

ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY CORPORATE CULTURE IN UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to a phenomenon of a corporate culture as an element of University management. The authors consider theoretically-methodological approaches in studying University corporate culture. They consider it in statics, from the point of view of the structural approach, and in dynamics, from the point of view of process approach., on the way of adaptation to the changes happening in macro- and micro-environments. Considering all the process of corporate culture formation, the authors highlight different subjects taking part in it, and estimate their influence on artifact, values, basic images formation and organizational structure inside university.

Along with theoretical consideration of the phenomenon, the authors also determine characteristic features of corporate culture at the example of the Ural Federal University which was founded in 2011 by the merger of two universities. The conclusions in the paper are supported by quality and quantity empirical research, conducted by the authors in 2010-2015. The authors conclude that University corporate management is a separate business process, realisation of which will enable to structure it on a system basis. They offer practical steps for University management.

Key words: corporate management, university management, organization values, levels of corporate management

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Introduction

In many cases the notions of organizational culture and corporate culture can be used interchangeably. If this was the case, however, there would not be two separate words,

organization and corporation, in the colloquial and academic language. Therefore, we shall distinguish these concepts since we believe that corporate culture is a part of organizational culture. In other words, not all organizations are corporations while any corporation is always an organization (Pedraza-Alvarez, Obispo-Salazar, Vasquez-Gonzalez, 2015).

Organizational culture is characteristic of all organizations and is created in two ways: top-down, by orders of the top management, and bottom-up, by the staff themselves. Organizational cultures of non-corporate organizations can be identical since they apply standard administrative documents, similar forms and methods of work.

A corporate organization, however, develops its own corporate culture, which is meant to distinguish it from others. Therefore, the core part of corporate culture is formed by the company management according to specific targets. Corporate culture is a part of organizational culture which has its own peculiar characteristics and which is meant to enhance the corporation's competitiveness in the modern world.

1 Research Methodology

Corporate culture is defined as a complex of social values, concepts, beliefs, behavioural norms and their manifestations created inside the organization throughout its history and shared by most of its staff (Dempsey, 2015).

Along with the theoretical analysis of this concept, it is important to point out some characteristic features of corporate culture by dwelling on the case of the Ural Federal University. It was created in 2011 as a merger of two famous Russian universities, the Ural State Technical University and the Ural State University, both located in Yekaterinburg, Urals. Each of these universities had its own corporate culture, which evolved throughout their ninety-year history. Thus, after the merger, the university management faced a challenging task of creating corporate culture of this newly born organization (Zaitseva, Zapariy, Korobeinikova, Busygina, 2014).

There are three levels of structures which affect the formation of the university's corporate culture: the university as a whole, its institutes, and its departments.

People are carriers of corporate culture while corporate culture as such operates on two levels: administrative and individual (that is, professors, administration and students) (Jun, Rowley, 2014).

People's goals tend to become core values even though these goals do not always coincide with the management's objectives. What the management are trying to achieve is to

promote the brand and to sell it at the highest possible price, both in the literal and metaphorical sense, while what the university staff normally want is comfortable life, self-realization and decent salaries (Mitrovic, Grubic-Nesic, Milisavljevic, 2014).

The most important task when managing the university is to measure the corporate culture. We should distinguish between the two key types of corporate culture: corporate culture for the management and corporate culture for workers. Sometimes these two types coincide: for example, for the university management, administration and the staff it is equally important that the university should make significant achievements on the national and international educational scene, which includes winning scholarships and governmental grants; improving performance on the international rankings; obtaining prizes and awards; providing more opportunities for career development, and so on.

For top managers, however, the progress primarily means significant financial and career-related effects while for the staff it is mostly about achieving a favourable psychological balance, although in the long run the university's success may also contribute to the material well-being of its staff.

2 Research Results and Discussion

The prestige of working in the university may serve as an indicator of how efficient its corporate culture is. Prestige is usually driven by meeting such important preferences as long vacations, flexible working hours and pleasant working environment.

The university also comprises permanent educational and scientific groups, including mature and experienced professionals along with beginner researchers. If the staff turnover is not too high, it means that the university is developing and meeting its targets set by the public and by the state.

Analysis of the focus group data demonstrates that the following scheme for development of the corporate culture model is optimal.

First of all, it is necessary to define the key objectives and targets of the university corporate culture. The focus group participants demonstrated willingness to delegate this function to the management or to an initiative group. The majority understand, however, that such strategy might lead to a failure: if a certain policy is developed by the management and realized through top-down orders, their decisions might not resonate with the workers and, therefore, there will be no tangible changes in the university life and the 'mission' will remain on paper.

