

The identity of the Organization in the Face of Change. The Case of Employees of Com.Tu.Lab when They Become Faculty Members at the National University of the Northeast (UNNE), Argentina.

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Abstract

We analyze processes of identification and symbolic appropriation of the institutional culture in the Labour Relations, Social Communication and Tourism Careers in a state university which until 2008 functioned unified as an institute called Dependent Careers of the Chancellorship. After the mentioned date and until 2013, each was formally transferred - although not geographically - to the Faculties of Economic Sciences, Humanities and Arts Design and Cs. Of Culture respectively, thus in 2012, a General Coordination to contain and manage them is created.

Since the careers continue to function in the same space and former employees, the aim of this research is to determine whether the old dominant administrative practices persist or they were modified given the transition to change.

The methodology employed consisted in the techniques of semi-structured interviews supported by the participant observance of the employees in their everyday tasks. A loss of the sense of autonomy was detected on them, showing a permanent necessity of building a new identity while living in conflict with the residual. The formality and the hierarchy are part of the university culture. The recommendations would be to plan the on-going formation on the mission, vision and functions of the new public office.

Keywords: Organization, employees, Argentina

Institution where the author/s collaborate/s

General coordination office of careers, National University of Northeast, Province of Corrientes, Argentina. Faculty of Humanities, National University of the Northeast / National Scientific and Technical

Research Council – Argentina. Faculty of Humanities.National University of the Northeast, Corrientes Argentina.

Introduction

Description of the case

The research was conducted at the General Coordination Office of the above mentioned careers: Labour Relations, Social Communication, Tourism and the remaining of Agricultural Industry, which depends on the Deans Council of the group of Faculties integrated with the Academic Entities of Economic Sciences, Humanistic Sciences, Culture Sciences and Arts and Design .

This general coordination office was preceded by the General Management of Careers that were dependant straightaway on the chancellorship. In 2010 this entity established that it was no longer possible to have careers that were dependant on it straightaway.

At its dawn in 1977, under the guidance of the General Director - as the position was called at that time - this organization operated in different locations in Corrientes; that´s why its nickname "*La escuela*" (The little school) with one centre for the Bachelor's degree and another where the University degree was completed.

Since 2010, by decision and resolution of the Superior Council of The University, the careers: Labour Relations, Social Communication and Tourism have started to depend of different Academic entities, which work in Resistencia attached to their own pedagogic regulations.

Nevertheless, the development of the careers continued to depend on the Centre in Corrientes as an engagement of respect to their territorial / original belongings. At that stage, the role of all academic authorities: Heads of Departments, coordinators and Career Directors was significant, given the need for academic articulation of all the events.

Theoretical Framework

Through the last years, the organizations have been affected by deep changes due to multiple factors; for instance, the information revolution, globalization, market broadening and the financial and economic crisis.

Etzioni (1972) defines organizations as "*social units (or human groupings) deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals*". From this definition, we can state that inside every organization can be found: a planned division of labour between workers, an authority allocation and the assignment of responsibilities for the management of communication.

Without communication, the organizations fall apart and can not survive. Communication is the first essential aspect, whose frequency can be

altered by a management change process. If there is a conflict between culture and strategy, culture will always prevail. That is the reason why communication is an essential tool during change processes.

Beginning by understanding working in organizations, it is necessary to merge in the concept of institutional space. According to Lidia Fernandez (2006), this concept is related to the conformation of an institutional expression environment in a privileged objective both for the form and content analysis of the regulatory framework and for the ways to act upon it, its influence and the consequences of respecting or denying it.

Also according to Fernandez (2006:2), an institutional space is one where organized life takes place. It is distinct from the main social space responding to certain terms. And it was done with the aim of becoming more specific to accomplish its particular purpose, bearing the due respect to the regulations.

Regarding all the above, the institutional space starts with the charge of duties which, before were in charge of other spaces and inserts itself into several processes of violence, as the detachment from the main space where it used to belong before. Otherwise, to start creating its own singularity and be distinguished and establishing itself as distinct, facing other institutions.

As an institutional space is cropped and protected by a border of the main social space, it starts an historical institutionalizing movement, producing facts that remain in people's memories and become tradition; creating ways of acting and doing within its specific reality and initiating mechanisms to support and protect its singularity.

