

Capstone Project

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Abstract

The idea of implementing a recycling project in Armenia is noble yet difficult. An Armenian based organization tried to convince its subordinates to start recycling, because its supportive of the green lifestyle and tries to benefit the environment however it can. This research paper is a participant observation project. It concentrated on a recycling campaign which was implemented in an anonymous organization. This research paper tries to analyze and answer the possibility of persuading/convincing the subordinates of an organization to start recycling willingly. Using Edgar Schein's Organizational Culture Model it was possible to identify the reasons for the organization's superiors to try and implement a recycling project. Moreover, using the systems theory which was described and developed by various authors, the organizations hierarchical structure as well as the internal system of the organization was analyzed. This was helpful when answering the research project question and the methodology which was implemented in developing it. Several means of persuasive communication tactics were used during the recycling campaign implementation. The organization's internal communications unit was responsible for creating internal emails containing hidden messages as well as other means of persuading the organizations subordinates to start recycling. A helping organization called Eco Waste contributed to the project by supplying the recycling bins and conducting a seminar which was helpful in convincing the subordinates about the benefits of the project. In the end, the results were satisfactory as the internal communications unit had managed to convince the staff to start recycling.

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Introduction

Participant Narrative

Organizational communication, when done right, can be used to achieve numerous feats. An organization which possesses effective methods of internal communication and manages to handle it well will inherently have more employee engagement, as well as a number of other benefits. By definition, Internal Communication is the practice of sharing information within an organization for business purposes. I had experience in such field, as for my capstone project, I conducted a participant observation at an organization, the name of which, due to privacy and security issues, I cannot include as well as any names of the subordinates or the superiors will not be included in my capstone paper. A fictitious name will be assigned to this organization - "Advanced Inc." so that the reader can understand that I am referring to the organization where I passed my internship starting from November of 2018 till April of 2019. During which I conducted the participant observation. My research project was connected to one of the projects which the Internal Communication unit decided to implement. A recycling project: the superiors of the organization, who are supportive of the green lifestyle decided, through persuasive communication, convince the staff of the organization to start recycling. This paper is about observing the recycling project's progress throughout time, the motivations that the superiors of the organization had when they decided to implement this project, and analysis of the results that came from this project, analyzing the success or failure that resulted from the organization's efforts. Since this research project included me as a variable in it, I will be separating my paper into two different styles of writing. Participant Narrative, where I will use a first-person narrative style of writing and Researcher narrative, where I can just focus on the results of the research and

the progress of the project. The two styles will be mentioned in the heading of the section, respectively.

My relationship with “Advanced Inc.” was through the Internal Communications unit, where I passed my internship. I decided to make my capstone project an internship one, and as previously mentioned it is mainly concentrated on the recycling project. The project coordinating team, was the Internal Communications unit along with the HR department’s head, the superior. The Internal Communications unit is usually responsible for handling out inside information in an organization, and the information flows for the organization staff/subordinates and the various departments of the organization. The information is related solely to the organization. The Internal Communications unit is also responsible for handling communication channels which contain a flow of information from the superiors to the subordinates. In large organizational structures, communication channels are critical as miscommunication in-between the superiors, and the subordinates may cause unwanted issues for the organization.

Another primary function of internal communications is caring about the subordinates, otherwise called the coworkers, the staff of the organization. Effective information channeling can bring much good to the staff. The superiors of Advanced Inc. were very supportive about giving their subordinates many benefits for working in their company. This entailed that the internal communications unit was responsible for communicating and even continually reminding its staff that they have numerous benefits available at their disposal. Such benefits could have been: health insurance, various subscriptions to gyms and spas with lower prices than for the average consumers. The mindset which was present in other coworkers and which was also passed on to me was that the members of internal communication should think about caring for the staff. I repeat

the same expression over and over, for it is crucial in order to understand our motivations and principles of work when we were representing the information channel of the organization.

