours and ten community service hours per semester. This equates to forty total hours for the entire year, which is a significant amount. Although these hours and events do not directly facilitate interaction between group members, they provide a space for people to naturally and randomly interact.

Role of Social Events

There were multiple examples throughout *The Culture Code* of companies with good cultures participating in social events with their fellow group members (Coyle, p.54). The role of social events in fostering a feeling of safety and belongingness is never directly discussed in the book, however, the frequency of examples made me wonder if there is an important connection between the two. One example is Google holding "no holds barred" hockey games where its employees could interact without feeling the need to manage their status or worry about who is in charge. Another example is the San Antonio Spurs eating together "as much as they play basketball together." Both Google and the Spurs are considered to be companies with highly successful cultures. It seems to me that social events help group members create connections with each other in a casual environment, similar to collisions. These connections enhance the feeling of belongingness and safety among group members.

Beta Alpha Psi has tried to implement social events to bring the organization closer together, but they have been largely unsuccessful with low turnout. I believe the reason for this is the lack of belongingness that members feel towards the group. As previously discussed, the absence of personal up-close connection may make Beta Alpha Psi seem like more of an obligation than a group to be involved in and passionate about. This disconnect causes social events to have very little appeal to members. If members do not feel connected to the organization or their team members, they will have no desire to spend their free time at a social event with them. I believe that to help fix this problem, Beta Alpha Psi needs to work on improving its culture from the roots, rather than depending on social events to create necessary connections. We must improve the overall culture and feelings of safety and belongingness for social events to be effective in furthering these feelings.

I went to my first Beta Alpha Psi social event this semester, which was a dinner for the executive board members. Prior to this dinner, I was not very close to or familiar with the other members. I was moderately nervous about spending the evening with people that I didn't feel very connected to. I now realize that it is a huge problem that I did not feel connected to the other people in this group. The executive board is supposed to work closely together to effectively run the entire organization. This is not possible without a feeling of safety and an environment in which members can openly share their opinions and ask questions when they are uncertain. In retrospect, I realized that due to my perceived lack of safety, I may have held back some of my opinions and been afraid to ask some of the questions that I had. The executive dinner was only two hours long, but it made me feel so much closer to my fellow teammates. We formed strong connections in this social environment that I think will help us function better as a team. An important aspect of social events is that no one is necessarily trying to prove their competence. As opposed to a formal executive meeting, team members do not have to worry about being perceived as capable and can focus on making personal connections.

I recommend that the executive board have at least one social event each semester to help build connections. The executive board members who have been around for longer should go out of their way to encourage newer members to attend these events, since many new members may be too intimidated to attend. Along with having purely social events, I suggest that the executive board make an attempt to have their formal meetings held in a friendlier environment. For example, I believe that discussing important organizational matters over dinner could help members relax and feel safer in that environment.

The Star Model

Sociologists James Baron and Michal Hannan analyzed approximately two hundred technology start-ups in Silicon Valley and classified their cultures into three different models (Coyle, p. 21). The star model focuses on finding and hiring the smartest people, the professional model focuses on building a group around specific skill sets, and the commitment model focuses on developing a group with shared values and strong emotional bonds. Beta Alpha Psi very strictly follows the star model. Students must be invited to join the organization and we only invite those who meet a demanding GPA requirement and have one of the four specified majors. In other words, the organization is focused on finding and recruiting the brightest students that JMU has to offer. There is no consideration of any other factors when choosing which students to invite. It is a very systematic process where we invite only those who are included in the generated spreadsheet that lists the eligible students. There is no consideration of whether potential new members will fit the existing culture and contribute to the organization.

It was discovered that the firms that utilized the commitment model consistently produced the most successful cultures (Coyle, p.21). This indicates that Beta Alpha Psi might want to shift their model to focus more on shared values and strong emotional bonds. The recruitment process for potential members is not something that I foresee changing. Beta Alpha Psi, at its core, is an organization for prestigious Finance, Accounting, and Computer Information Systems majors. However, once those potential members officially join the organization, we can do a better job of promoting shared values and fostering emotional bonds. This should ideally start during the candidate process. We have started to introduce the organization's values by providing the candidates with basic information on the chapter and holding them accountable for being familiar with it. We are also attempting to foster emotional

11

bonds through our mentorship program. Each candidate is assigned a current member as their mentor and is required to meet with them once a week. When I was a candidate myself and not on the executive board, candidates were arbitrarily matched with their mentors. One of the biggest changes I made when I joined the executive board was improving the way that candidates are paired with a mentor. The candidate process now involves a "speed dating" event where all of the candidates and potential mentors get to meet and interact casually in a social environment. After this event, mentors get to preference which candidate they would like as their mentee, based on how compatible they believe they are. This process is far from perfect but it has helped us better pair mentors and candidates which has resulted in a larger number of emotional bonds. It is my hope that Beta Alpha Psi and the executive board continue to make strides toward building a feeling safety and creating a successful group culture.

