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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the role organizational culture plays in the leadership of United States Air Force (USAF) Services squadrons. While some might argue that the study of organizational culture is a somewhat vague notion, there is significant theory and findings to show otherwise. In their now famous look at "excellent" organizations, Peters and Waterman (1982, p.75) found that "without exception, the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of excellent companies . . . In these companies, people way down the line know what they are supposed to do in most situations because the handful of guiding values is crystal clear."

While Peters and Waterman looked from a subjective standpoint on how an organization "feels", there is some quantitative research that backs up their claims. In 1984, Daniel Dennison studied 34 American corporations to determine the link between organizational culture and financial performance as indicated by Standard and Poor's financial ratios. In summarizing his findings, Dennison (p.6) states "the data presented here provide hard evidence that the cultural and behavioral aspects of organizations are intimately linked to both short-term performance and long-term survival." (see page 6)

With these studies in mind, I intend to show how organizational culture is linked to leadership and, consequently, organizational effectiveness of USAF Services squadrons. Through this study I hope to enhance the reader's understanding of organizational culture and its implications for organizational success. I also believe a major result of my research into organizational culture will be a deepening of my own understanding of the leader's role in an organization. Finally, I hope that this study will prove to be of some benefit to my fellow Air Force Services officers. The words of Edgar Schein (1985, p.50) perhaps best summarize the focus of this study:

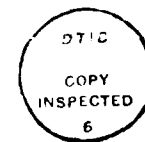
What we need to understand, then, is how the individual intentions of the founders, leaders, or conveners of a new group or organization, their own definitions of the situation, their assumptions and values, come to be a shared, consensually validated set of definitions that are passed on to new members as 'the correct way to define the situation'.

Chapter I will continue the discussion of what organizational culture is and what role it plays in the organization. Chapter II outlines the role, mission, and makeup of Air Force Services squadrons. While much of the material presented in the monograph will be theoretical in nature, it is my intention to relate the theory to this specific organizational setting. Chapter III looks at the role of leadership in defining organizational purpose and the use of superordinate or overarching goals

to define this purpose. Chapter IV discusses procedures for determining the existing culture of an organization and sets forward recommendations for the foundation of an effective Air Force Services culture.

Understanding and managing cultural change will be the focus of Chapter V.

I will conclude my study in Chapter VI by looking at methods for developing the desired culture outlined in Chapter IV. With these thoughts in mind, let's now turn our attention toward developing a clearer understanding of the concept of organizational culture.



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THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN THE LEADERSHIP  
OF UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SERVICES SQUADRONS

A Monograph  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Professional Studies

by  
Thomas Patrick Spellman  
January 1988

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## BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Patrick Spellman was born [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. He graduated from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1979. After holding several management positions in the hospitality industry, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force in July 1983.

Before enrolling in the Master of Professional Studies program at Cornell's School of Hotel Administration in 1986, he was deeply involved with efforts to enhance the quality of the United States Air Force lodging program. Upon his graduation, Captain Spellman will be assigned as the Food Service Officer for the 90th Services Squadron at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, with overall responsibility for the Air Force's missile-site feeding program.

He is married to the former Cynthia Ann Parker, and has one son,  
[REDACTED].

## DEDICATION

To my mother, wife, and son - with love.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes out to the United States Air Force, which sponsored my graduate studies.

I would also like to thank Professor Francine A. Herman for her support, encouragement, and belief in my abilities.

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## INTRODUCTION

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## CHAPTER I

### ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE DEFINED

In studying organizational culture, one needs to start off with a clarification of the term and come to an agreement on its definition. To begin, many people probably relate better to the term "corporate culture" than they do organizational culture. While the term organizational culture may lack some of the ring of corporate culture, it represents the school of thought more accurately. The attention of the business media (Fortune, Business Week) and the general public's interest in best sellers such as In Search of Excellence, however, have focused on corporate culture. For the purpose of this study, the two terms will be taken to represent the same concept.

While attention to the term may have received a great deal of notice in recent years, the theory of organizational culture is by no means a new one. As early as 1938, Chester Barnard described one of the three executive functions as "to formulate and define the purposes, objectives, [and] ends of the organization" (p. 231). Peters and Waterman relied heavily on an earlier work, Philip Selznick's Leadership in Administration, written in 1957. But it took the success of In Search of Excellence, and the sudden

realization that the U.S. was losing its position to Japan as the world's industrial leader, to truly awaken American management's interest in the subject.

Definitions run the gamut from the theories of social science to the practical, common sense viewpoint of many management consultants and practitioners. Schein (1985, p.9) describes organizational culture as:

...a pattern of basic assumptions - invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration - that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Deal and Kennedy (1982, pp.13-15) in Corporate Cultures talk about "the way we do things around here" and focus on five elements of culture - business environment, values, heroes, rites and rituals, and the cultural network. Deal (1985, p.30), especially, tries to relate these and other opinions on what exactly organizational culture is when he says:

At the heart of [most of these] definitions of culture is the concept of a learned pattern of unconscious or semi-conscious thought, reflected, and reinforced by behavior, that silently and powerfully shapes the experiences of a people. Culture provides stability, fosters certainty, solidifies order and predictability, and creates meaning.

