Better Culture? Avoid Confusion, Disorder, and Infighting

Who in your organization is responsible for creating confusion, disorder, and infighting? Perhaps in seeking to do well, each individual inadvertently generates his or her unique little piece of mayhem. Is it possible, however, to pin the responsibility for disruption and chaos on any one individual or group of individuals?

I've just finished reading Patrick Lencioni's 2012 book entitled *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. I find Lencioni's answer to my question right there on page 74. If there is confusion, disorder, and infighting in your organization, the responsibility for its existence lies squarely with the leadership team.

I confess that I've somewhat dramatized the words that Lencioni wrote. Here's how he describes the responsibility for the existence--or lack--of organizational health: "Building a healthy organization is all about achieving alignment." Lencioni continues, "Alignment is about creating so much clarity that there is as little room as possible for confusion, disorder, and infighting to set in."

Finally, Lencioni writes, "The responsibility for creating that clarity lies squarely with the leadership team." So, if you are on the leadership team of your organization (or if you are simply the leader of your little department), he's pointing his "organizational health" finger at YOU!

The first part of the book explains why so few leaders allocate time and energy toward improving organizational health. Every organization's culture is unique, typically the haphazard assembly of attitudes and behaviors generated by each person's influence on "how we do things around here."

Lencioni says that unintentional culture development rarely yields a healthy organization. What does he offer as a better way of building a healthy culture? He provides a four-part model.

The first part deals with building a cohesive leadership team. This section of the book offers Lencioni's expanded insights from his ten years of organizational consulting experiences built on his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, published in 2002.

Following "Build a Cohesive Leadership Team" are the three additional parts of his model. I was struck by the repetition of one word in these three portions of the model:
- Create clarity
- Overcommunicate clarity
- Reinforce clarity

Do you think that Lencioni might consider that the leadership team's objective of "clarity" is paramount?

I remembered a superb treatment of the concept of clarity in Andy Stanley's *The Next Generation Leader*, another book I strongly recommend! (The other sections of that very insightful book deal with character, competence, courage, and an extremely compelling section on coaching!)

I opened Andy Stanley's section on "clarity". Yep, there it is: "Leadership is all about taking people on a journey. The challenge is that most of the time we are asking people to follow us to places we ourselves have never been. There is always uncertainty. But uncertainty underscores the need for clarity."

When I talk with leaders, they usually assure me that their guidance is clear. When I talk with the people under their authority, however, I often hear a different story. You've been in both positions in your career. Who do you think has the technical right to evaluate whether directions are clear, the giver of the guidance or the recipient?

Lencioni closes his book with a surprising twist. He allocates fifteen pages to the topic of meetings.

"No action, activity, or process is more central to a healthy organization than the meeting. In fact, if someone were to offer me one single piece of evidence to evaluate the health of an organization, I would not ask to see its financial statements, review its product line, or even talk to its employees or customers; I would want to observe the leadership team during a meeting." Wow, that's a surprise, but hugely revealing about clarity!

How comfortable would you be having a typical team member observe your leadership team meetings? Would the individual walk away with greater strategic awareness and direction than he or she had known before?

Consider initiating a short-term study group with your colleagues. Cover fifteen or twenty pages a week using either of the books mentioned in this article. You'll discover many applicable ideas. A year from now, I predict you'll have less confusion, disorder, and infighting in your organization!

****

I discovered a blog post that provided an independent yet functionally relevant supplement to the article above. Chris Patton explains that years ago, Andy Stanley wrote three questions on a 3x5 card that he carries with him and refers to often. The three questions are:
--what are we doing?
--why are we doing it?
--where do I fit in?
Those are great questions for the leader personally, and for the leader to consider asking anyone in his or her organization.

The blog post, as of today, can be found here:

      http://christianfaithatwork.com/clarity-from-3-questions-part-2/

The wisdom contained in the blog post is a terrific supplement to the article above.

Dennis Hooper
April 19, 2022