Since the superiors of the organization were so inclined to make the environment and the mindset of the subordinates ecofriendly, one of the superiors came upon an idea of implementing a recycling project, which is a unique project to tackle for Armenians, as the idea is almost completely absent from the societies mind. The idea came from one of the superiors specifically, who had active participation and involvement in the workflow of the internal communications unit. Other subordinates, including me, quickly caught up to the idea and very soon decided to make it a reality. Throughout the scope of that project, the Internal Communications unit had to implement recycling bins throughout the whole organization. More specifically, the internal communications unit aimed at, through persuasive communication, convince the subordinates that recycling is good for the environment, that it is a crucial step towards a greener future and that everyone should contribute however they can to recycling. Since the idea came from the superior of the internal communication team, it was primarily their vision and aspiration which would help lead the path for the rest of the team. Once again, this project was quite unique for Armenia's standards, as most of the country have never even heard about recycling and its benefits on the environment.

The organizational culture which was developed for years in Advanced Inc. was very important to take into consideration when trying to implement the recycling project. Advanced Inc. always paid close attention to creating a very friendly and positive organizational culture. The HR department, one of the departments in that company which is closely following how well do subordinates follow the cultural norms that have been set over the years. Or how well did the newcomers adapt to those cultural norms. Internal Communications unit being an integral part of the HR department was the right unit to persuade the subordinates to follow the green lifestyle.

Literature Review

A very helpful source which was helpful in deciphering the organizational culture of Advanced Inc. and was essential in order to understand the values of the subordinates who were supposed to learn about recycling, was Edgar Schein's principles and theories regarding the organizational culture. In an article written by Schein "What is Culture?" the author writes about methods of trying to analyze an organization from within, in order to understand what are the cultural norms and the values of the organization. Schein points out a couple of methods for achieving this, the first of which is the Survey Research Approach. This first method is primarily based on survey and other types of statistical findings. The second one, Analytical Descriptive Approach, is an approach that requires the researcher to break down culture into analytical components, several parts. Such components to be analyzed are rituals, rites of passage, norms, founder's values, stories, which comprise the whole culture of any given organization according to the author. The final method is Ethnographic approach. This approach requires the researchers to integrate themselves into the organization. This is done to get a feeling about the working environment, the spirit of the team, the relationship of the superiors towards the subordinates and all of the rituals that take place in that organization. This research project was conducted in a similar manner, which allowed the researcher to analyze the working environment as well as to experience first hand the organizational culture and the subordinates involvement in that developed culture.

Schein also gives a hefty definition of the culture of the organization. "A pattern of shared basic assumptions: invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. That has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore is to be taught to new members of the group as the correct way to

perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (E. Schein, 1991). The definition managed to describe all of the important aspects that comprise the organization’s culture. Lastly, one of the most important and significant aspects of this piece is the description and explanation of the Levels of Organizational Culture. Schein creates the model structuring the three levels that make up the organizational culture. At the very top are the Artifacts, which the author describes being visible organizational structures and processes. The second level, are the Values which are the strategies, goals, and philosophies which the organization has. These are the drives of the subordinates, the reason for their hard work. At the very bottom, there are the Underlying Assumptions. Which are unconscious, taken for granted beliefs or habits of perception, thought and feelings. According to the author, these assumptions are making up the values of superiors who create the value sets of the company. The assumptions are at the base of value creation, as they are what shape the values which will be implemented for a company.

Many of the key points in this source were very helpful in the planning and implementation stages of our project. By understanding the key concepts of this source, we were able to pinpoint our future strategies.

Sources which helped understand the hierarchical structure of our organization were Chih-Hui Lai’s and Sapphire Lin’s Systems theory, and Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s book on General Systems theory. These sources were crucial for understanding the hierarchical structures, in order to explain the value integrations in Advanced Inc, how and why those values were so persuasively being communicated to the subordinates by their superiors. Also, these sources would help explain some of the intricacies of the recycling project.