Share Vulnerability

Vulnerability Loop

Vulnerability is defined as the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally (Coyle, p.104). Many people, including myself, have trouble being open and honest about their vulnerability because it is often associated with weakness. This is a toxic mindset to have and can be detrimental to group culture. A vulnerability loop, which is a shared exchange of openness that is the basic building block of cooperation and trust, is a crucial aspect of a successful group culture. If a team member is open and shares their vulnerability, it encourages others to feel comfortable opening up as well. On the other hand, if a majority of team members are closed off, it establishes a norm of hiding vulnerabilities and it will be increasingly difficult for any team member to be open. The

vulnerability loop is extremely contagious and once it catches on, the majority of the group will be acting open and vulnerable with each other.

After learning about the importance of sharing vulnerability, I started to wonder whether a vulnerability loop is present within the Beta Alpha Psi executive board. I came to the conclusion that, as of now, there is not a strong vulnerability loop within the group. When I joined the executive board, I was very new to Beta Alpha Psi. Many of the other board members had been involved with Beta Alpha Psi for multiple semesters, some even serving multiple semesters on the executive board. When I was elected Candidate Educator, I was very unsure about what my responsibilities were. I should have reached out to the rest of the group and asked for guidance. However, being brand new to the board, I did not want to show any weakness and prove that I was capable of handling the position I was just elected to. I believe that, even in the presence of a strong vulnerability loop, new group members will always be at least a little intimidated to ask questions. It is human nature to want to appear capable and to prove yourself to your new group members. However, a strong vulnerability loop and a culture that encourages sharing vulnerability can help new group members become comfortable with opening up and asking the necessary questions. For example, I would have been more inclined to speak up if the more experienced executive board members had directly encouraged me to ask for any help that I needed. A direct invitation to ask questions may help a new member feel comfortable with sharing their vulnerabilities. A culture that encourages this is also helpful because when someone else asks questions, it empowers others to ask their own questions that they may have been hesitant to ask.

Asking Questions

The willingness to ask questions is an extremely important part of sharing vulnerability. Unfortunately, people often shy away from asking questions for a fear of seeming weak. *The Culture Code* discusses two individuals who exemplify the importance of asking questions and the impact that it can have on group culture. These two individuals are Harry Nyquist, an engineer at Bell Labs, and Roshi Givechi, a designer at IDEO. Harry Nyquist is best known for drawing people out and getting them to think by asking questions. He would ask the right questions with genuine curiosity and warmth, which in turn generated motivation and new ideas. Another important aspect of Nyquist's positive impact on group culture is the fact that he would often talk with people who were working on projects that were completely different from his own field. It is important to talk with people outside of your immediate group to obtain different perspectives. These different perspectives are beneficial because they may help team members view projects and problems in a new light. This is inherently difficult for the Beta Alpha Psi executive board to do because we are all very similar. We all have similar majors and an intrinsic drive which is reflected in our qualifying GPAs. The only difference in perception that we can take advantage of is different majors. A finance major may have a different view on a problem than an accounting major. However, the variation in those views is likely insignificant because the majors are so similar. The executive board has not yet considered this, but I think it may be beneficial to talk to executive board members from other organizations to get new ideas and bounce our ideas off of them. For example, discussing ideas with executive board members of a sorority may shine a new light on our own organization and help us to improve in areas that we had never considered before.

Roshi Givechi is best known for surfacing, which is the process of using questions to bring information out of people (Coyle, p.150). This entails asking the right questions in the right way. It is important to ask the right questions because the goal is to help people think beyond what is immediately right in front of them. Questions are meant to challenge people to think deeper and to achieve this goal, the right questions must be asked. It is equally important to ask in the right way because different people are motivated by different things. Therefore, it is crucial to know what each individual responds to in order to have effective interactions with them. For example, certain people on the executive board prefer you to be straight-forward and blunt when interacting with them. However, others would be offended by this same approach. It is also important to note that uncomfortable questions and conversations are important. People typically prefer to avoid uncomfortable interactions, when often those are the most crucial ones to have.

