Practicing Anthropology in Corporate America: Consulting on Organizational Culture

Ann T. Jordan, ed.

National Association for the Practice of Anthropology
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To the memory of Frank Dubinskas, whose research and writing included a decade of work on the interface of technology, organizations, and culture.
Introduction

For business anthropologists, the significance of the organizational culture concept in management consulting cannot be underestimated. The term has received so much popular press that it is known to business people at all levels throughout the country. The term in essence represents an anthropological approach to managing organizations and an area of analysis in which anthropologists are the experts. Thus the field is a natural for practitioners, and management consulting has opened up as one of the major growth fields for anthropologists in the 1990s. This bulletin provides a broad view of current research and consulting on organizational culture. It brings together anthropologists working in consulting and in departments of management, marketing, organizational behavior, family medicine, and anthropology to provide a varied perspective. On one level this bulletin is a how-to book for anthropologists interested in developing a consulting business on organizational culture. It includes tips on getting into consulting, advice on how to communicate with managers, and detailed examples of consulting work. It should be read as a companion to Giovannini and Rosansky's 1990 NAPA bulletin on management consulting, as that volume provides additional useful information not repeated here. On another level, this bulletin addresses conceptual questions of interest to all anthropologists. It integrates the conceptual basis of anthropology with the conceptual basis of management studies and discusses ways in which practice can influence theory in anthropology.

The bulletin is divided into two sections. The first section consists of two articles that give an overview of the conceptual framework of organizational culture. They discuss the relation between theory and practice and are designed to explain the relevant paradigms for consulting work. The second section of the bulletin is composed of a series of empirical studies. In each case the author defines organizational culture in the way she or he finds most utilitarian. Each includes a definition of organizational culture and an empirical example of its use. The cases are purposely diverse to provide the reader with a number of options in applying organizational culture in consulting.

If the reader is a new consultant, the chapters in this bulletin are of use in two ways. First, they provide examples of how to go about consulting on organizational culture. Second, they provide you with content to use in developing your own specialty. For example, you may want to adapt one of the definitions of organizational culture for your own use, or you may want to cite Kanu Kogod's statistics on diversity or Jill Kleinberg's descriptions of
the difference between Japanese and American work sketch maps to demonstrate your own expertise to managers. Third, all the chapters, especially Nancy and Robert Morey's, give good insight into the worldview of managers, so that you can develop the ability to communicate your expertise effectively.

References Cited

Giovannini, Maureen J., and Lynne M. H. Rosansky
Introducing the Concept

Organizational Culture: The Anthropological Approach

Ann T. Jordan

This chapter provides an overview of anthropology and organizational culture consulting. It discusses practical issues for consultants such as how to define organizational culture, what method and theory in anthropology to use in doing consulting, and what literature is available in anthropology. It also discusses theoretical and ethical issues that this work raises for all anthropologists, such as whether organizational culture is an appropriate use of the anthropological concept of culture and whether this work is ethical for anthropologists to perform. These are issues typical of the new era in anthropology in which models of culture and ethical guidelines are changing. Their solutions demonstrate contributions practice can make to traditional anthropology.

The Anthropological Literature

The term organizational culture has become popular in both anthropology and management over the last ten years. On the surface it appeared that the early clamor among business analysts regarding culture in organizations was largely a result of the American response to Japanese business success. In 1981, Ouchi, as well as Pascale and Athos, published books addressing the role of culture in Japanese business success. The following year Deal and Kennedy (1982), as well as Peters and Waterman (1982), published books bringing home to the United States the notion that successful businesses must be concerned with their "cultures."

While anthropologists had been working in business settings for decades and while some work had already appeared in the fledgling field termed "organizational culture" (for example, Baker 1980; Hofstead 1980; Pettigrew 1979), it was the four aforementioned best-sellers that contributed the most toward publicizing and popularizing the culture concept and thus attracted the interest of the business community.

After this initial period of favor in the popular press as the term corporate culture, the term organizational culture has settled into consulting and academia to describe one more tool to use in studying organizations. In management consulting from the business-training perspective, it is seen as additive, one more piece of the organization. Management interest in anthropology focuses on our methodology as reflected in the several articles