Every organization operates and lives differently. The hierarchical structures and even the means of operation that the organization’s superiors undergo. The first key concept of the General

System Theory book is that an organization has to be perceived as a living and breathing organism. The systems approach described, also sets out a goal for itself to understand how can it achieve to describe and invent several means of accomplishing several goals/ tasks in any organization. It is described that organizations have three main parts. An organization has Inputs; these are some assets that get inputted into an organization: workers, products, etc. After receiving the Inputs, organization Processes start to take place inside the organization, which is the work that the staff/ subordinates execute after which come the Outputs. Outputs are the results which the subordinates produce by working in the organization. Hopefully, subordinates can deliver whatever service or good that they have to, to the public or other companies, and bring benefit to their organization. In this manner, the organization can strive and stay active. These types of systems are considered to be Open Systems. As inputs and outputs are continually in flow, in order to keep the system, the organization functioning, the naming of those types of systems remained open. Holism and Interdependence are also crucial concepts to understand when viewing the structure of an organization. Holism suggests that an organization is a whole comprised of many different departments or the teams that are operating inside of it. While the concept of Interdependence suggests that an organization being a whole is interconnected. Even the subparts which divides various teams and department in the organization are interconnected in a way that one department can have a weak or strong influence on the other, directly or indirectly.

Each organization has goals and feedback systems. An interesting keynote about the goals of an organization is that, by the author's description, there is no one simple way to reach a goal. When aiming for a goal, it has to be taken in for a consideration that not all means of achieving a goal are equally effective. Feedback systems are important in any organizational structure, as positive and negative methods of giving feedback can influence, motivate or demotivate

subordinates. Effective feedback giving systems have to be in check. It would be a waste not to mention that Advanced Inc. had a very feedback forward approach towards all of its subordinates. Everyone was encouraged, and felt obliged even, to give feedback to the coworkers that they interacted with. Lastly, Entropy is another idea which is important to comprehend for an organizational structural understanding. Entropy brings the idea that each organization, as a living organism, will deteriorate in time, if not maintained properly. By this, the author explains that maintaining an organization, and keeping it in tact is crucial for that reason. Maintenance can be a simple thing as, keeping the building in which, the organization operates in, clean. Or meeting the subordinates' demands, in order to keep them happy.

Research Questions and Methodology

Participant Narrative

As already mentioned, in Advanced Inc. I was undergoing an internship. I have worked there since the beginning of November till mid-April. The project which the Internal Communications unit decided to implement took place since the beginning of February and is in progress till this day. For my research purposes, I have picked a specific time frame during which the project was done, and my analysis was based on that specific time frame.

The project which I decided to follow and monitor closely, was the recycling implementation. The superiors of the HR unit have decided to convince their staff about the benefits of recycling so that the subordinates will start to recycle themselves.

The research question which was to be answered by me, was shaped from that project and is the following: Can an organization through effective means of communication convince its staff

to start recycling? That is the question I have tried to answer, although that is the simplest form that the question takes. There are a couple of intricacies and details that have to be explained and discussed in order to truly understand the research question and the reasons for me to tackle it.

When writing about the organization, my main focus was on one of the superiors from the HR department of Advanced Inc. Being the founder of the Internal Communications unit in that organization, that person wanted to implement this project through the means of the Internal Communications unit. This is important to mention, for it means that no other units or departments were able to monitor or supervise the project, and the responsibility of successful implementation rested upon the Internal Communications unit. Since the idea spurred from this superior who spent ten years working at Advances Inc. and is a representative of the organization and holds, lives, teaches the values of the organization, it was apparent that my main focus would be her, as the main source from which this new idea of a project spurred.

Many different projects were being implemented and were in development during the time of my internship at Advanced Inc. Still, I decided to concentrate and base my research on the recycling project as this was a very unique project to try and implement. I considered that if this project gets successfully implemented in the organization, and if the subordinates integrate this idea into their culture, then any other task would be considered easily accomplishable. This might seem weird to some, but considering that in Armenia the idea of recycling is completely absent and that the majority of the country never even heard of it, it does not seem such an easy task to pull off. Lastly, when implementing the project, the Internal Communications unit decided to concentrate only at a relatively small group of subordinates. Advanced Inc. has hundreds of workers under its supervision, trying to target everyone at the same time would be an impossible task to pull off. That is why our unit concentrated on three departments at first, which had roughly

a hundred subordinates. After successful implementation of recycling for three departments, our unit would try to implement recycling bins throughout the whole organization.