Share Vulnerability to Combine Strengths

One of the most important reasons that sharing vulnerability is important is that it enables team members to combine their individual strengths. Groups should strive to become more than the sum of their individual parts. In order to do this, it is critical that people understand and accept that some group members are better at some things than others. People have different specialties and skill sets, which must be acknowledged and capitalized. A group will never be able to come together to exceed the sum of its parts if all members hide their weaknesses due to a fear of seeming vulnerable. Group members must be open and honest about their strengths and weaknesses so that the group can allocate members to different tasks in the most efficient way possible.

I believe that the Beta Alpha Psi executive board has allocated our members efficiently according to our individual strengths. We each have our own assigned executive position which reflects what we can do best. For example, my strength of public speaking is one of the reasons I was elected as the Candidate Educator, who is responsible for running multiple meetings. The Webmaster is someone who is great with computers and is therefore assigned to handle all of Beta Alpha Psi's social media. All of the executive members were fairly honest with themselves when running for their position. It seems to me that we all ran for, and won, positions that cater to our strengths.

It is important to note the importance of how the group responds to a shared vulnerability. When a person shares a weakness, those that they are sharing it with can respond in one of two ways. They can either reciprocate and reveal a weakness of their own or pretend that they do not have any. It is crucial that other members of the group reciprocate in order to establish a strong vulnerability loop.

Authority Bias

Authority bias is defined as the tendency to attribute greater accuracy to the opinion of an authority figure and be more influenced by that opinion (Coyle, pg.139). In simpler terms, when a superior tells you to do something, most people are going to do it regardless of whether it is wrong or not. This occurs because it is intimidating to stand up to a superior and object their opinion. However, it is crucial that authority is respectfully challenged by group members. One person telling everyone else what to do is not a good way to make decisions. Valid opposing views and opinions should be brought to the attention of the superior so that the best decision can be reached. Since this is uncomfortable for a lot of people, those in a position of authority should create an environment that people feel comfortable speaking up in. One of the best ways to do

this is by sharing their own vulnerabilities with the group. For example, a leader using a phrase such as "Now let's see if someone can poke holes in my idea" invites people to respectfully challenge the idea and also acknowledges that they are vulnerable because their idea is not perfect.

When I first started my position as Candidate Educator, I had multiple meetings with the Vice President of Membership, Vice President, and President. There was a significant amount of disagreement between the President and the three of us, specifically about the candidate process. The Vice President of Membership, Vice President, and I were all on the same page about the changes that needed to be made to the process. However, the President did not agree with us and he had final authority. As a brand new member of the executive board, I was a little scared to stand up to the President. However, I knew it needed to be done because the candidate process was technically my responsibility and I truly believed that I had some good ideas. Once I respectfully opposed one of his opinions, we were able to have a more open dialogue where I felt comfortable speaking my mind even if it disagreed with what he thought. Those meetings would not have progressed at all if no one was willing to challenge the President and we would have ended with a solution that the majority of us did not believe was the best one.

Log PT

Log PT is a Navy SEAL training exercise where a group of SEALs has to perform an assortment of maneuvers while bearing the burden of a large log together (Coyle, pg.120). This exercise creates intense vulnerability and deep interconnectedness between team members. Each member is incredibly aware of their teammates around them who are also holding the log and motivation is extremely high because no one wants to let their team down. There is also absolute transparency as to who is making mistakes or not carrying their weight. When one teammate

falters or makes a wrong move, everyone on the team knows. Essentially, there is no way for an individual member to hide their weakness from the rest of the team. Another key aspect of Log PT is that team members must work as a cohesive unit or they will not be successful at all. This means that when one team member weakens, those around them must adjust their own efforts to pick up the slack.

The lessons learned from observing Log PT can be related to other groups and their experiences. For example, students are often required to work in teams to complete important group projects. In my experience, members of these groups tend to work harder because they do not want to let their team down. This is especially true if it will be apparent to the team which members had a weak performance. I had to work with a group in one of my finance classes last semester to write an industry report. We handled this task by delegating one section of the report to each team member. We published these assignments in a Google Document so that everyone was aware of who was doing which part. The professor had informed us that she would be grading and providing feedback on the report before returning it to each group. Everyone in the group worked extremely hard on their respective part because no one wanted their section to have a lot of corrections and negative feedback. The rest of the team would be able to see who performed the weakest and had the most corrections. This transparency often motivates team members to perform better.