Thinking about the above mentioned, at the core of Perez Lindo's University (2009:13), it is stated that universities, as organizations, are in constant expansion and changing processes everywhere. Furthermore, as a result of their internal heterogeneity (Roberto Vega, 2005:38), one is allowed to observe a dual organization, setting the juxtaposition of two models: a bureaucratic, formal and rigid one, and another which is the academic one, and it is systematic, democratic and necessarily flexible. These two representations coexist and develop paralelly; and moreover, from the need of communicating and coordinating both of them, arises the complexity of all internal management procedures at the universities.

Following North (1993: 110), Gloria Castillo Aleman (2006) conveys that Institutional change can be understood as a result of an adjustment process adjunct to a set of mandatory rules and norms. Also pleading that assessing universities is part of a wider changing process happening in their context.

According to Castillo Aleman (2006), changes depart from a new governmental regulation, which is applied in institutions by means of quality control mechanisms. Therefore, the study of change alludes to the adoption

of new external assessing rules and to their linkage to the internal assessing system in the context of the higher education institutions.

The university has always been a key agent in the process of modernization, both regarding culture and as social and economic development. According to Scott (2005: 53-54) "*The globalization produces fundamentally a new revolution in communicative culture*".

Mollis (2008), referring to the reforms the Argentineans have been through during the last years, states the majority of the changes implemented are carried out based on the text of the law in force and without bearing in mind other actors' judgment. Besides, along with Galarza (2008) politically significant changes can be found from considering superior education as a free right. On this scenery, is valid to inquire up to what extent the changes encouraged by the new laws have a beneficial result for the institutions.

As indicated by Mollis (2008), the belief that every new law responds to the need of reforming what its former antecedent could not solve, or even solve problems originated by the former law, was the most substantial fundament to encourage a reform which recognized the identity and sensibility crisis that affected the actors and the higher education institutions.

This crisis has become visible and measurable subsequently to the implemented reforms which were consequent to the end-of-century public policy facing the new millennium. According to related studies, the crisis is neoliberal, and the Argentinean university can not escape from the traces of the reforms's protagonist's mentalities (Mollis, 2001, 2006, 2007).

The universities have developed a distinctive communicative culture, characterized as being brainy, objective, codified and symbolic. A culture which resumes itself in the word *logos*, embraces Mathematics and Natural Sciences as well as Humanities. However, the globalization promotes a different kind of communicative culture (visual, intuitive, volatile and subjective), whose distinctions have eroded among the private matters and the public, official and corporative ones.

Regarding institutional culture, Fernandez (1994) conveys that the effect of time upon the interaction of basic components reflects the progressive construction of more and more complex levels of the institutional culture. In addition, it is possible to observe that, in long periods of time an institutional establishment continues to exist because of its ability to absorb change impacts remaining invariable in its defining features. These invariable features form what Etkin and Schvarstein (1989) call "*institutional identity*".

Etkin and Schvarstein (1989) deems components of the organizational identity to those aspects whose variation means the materialization of a new organization. Aspects such as time, size, location, type of product, rendered service's life cycle, relation between cost and

benefit, relation with other institutions, influence on its context, satisfied social needs, and institutions which affect the organization.

The different authors also give account of the existence of levels of autonomy, which are defined as the institutional ability to maintain invariable the features referred to identity. It is possible to notice the institutional culture's components as an assurance to its autonomy, thanks to their job of filtering disruptive stimuli. The permanence of some characteristics over time shapes a dynamic constancy which has been called institutional style. In the everyday life of institutions, style may be considered a result which brings together the organizations' culture and works as a mediator between circumstances and results (Fernandez, 1994).

The university's essential features are among others: its size which can be small or large. In the case of UNNE, the University's community is numerous if we bear in mind students, teachers, and non-teaching staff, hence the size notoriously influences the administrative sub-system causing the need for diverse communication and decision-making systems. (Roberto Vega, 2009:39). the goals and aims will not be able to be accomplished without a communication which interconnects the centres of decisions with the operational ones, both regarding work and affections, because not only is the organization the physical place but also human every day interaction takes place and because communications are closely knit relationships among people.

