

Cultural Analysis of UBHT

Ideas For Executive Group Workshop June 3 1992

There are three key issues to get across in this brief session:

1. The nature of change and my understanding of first order, second order change and the implications that has for cultural change. In my terms cultural change has only taken place when there is a change of the organisation (at the core) rather than changes to the organisation.
2. Insight into some of the cultural understanding I have acquired, to explore this with you as a group and gain feedback about my interpretation of your perceptions.
3. To gain some insight and feedback from the group about the nature of my engagement with the organisation. What do you think I have been doing? Has it (however defined) been useful, problematic.....etc if so how? What is the role of an 'outsider' and how can cultural diagnosis be used?

Introduction

Rather than writing a full paper for the group I have decided to present some skeleton ideas. This is a conscious decision and is based upon my experience and understanding of the culture. Firstly the organisation at Executive Director level is primarily an oral culture - consequently to produce great reams of written material at this stage is counter cultural. The counter cultural nature of that material would give it greater meaning and 'embeddedness' than I might want to convey. At UBHT if is written down it is either very important or ignored.

Secondly I am conscious that this session is in part counter cultural and therefore a high risk enterprise. To discuss a culture with a group of its 'cultural transmitters' is always very difficult for an 'outsider'. Thus the activity has to be understood in the context of its presentation. Social science research of the kind that I undertake cannot be 'objective' in the literal sense. Hence the best that I can hope for is to search for meaning and interpretation of the culture, using your words and views and interpreting them in a way that is subjective but rigorous in its analysis. Part of that rigour comes from constantly checking and cross checking, with different members of the group and significant others, what meanings rites, rituals and terms have in the organisation. Even so, I am well aware that to present anything to the group as a collective is a hostage to fortune as the 'organisational mirror' of a cultural researcher throws up many strange and difficult things - the very things that are taken for granted every day, or the things that everyone knows about, but would never dream of discussing openly. This type of session can therefore raise taboo subjects that provoke anxiety and hostility amongst the group. Invariably these feelings are projected onto the 'outsider' (me!) as a defence mechanism to enable the group to cope. If this is the case, please think of the issues that I am raising now; this will enable any discussion to be productive and move the group and organisation forward in its understanding.

The purpose of cultural analysis is not to evaluate, but to describe and interpret situations and actions according to the meanings they have for the members of the organisation.