It is also important to note that Log PT is included in part of SEAL training, which is important because it sets the tone and cultural expectations for the group. Beta Alpha Psi has no training for their executive board members. I remember feeling lost for a while after I was elected because I did not know the expecations for the position. It is hard to establish expectations and cultural norms if there is no training. I think that Beta Alpha Psi should

implement some form of training for new executive board members so that they are aware of the expectations and norms of the group. I have two recommendations for this implementation of training and team building. First, I believe that each departing executive board member should meet with the member who will be succeeding them and discuss the duties and expectations of the position. I plan on doing this at the end of the semester with the member who is elected to be the new Candidate Educator. I took notes throughout the semester on my experience and plan on sharing them with my successor to give them a better idea of their responsibilities. Along with these individual meetings, I believe that there should be a social event held for both the departing and the new executive board members. This creates a safer space for new executive board members to ask questions and create connections with those that they will be working within the very near future.

Establish Purpose

Catchphrase Heuristics

When attempting to create a successful group culture, it is critical for organizations to establish purpose by promoting shared goals and values. Heuristics, which are any approach to problem-solving that employ a practical method, are a powerful way to do this (Coyle, p.212). They provide guidance by creating if-then scenarios that link priorities to keystone behaviors. Catchphrase heuristics have been championed by two very different leaders: Danny Meyer, a successful restaurateur, and Ed Catmull, the president and co-founder of Pixar. Meyer manages for proficiency while Catmull manages for creativity. This difference in managing styles impacts how they each use catchphrase heuristics to establish purpose. The catchphrases used in Meyer's proficient environment are surprisingly vivid and specific. On the other hand, the catchphrases used in Catmull's creative environment are un-catchy, plain, and universal. This is the opposite

of what I would have expected. I assumed that creative environments would require more graphic and colorful catchphrases than a proficient environment, which is the opposite of what has actually occurred. These differences make the point that it is important to know what type of environment you are working in so that you can apply the most effective method.

While I read about the importance of catchphrase heuristics, I could not help but think the whole idea is a little childish and silly. It was hard for me to believe that some fun catchphrases could really impact group culture. The book pointed out that an overwhelming amount of heuristics and catchphrases can be off-putting to group members. However, it has been proven that utilizing these catchphrases in moderation is helpful in establishing purpose within a group. Beta Alpha Psi does not seriously incorporate catchphrase heuristics into our culture. Each semester, the candidate class gets to design a t-shirt for themselves. We request that they come up with a fun catchphrase to put on the back of the t-shirt. However, this is the furthest extent that we use them. I believe that it may be helpful for us to come up with some organization-wide catchphrase heuristics that we could use repeatedly to establish our goals and purpose. Beta Alpha Psi is primarily an organization focused on proficiency, so it may be best for us to use fun, vivid catchphrase.

Meaningless Mission Statements

Most organizations have a mission statement, but most of these mission statements do not actually have an impact on group culture. It has been found that many people feel as if mission statements are more of a public relations gimmick than a unifying document. I would have to agree with this. Two summers ago I worked as a talent acquisition intern in the human resources department at a large aerospace engineering firm. One of my tasks was to find ways to make the company's key values more applicable to the mission statement and relatable to all of the

employees in the firm. I really believe that, in this organization and the majority of other organizations, no employees really care about these statements. The unfortunate reality is that a mission statement usually only exists for the purpose of existing and does not serve any other purpose. A mission statement can be a very powerful way to establish purpose if utilized correctly.

The President of Johnson & Johnson, James Burke, challenged the company's long-standing Credo which acted essentially as their mission statement. This received aggressive push back from many executives who could not fathom getting rid of a document that had been around and part of the company for so long. The CEO believed, however, that the credo was serving no purpose and did not matter much to employees and was therefore nonessential. The company decided to keep the Credo instated but Burke continued to challenge and encourage conversation about it. Even though it was never changed, these challenges brought fresh awareness to it. People were talking about Credo more frequently and it had become more relevant to the organization than ever, even though its substance was not changed at all.

Beta Alpha Psi has Bylaws that include a mission statement, which is to inspire and support excellence, but most members are not aware of the Bylaws nor the mission statement. I did not know what the mission statement is until I joined the executive board and was instructed to read through the Bylaws. The mission statement is not very present within the organization and therefore does not have much of an impact on the group culture. We have attempted to incorporate the Bylaws and mission statement into the candidate process to increase awareness. We have done this by providing each candidate with an information packet that summarizes the most important parts of the Bylaws. Each week we have a quiz on this information. Unfortunately, our efforts have not seemed to make much of a difference. I believe that most

candidates just review and memorize the information before the quiz and then forget about it. The executive board needs to figure out a more effective way to utilize the mission statement in establishing purpose because simply having members read the mission statement does not have much of an impact.