Thus, when defining or revising the mission, it is crucial to conduct an extensive study of opinions and aspirations not only of the academic staff but also of other university workers: it is essential to take into account not only the potential of the administration and the academic staff but also that of the student community.

This study is particularly important for such large-scale and complex structures as federal universities. Focus group participants pointed out the following measures to be taken: if the university management decide that they would like to engage the potential of the staff to create and develop the corporate culture, it will be necessary to announce that the university intends to conduct self-evaluation and revise its key objectives, targets and mission. This will serve as an important "start signal" to begin collective work on the development of the university.

This should be combined with surveying what the main subjects of the university corporation think about its current state, its main objectives, targets and areas of development. The optimal solution would be to conduct a full-fledged sociological survey followed by monitoring conducted regularly and on a continuous basis in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the situation. Additionally, such survey can reveal some internal problems of the university, which is a welcome development since it will contribute to their faster solution (Galpin, Whittington, Bell, 2015).

The survey results should be comprehensively discussed and compared with the management's ideas about the university's mission at a series of meetings. These meetings can involve different members of the university staff and be conducted in different formats or combine several of them: brainstorming sessions, role playing and simulation games, case studies, and SWOT analysis. Such meetings allow their participants to accumulate a critical amount of ideas which can lay the basis for the university mission or be used to improve the fundamental principles of the corporate culture.

The survey will have a positive impact on the organization because it, among other things, will give the most active members hope for major improvements and allow them to get involved into the process of university development. Furthermore, this survey will help the management identify those workers who are likely to become the driving force for further progress. It will also show how strongly the staff resists changes and will bring to light the internal problems to be dealt with. The only counter-productive step in this process is to stop at this stage, since this will destroy the expectations of the most motivated staff members and will strengthen sceptics' positions.

Another important step would be to evaluate the external environment in which the university's mission will be realized: that is, focus on the educational market and its trends and on the factors which can threaten the Ural Federal University or, on the contrary, enhance its efficiency. This work can be described as a marketing survey and it will be also aimed at identifying the university's competitors and potential partners.

The university's objectives, targets, and mission can be formulated and adjusted by analyzing the acquired information. As a rule, a mission is a brief description (ideally one page long) of three to five key principles. This text must be presented to the staff or at least the staff must be informed about the results of the work done. Ideally, the mission should be introduced to the university community together with the corporate culture principles and the project of the university's strategic development. Thus, the university community will be able to continue working collectively to enhance the university's efficiency and to form its corporate culture, which should be viable, dynamic and inspiring.

The university's corporate culture as seen by the academic staff implies a certain generalized image (the 'face' of UrFU), which determines the behaviour and lifestyle of university employees. This means that there should be a generalized code of conduct or uniform rules agreed upon and shared by all the staff members.

Since the Ural Federal University is a large, complex and heterogeneous organization, which comprises a great number of diverse structures, each with its own established practices, stereotypes and concepts, it is vital to develop some common values and rules of conduct, which would be accepted by everybody. These uniform rules will subsequently generate other forms such as traditions, logos, dress-codes and so on. At the moment, however, it is essential just to form the basis: the general code of internal rules applicable to all staff members.

According to the results of our research, management of the corporate culture of the merged university should become a separate project to build an organizational design which would allow to apply a systemic approach to structurization of the corporate culture. Management of corporate culture should be seen as a set of easily regulated parameters: this will create a structure enabling the organization to be flexible and to implement changes quickly and efficiently.

All the above-mentioned points demonstrate the significance of corporate culture for the development of the university and the subjects, the carriers of this culture. Understandably, corporate culture does not bring profit by itself although the habit of starting each working day feeling physically and mentally prepared is also a cultural characteristic.

Therefore, it is essential to establish the connection between the creation, development and diagnostics of corporate culture and other, less obvious areas of the staff's activity.

Creation and maintenance of the optimal corporate culture requires constant and consistent effort of all organization members: management, administration and the academic staff. It is not enough just to determine the key principles of the corporate culture in compliance with the mission, corporate values and targets. What is required is the permanent and tight control over how these principles are being implemented, how they are becoming a norm of life for all members of the university corporation.

Conclusion

These conclusions are supported by the results of the qualitative and quantitative empirical studies conducted by these authors from 2010 to 2015. People are carriers of corporate culture while the culture itself operates on the administrative and individual levels, that is, it involves not only the administration, but also professors and students. Corporate culture can be studied by applying a static (or structural) approach or a dynamic approach, that is, studying the process of the company's adaptation to the changes in its macro- and micro-environment.

Considering the whole process of corporate culture development, we can focus on the role of specific subjects and evaluate their impact on the formation of artifacts, values, key concepts and organization structure within the framework of the university's corporate culture. We hope that the above-described measures to create and modernize it will contribute to the university's further progress.

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