The whole project had started because of a superior from the HR department of Advanced Inc. At first the superior had managed to convince the subordinates, including me, who were going to be implementing this project about the good of recycling. At this point, it is also important to mention that, once again because of privacy issues, I am not going to be including actual names of the subordinates in this research paper. While interviewing the subordinates who were going to be implementing the project one of them, Jenna had mentioned that she had never done recycling herself because she did not get the chance to do it. None of the schools nor the universities had recycling bins, and she did not know about the benefits of the recycling before. However, the other subordinate, Michael told that he was much more familiar with the idea of recycling before. Michael told that since he was a teenager, he along with his friends would try and separate some of the trash that was gathered in their yard. He told me that their yard was never properly cleaned or taken care of and he and his friends would have to be the ones to clean it up. They also tried to separate the leftover food that was thrown away for stray cats or dogs, even homeless people. They would clean up all of their yard from trash and sort it out to some degree. Surely their work is remarkable, but it wasn't recycling per say. Still, many years ago Yerevan did not have any companies or smaller organizations which would gather the recyclable trash and recycle it. Lastly, I myself was not aware of the benefits that come from recycling, moreover I never even considered trying to implement a recycling campaign myself. Yet, our superior had managed to convince us that this project has to be done for the greater good of the environment and to convince people that they also have to contribute to recycling.

When applying Edgar Schein's model of different levels of organizational culture to this instance, we can see that the superior who had Underlying Assumption about recycling and its benefits, tried to communicate that information and apply the concept of it to the value set of the whole organization, by taking small steps. Similarly, in my experience with Advanced Inc. the superior of the HR department, told me in an interview that they always wanted to implement a recycling campaign. They told that they already implemented some systems of helping the environment in the name of the organization. This means that even before the implementation of the recycling project, the superiors already had an underlying assumptions that being environmentally friendly is a good sign. These underlying assumptions formed strong opinions in them over time, which caused them to act in support of the environment however they can. Lastly the superiors decided to instill this idea of being environmentally friendly onto the subordinates. According to Edgar Schein, the Underlying Assumptions are the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs that people have, which in terms form the values under which they operate. As already mentioned, the superior has decided to expand their own values into the culture of the organization. According to Schein, organizational values include philosophies which the organization's subordinates follow. In my experience with Advanced Inc. I noticed that the HR department pays close attention to the formation of the organizational culture. Every corporate event, every letter and every project implemented, had a hidden message. These messages, usually implied how much the organization and its superiors care about the wellbeing of the staff. Or how important it is to follow the organizational culture rules, such as being nice, friendly and always willing to help one another. And in the instance of the recycling project, how important it is to support the green lifestyle and help out the environment however we can.

When interviewing the superior, they mentioned that they mainly consider recycling good, because it would free up the planet from all of the leftover plastic. Moreover, to the question “Have you considered implementing a recycling campaign before?” they answered that their organization always supported the “green style,” meaning that they were always trying to help out the environment. Advanced Inc. had previously and till this day, helped cleaning out the parks in our city and other regions. Before they were shredding their papers and giving it away for recycling. Lastly, in their offices, they have paper cups installed near the water dispensers, instead of plastic cups. This entails that the organization before deciding to implement this project had been trying to recycle and go eco-friendly before, but now they also wanted to ensure that their staff does the same. Edgar Schain’s Analytical Approach of analyzing organizations reveals that in Advanced Inc. the superiors values to some extent have already been applied to their work. The superiors’ values about the benefits and good of the green lifestyle have made them recycle their organizations left over paper and have recycled paper cups instead of plastic. Thus, it became a norm for the organization to follow the recycling ideology, even before the recycling campaign was implemented. The idea of recycling by the beginning of the campaign was already embedded in the organizations culture.