Material (human or other) and methods

In order to conduct this descriptive research a sample of twenty out of twenty nine members of staff was selected. The actors, who took part of the research voluntarily, belonged to the non-teaching segment of the University permanent employees.

The data collection method used were interviews and participant observation. The former were semi-structured and performed individually to achieve the necessary depth which made the obtained a primary data. The latter, was performed unaffectedly, at the workplace.

The utilized instrument consisted in an open questionnaire with nine items, four of them being analyzed in the current investigation:

1- What is your opinion on the way how tasks are managed? How would you describe it bearing in mind that the Academic Entities of the Consortium of Faculties virtually always intervene?

2- How communication between you and the Academic Entities materialize?

3- Do you perceive a decrease in decision making or autonomy compared to the previous period?

4- The General Coordination was created three years ago; do you observe a change of phase in the everyday working life as regards ways of managing and praxis, between what it used to be the General Management of Careers dependant on the Chancellorship and the current phase?

Objectives

Given the fact that the work continues to be done at the same location and with the same members of staff, this research objective is to determine whether the old dominant administrative praxis persist or they suffered modifications providing the change transition brought through.

Results/ conclusions

Regarding the first question in the questionnaire, it is generalized the perception of operational sluggishness on accomplishing tasks and transactions because of the distance and delays. One task between department undertakes different ways according to the Academic Entity targeted. It is necessary to check the specific administrative circuits, which implies to waste some time.

Tasks and negotiations are faster with Economics and Humanistic Faculties than with Faculties of Arts, Design and Culture, that is why employees compare the administrative praxis between their location and the Management Entity. The rigorous formality of this tasks carried out between the two locations mentioned is highlighted given that it is a basis of the leadership to know all the subjects and topics before sending them to the different Faculties, and there is still no specific regulation for the administrative circuits nor for the deadlines for submissions of all paperwork.

Related to the second query, the standing out point is that another premise of the leadership is that all formal communications with the Academic Entities must take place through its interlocutor who is in charge of significant topics. This is compulsory, excluding routinely matters which, given the need of collaboration and technical cooperation, and in order to ease and speed up the completion of duties, are promoted by the leader of the Management Entity.

The situation rotates between directions which seek for immediate and concrete effects, and the lines of action imposed by the circumstances, as for when the non teaching members of staff have their working day suspended because of power cuts, and they must first ask the Deans for guidance, because this kind of decision also affect the teachers given the coexistence of the academic and administrative systems. Instructions abound, formal notes and letters, decrees, mailshots, memos, etc., since in times of

transition the necessary dialog and full commitment of members of staff are called upon.

On the subject of the third question, it is underlined that it prevails a perception among the members of staff of a decrease in the autonomy of making decisions, with the exception of some cases with a reasonable margin of freedom to act. In previous times, the General Leadership used to make the decisions providing its position and direct dependence to the Chancellorship. The job status of General Coordinator could have equated with the rank of a Faculty Secretary quite similar to an administrative profile and whom depends on the highest academic leader.

On the last query, the general perception conveys that they are in a transition, an opportunity to learn something different, moving to a new phase, one in which commitment to the future and communication are of paramount importance to adjust in order to work together with the Consortium of Faculties since each Academic entity has its own ways and its own singular organizational identity. This is materialized in the nature of the administrative praxis which are legitimized through the everyday interchange and interaction.

Summarising, it is possible to affirm that this Management Entity has had a history denoted by change. In this logic two features are highlighted:

- First, the homogeneity as regards the institutional actors' conduct; the way organize and perform their jobs, the acceptance of the regulations and adaptation to new environments to suit the different conditions.
- Second, the institutional culture characterized by the heterogeneity as to perform administrative tasks, which vary according to the main context of each career.

Last but not least, it is necessary to point out, that the process through which Style and Institutional culture of this organization are shaped, it is structured departing from the permanence of diversity and change. Therefore, the administrative praxis is, only to some extent, modified by the last changes, provided that it can be observed that some everyday habits and sayings persist ingrained through time coexisting with novelty guidelines imparted by actors who stand out in the course of the dynamic of change.

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