

Exam PSY2406
– Organizational Psychology –
Autumn 2011

Written school exam, Wednesday 9th November, 09:00 hrs. (3 hours).

Examination results will be announced on 30th November.

Open book exam: students are allowed to use the textbook, notes, other course material and a dictionary. Computers and mobile phones are not allowed.

Read the following case carefully and answer all questions at the end of the case.

“Googlers” share a culture of choice

The Google corporation could, on several criteria, be described as one of the most successful businesses in the world in the early years in the 21st century. Formed by two Stanford University students, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, in 1998, the company, which is best known as an internet search facility, has also broadened its activities into other areas including e-mail, social networking services and mobile phone operating systems.

Google has certainly grown rapidly in the short years since its foundation. In 2009, it employed just under 20000 workers. However, Its success lies not just in its rapid expansion. For the word Google has itself no entered the everyday language of millions of people across the world. A survey conducted by BrandZ in 2008 found that Google was the most powerful brand worldwide, while a Forbes magazine article from 2007 identified Google as the most desirable place to work in the USA.

To what extent is Google’s success associated with the development of a distinctive organizational culture – the topic we go on to address in this chapter? Google’s own

promotional material undoubtedly lays stress on the distinctiveness and importance of its culture. The ‘corporate information’ section of its website stresses a ‘small-company feel’ within this large organization. To take one example, Google’s headquarters offers the opportunity for open discussions over lunch as everyone is encouraged to eat in the same office café. Google’s depiction of its own culture also identifies some striking artefacts (=observable features of culture) that could be found in a typical Google work space.

Organizational culture comprises different levels; namely the outer layer of observable culture (or “the ways things are done around here”), together with the deeper level of shared values and common assumptions. Google’s website invites visitors to take a virtual tour of its headquarters in Mountain View, California. The tour shows, amongst other things, a piano, rubber exercise balls, bicycles, a gymnasium with weights, a massage room, football and pool tables. Roller hockey is played in the car park and both the café and assorted snack-rooms serve a range of ‘healthy options’. So, all-in-all, there is a distinctive, and in many respects unusual, set of observable artefacts making up the outer layer of Google’s organizational culture.

We will also see, however, how the outer level of a company’s culture can be an expression of more deeply-held values. Google has developed a strongly distinctive set of values and these values and core-assumptions are reflected in its surface ways of working. Indeed, it is possible to claim that a typical Google workspace is designed to foster and reinforce desired corporate values. Google’s website highlights the company’s commitment to innovation, which in turn can only happen if everyone is comfortable sharing ideas and opinions. Office and indeed café layout can be pivotal to the reality of such sharing. Google’s reputation as a good employer, bolstered by its emphasis on fun and good health, can also

contribute to employees' effectiveness.

The depiction of language, symbols, physical layout, values, beliefs and ways of behaving set out here capture the essence of this company's organizational culture; in the case of Google, a highly distinctive and unusual one. Do such things matter or are they simply surface or even shallow manifestations of style? We might assume that Google's culture helps to deliver success and, if this were no longer the case, would be subject to change in the future.

Questions:

1. Describe the culture of Google.

You can base your description on theory, but you can also describe it without referring to theory.

2. To which type in the competing values framework does the culture of Google fit?

Give arguments for your choice based on the case and on the theory in the textbook.

3. Google shaped its culture to support creativity, innovation and performance. Do you think the culture is efficiently supporting these goals?

Base your evaluation on the case and on theory wherever possible.

4. Does the culture of Google have an effect on cooperation in the organization? Give your opinion and explain.

Argue based on the case and on theory wherever possible.