When the group of subordinates who were going to implement the project believed in the idea of recycling, it was time to execute the idea. The first step was to find a company which was going to be supplying our organization with the recycling bins and which was going to be collecting the bins when they were filled up and handing them out to other organizations which were in the business of recycling plastic, glass or other recyclable materials. Our Internal Communications unit decided to contact an independent organization called “Eco Waste.” People operating in this small organization are continually helping out the city in whichever way they can,

by clearing out the trash from the parks and other locations, and by placing recycling bins in schools and other organizations. They are also trying to bring about the knowledge of recycling into the Armenian culture by spreading that knowledge wherever they can. A meeting was conducted with one of the founders of the Eco Waste, Tsovinar. During that meeting, our unit along with our unit superior had explained to them that we have a passion of bringing about this idea into our organization's culture even more and that we want to convince other subordinates of its benefits. We brainstormed how can we try to make this project a reality. We agreed to some terms and made sure that Eco Waste was a trustworthy enough organization that we can work with.

A couple of days after the meeting, our unit had settled on a design of the recycling bins. We wanted the design to be compatible with our office's kitchen interior, where we decided to put up the recycling bins. We also brainstormed that we can make the tops of the bins colored, each container for each of the recyclable materials would be colored differently, and would entail a color psychology. This way the workers would associate the colors with every item they were going to recycle, such as green for paper, blue for plastic, etc. While the top parts would be colored, we decided to make the bottom transparent, so that the bins would have a simple design and the subordinates would be able to see how much have they recycled. This latter would also give them a sense of progress. We wanted the transparent part to be made out of recycled glass, as we learned from one of our superiors when pitching them the design for the bins, the recycled glass would look good, and it would convey our message of recycling if we make the bins from recycled materials.

After the designs were sent to the Eco Waste team, they went ahead and looked for a manufacturer who was able to build those bins from the materials that we requested and by our design. As later turned out this was a bit challenging, as the idea of making a bin from recycled

glass had never occurred to anybody before in Armenia, thus none of the manufacturers had any idea how to make them. This meant that the Eco Waste team were supposed to contact any manufacturer they could locate until they were able to find anyone who would be able to make the bins as we requested. This put a bit of a strain on them, and they got over their initial promised time of delivering the bins. The bins came in late a little over two weeks. After their arrival, it was time to execute our plan of educating other subordinates about recycling. The Eco Waste team had developed a presentation for our coworkers. Since they had much more expertise and experience with waste management and recycling, they were the ones to make the presentation. Our team had reviewed the presentation before it was showcased. This was done in order to make sure that our team was pleased with the presentation.

Before I get into the detail of the project implementation process which took place, it is crucial to mention that for this part of the process the Organizational Systems theories provided with some insights in analyzing this project's implementation. When the education process was being planned for the three departments, there were not any different strategies for different departments. No demographic, psychographic or behavioral statistics have been considered. Instead, the subordinates were viewed as a whole, an interconnected unit. This was one strategy was developed in order to try and incorporate this new idea, the value set into their culture. The implementation process went by smoothly. The seminar seemed effective, well-structured and organized. During the presentation, the speaker talked about the benefits of the recycling, that people should not associate recycling with trash, as the recyclable materials can be used and recycled again up to ten times, since when they were created. Some statistics were shown about recent recycling achievements around the world, also predictions of what would be if people start recycling today. Following the seminar, during a period of once or twice a week, our Internal

Communications unit would send internal E-mails, reminding our coworkers once again about the benefits of the recycling and why should they start doing it. Also, the next day after the seminar the recycling bins were placed, and the monitoring process began for us.