Link the Present to a Meaningful Future

A powerful way to establish purpose is by linking the present to a meaningful future. Stories are a good way to do this. They are a creative way to deliver information that drives desirable behavior. Beta Alpha Psi utilizes stories when attempting to convince people to join the organization. We hold two information nights where potential candidates are given an overview of the candidate process and the organization as a whole. I am the executive board member who presents at these information nights. I always make sure to tell my personal Beta Alpha Psi success story. I share with them that I was in their exact position last year, debating whether or not I should join Beta Alpha Psi. I ended up joining and going through the candidate process. During my time as a candidate, I attended the required professional meetings. These professional meetings are opportunities to meet and network with recruiters from different firms. I took advantage of this opportunity and introduced myself to recruiters after the meetings and built connections with them. I followed up on my interaction with the recruiter from my ideal firm and ended up building a very strong relationship with her. She serves as a great resource and helped me through the interviewing process, in which I ultimately secured an internship. I linked my decision to join Beta Alpha Psi to a meaningful future, which was the internship offer that I received. This has proven to be a very powerful way to demonstrate the purpose of Beta Alpha Psi.

It is also important to make sure that team members are looking at the bigger picture to understand the purpose of their present actions. I believe that both Beta Alpha Psi executive members and regular members sometimes forget to appreciate the organization for what it is. Sometimes I find myself getting caught up in my work and responsibilities as an executive board member and I start to view the organization as a burden, rather than an opportunity. Many members experience a similar feeling while they are fulfilling their professional and community service hour requirements. However, it is extremely important to stay focused on the big picture and the true purpose of the organization. Beta Alpha Psi is not a burden or a club that you just join to put on your resume. It is an opportunity to connect with recruiters and business professionals, which provides an advantage when seeking internships and job opportunities. As an executive board member, it is important to remember that we work to be able to provide this opportunity to many students. It gives purpose to all of the hours that we put in and helps to strengthen our motivation.

Mistakes

Mistakes are inevitable. At some point, we will all make a mistake. An important part of a successful group culture is being able to share candid feedback and learn from these mistakes (Coyle, p. 217). Pixar is a great example of a prosperous organization that embraces their many mistakes. President Ed Catmull admitted that all of their movies are bad at first, which he claims is actually crucial to their success. Essentially, groups and ideas need to be terrible at first so that they can churn through many new ideas to get to the best final version. Mistakes and failures should be embraced as a starting point for improvement. However, this is hard to do for many individuals and groups because most people are inclined to give up on an idea if it starts out truly horrible. It is crucial that groups can handle candid feedback because that is the only way to

make the necessary improvements and reach the best outcome. Along with that, leadership and team members must defend each other when a mistake is made, otherwise, all members will be too afraid to make mistakes and there will be no progress within the group.

When I joined the Beta Alpha Psi executive board, there were a lot of changes that I wanted to make. Since I am the Candidate Educator, I have authority over the candidate process and the ability to make changes. One of the biggest changes that I made was introducing a speed dating event to the candidate process. As previously discussed, the goal of the speed dating event was to enable better pairings of mentors and candidates. The first semester that we implemented it, the event did not go very smoothly. Since it was our first time holding an event of this type, there were a few unforeseen complications. We asked for honest feedback from the candidates and mentors who attended the event in an attempt to determine the best ways to make improvements. Rather than get discouraged and give up on the speed dating idea, we took the feedback we received and made some changes to the event for the next semester. The second time holding the speed dating event went much smoother than the first time because we were able to learn from our previous mistakes and make the necessary changes. Luckily, the executive board group culture allowed us to continue with the idea and work out the problems even though it did not go perfectly the first time. I believe that this will encourage other executive members to implement new ideas without fear of backlash if they do not work out perfectly at first. A quality team is one that can work through mistakes.

Conclusion

There are many different factors that contribute to successful group culture. These factors can be summarized into three specific skills: building safety, sharing vulnerability, and establishing purpose. Building safety focuses on belongingness cues that create safe connections

24

between members of a group. Personal, up-close connection is a key belongingness cue when it comes to creating connections between team members. These physical interactions and proximity help drive performance and cohesion. Sharing vulnerability is focused around an exchange of openness between team members that builds cooperation and trust. Team members asking questions and sharing their vulnerabilities allows the individual members to efficiently allocate their strengths so that the team becomes more than the sum of its individual parts. A successful group must link the present to a meaningful future to establish purpose. This can be done by utilizing catchphrase heuristics and meaningful mission statements.

Beta Alpha Psi is an extremely successful organization that has upheld a prestigious reputation for 100 years. Although the executive board has successfully handled the operations of this organization, its culture is far from perfect. I do believe that Beta Alpha Psi is currently on a good path with a very capable executive board, but there is always room for improvement.

Bibliography

Coyle, D. (2018). *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups.* New York: Bantam Books.