Chapter 15 - Organizational culture

Answers to end of chapter questions

1. What is the relationship between organization culture and other key organizational concepts: structure, leadership, change, innovation?

It affects all of these aspects of organizational life. It determines the way in which people think about these factors and how things are done.

2. ‘If organizational change is to be real change, it has to happen at the level of culture.’ Discuss.

In order for organizational change to be successfully implemented it needs to be understood by all those involved. For real change, the ways of thinking of individuals in the organization need to change, and this can only be achieved by a change in culture.

3. How does an awareness of other industrial cultures enrich our understanding of the culture concept?

An awareness of other industrial cultures enables a more informed assessment of our own culture and its effect on organizational life.

4. How are organization cultures rooted in the symbolic aspects of everyday life?

Culture is also socially constructed; it reflects meanings that are constituted in interaction and that form commonly accepted ‘definitions of the situation’. A symbol ‘stands for’ something more than itself. The symbol can be many things—a sign, an event, an object, even a person—but the essential point is that a symbol is invested with meaning by us, and expresses forms of understanding derived from our past collective experiences. The sociological view of culture is that organizations exist in the minds of their members. How members define reality is just as important for outcomes as concrete techniques and procedures.

5. Why is it important to try to classify organization cultures, and what are the limits of classification?

Classifications like Handy’s can be useful in analysing real-life organizations; they show us what to look for and highlight key features of the culture. This is especially true if we can find organizations which fit very closely the role, task, and power culture types. What is more likely is that cultures will be a complex mix of types, although even then it may still be possible to see in the organizational culture some of the key dimensions of the classification. Nevertheless, attempts to classify organizational
cultures have their limitations, and once a category system is imposed the diversity of types is constrained. For example, Handy’s different cultural types seem to add very little to the account that was provided by *structure*.

6. **Is organization culture just another term for corporate image?**

The culture of an organization shapes its image both for its internal and external customers.

7. **How do you reconcile the view of culture as a unifying force in organizations with the idea of organizational sub-cultures and counter-cultures?**

An organizational culture should be allowed to be interpreted and understood in multiple ways. This would be in line with the diverse and pluralist nature of today’s workplace. The idea of organizational culture as a unifying force in organizations still holds true but there needs to be room for interpretation.