During the first couple of weeks, some of the subordinates actively and excitedly were recycling their plastic bottles and left-over papers. While others were throwing those same items into the regular trash bin as they were before. Some of the subordinates were a bit lacking in excitement and desire to recycle properly. During that monitoring process, Jenna got really upset when she saw that people are still not up to the task of recycling. Thus, we decided to give direct feedbacks and reminders to subordinates that they should start recycling and that the bins are there for a reason. The reminders were done in the form of both face to face conversations and internal emails. While the process was a bit frustrating to watch for some of my colleagues, we predicted before that it would take a couple of months for our coworkers to fully adapt to this new idea. In fact, when interviewing some of the subordinates, everyone shared that in their opinion it would have taken at least two months before everyone would start to properly recycle. Their predictions were in fact correct. It took a little over two months before the vast majority of the subordinates started recycling. All of the recyclable materials were in their right bins; the regular trash bin was half empty all the time because of the newly installed bins. Almost everyone had caught to this new idea and managed to successfully integrate it into their culture. It was now time for the Internal Communication unit, to expand this project by implementing it for their whole staff.

Research Findings and Analysis

Researcher Narrative

When brainstorming this project and during the implementation project, the expectations were that it would be difficult. The expectations were that it would take the staff at least two to three months before they start to recycle properly. At the beginning, after the recycling bins implementation and after the seminar took place, a small part of the staff started to properly cooperate and recycle almost right away. This happened because, that part of the staff was the most engaged and active part of the organization's culture. In another words, those staff members are true believers in their organizational ideologies and the values that it supports. Which, for this project meant that as soon as the organization decided to implement the bins and start recycling, that supportive part of the staff immediately followed the ideologies and started recycling as they believed that its beneficial. The second part of the staff, which caught on to the idea of recycling several weeks later after the bins implementation, was slower primarily because of their cynicism regarding the benefits of recycling. Despite the conducted seminar, some subordinates held the viewpoint that their recycling efforts will not make a considerable change for the environment, thus were less enthusiastic about recycling. This resulted in some recycling bins to be filled up with items designated for other bins and recycled items being thrown put into regular trash cans. However, soon enough after a month of recycling the Internal Communications unit has made an email, which contained statistical information about how much recycled material the organization produced and how much benefit can it produce to the environment. This was done by the help of the Eco Waste team, as they had experience in gathering similar information before. The Internal Communications unit made the email presentable and communicated that to all three departments who were supposed to recycle. This email soon served its purpose as more and more subordinates

started to recycle. Their viewpoint was changed towards recycling when they understood their role and the impact that they can make by recycling. Lastly, some of the subordinates were latecomers to this idea of recycling, and only started to recycle well into the second month of the project. Some of the subordinates, who were not strong bearers of the organization's values and culture, didn't pay much attention to the recycling bins. The majority of those subordinates were usually uninfluenced towards activities promoted by the organization. Still, as time went by and the recycling bins became more and more intrinsic to the organization, these subordinates also started to recycle. Seeing that the idea of recycling is already implemented into the organization and that almost everyone follows the rules, these latecomer subordinates, almost as an act of conformity, started to recycle as well. Hence, by the end of the study and analysis period of this project, not everyone, but the majority of the subordinates recycled properly. The internal communications department had managed through several means of persuasive communication convince the staff that recycling is good and that everyone should contribute however they can.

Conclusive Thoughts

The expectations that I had for this project were generally met. Having worked in the organization, I was aware that it had a strong built-in culture. The HR department, during my research conducting process, kept a close eye on the behavior of the subordinates and always through various means, tried to keep the strong sense of its culture amongst all of the subordinates. Knowing all of this, I was sure that the recycling project would be a success. Still, I knew that our unit would face challenges as this type of a project was never implemented in Armenia. Even if it was, it surely wasn't successful. My expectations were met, as eventually, the staff started to

recycle properly. However, further development and research is required for this project as the Internal Communications unit wanted to expand from implementing bins for just three departments, to implementing it throughout the whole head organization and its branches. This will pose further variables and difficulties for the project implementation, and the results are unexpected in this point and time.

PowerPoint Slides Google Drive Link

I will post the slides separately under Part 2 in Turnitin. If some of the slides appear empty or any other difficulties arise, please download the slides and view them in PowerPoint.

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