While Schein's social science perspective may better explain the role of culture to those of an academic bent, Deal's definition seems to do the

superior job of incorporating the best of both the formal and less formal definitions of organizational culture.

From a managerial standpoint, it is essential to understand the role culture plays in the organization. Tichy and Ulrich (1984) argue that organizational culture not only enables organizational members to make sense of events and symbols within the organization, but also provides meaning by embodying a set of organizational values. It is these values which Deal and Kennedy feel are "the heart of the organization." They also argue that companies with a strong culture enable their employees to do a better job by (1) providing a system of informal rules that spells out how people are to behave and (2) by allowing people to feel good about what they do (pp.15-16).

It is not enough to understand the concept of organizational culture or come to an agreement on a correct, all encompassing definition. Rather, it is essential that managers and leaders understand their role in managing the culture of an organization. While later chapters of this study will focus on the leader's role in defining organizational purpose and ways to develop the desired culture, it is essential from the start to understand that culture does indeed affect the success of organizations. Likewise, leaders of organizations have incumbent upon them a certain *noblesse*



*oblige* to develop organizational culture and provide a sense of purpose and meaning to the workplace.

Not only is organizational culture something to be truly concerned about, but it can also be managed. As to whether organizational culture is something that hard-charging, results-oriented managers and leaders need to be concerned with, Peters and Waterman (1982, p.51) argue persuasively about the success of their excellent companies:

We have observed few, if any, bold new company directives that come from goal precision or rational analysis. While it is true that the good companies have superb analytical skills, we believe that their major decisions are shaped more by their values than by their dexterity with numbers. The top performers create a broad, uplifting, shared culture, a coherent framework within which charged up people search for appropriate adaptations. Their ability to extract extraordinary contributions from very large numbers of people turns on the ability to create a sense of highly valued purpose.

The discussion to this point attempts to set the background for the role culture plays in the organization and why the managers or leaders of an organization should not only pay attention to culture, but how their doing so can improve the effectiveness of the organization. At this point, let us look at the composition of a typical Air Force Services unit, to see how its culture is formed and influenced.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ROLE OF USAF SERVICES

Air Force Services divisions or squadrons are comprised of seven main components - food service, lodging, furnishings management, linen exchange, dormitory management, honor guard, and mortuary affairs. Some of the functions such as food service and lodging have a direct correlation to the private sector, while others, e.g., mortuary affairs and honor guard, are strictly military in nature. In any case, all functions and branches of Air Force Services are responsible for providing some sort of customer service; this is the link that ties the organization together.

Food Service is responsible for the feeding of all enlisted personnel at a particular Air Force base or installation. A given base may have one or more airmen's dining halls depending on the size and configuration of the installation. Service is cafeteria-style. Besides the standard three meals, midnight meals, carry-out service, and meals for flight crews and transient passengers are also usually provided.

The Air Force lodging program is very similar to its private sector commercial hotel or motel counterpart. Air Force personnel traveling as part of their duty requirement are required to stay in these on-base

quarters, which are usually comparable in quality to an average mid-priced hotel such as Holiday Inn or Ramada Inn. Food and beverage service is limited to in-room snacks and beverages. The major difference between the commercial lodging industry and Air Force lodging is the requirement to house guests differently, depending upon their rank or civilian grade. Enlisted personnel are housed in the Visiting Airmen's Quarters, while officers are housed in the Visiting Officers' Quarters. These facilities are almost always two separate and distinct structures. Within each broad category, personnel are assigned different types of rooms, again depending upon rank.

The Furnishings Management branch coordinates the supply, purchase, repair, and disposal of all government-owned furniture for dormitories, as well as government owned household furnishings provided to general officers. It is also responsible for furnishings provided to families in overseas locations.

Linen Exchange is one of Services smaller branches and is responsible for providing bed linens to dormitory occupants and coordinating with a private contractor for the laundering of these linens as well as certain uniform items. In a few cases, Linen Exchange actually operates an Air Force laundry plant.

Services is also responsible for coordinating all dormitory management activities. Single enlisted personnel, depending on their rank, are required to live in the base dormitory facilities, known more commonly in the past as barracks. Dormitory managers coordinate room assignments and inspections, cleaning requirements, furniture accountability, and facility maintenance. Depending on the major air command to which the base belongs, Services has either direct control and responsibility for dormitory management, or they serve as a central coordinating point for dormitory management and training issues.

Mortuary Affairs is divided into two major components. First, Services personnel coordinate all logistical activities surrounding the burial of Air Force personnel. The second component of Mortuary Affairs is the operation of the base Search and Recovery Team. Using Services personnel and other personnel from the base, Services is responsible for recovering the remains of any deceased Air Force personnel whose fatality is a result of a major accident or wartime fatality.

Finally, Services is responsible for managing the base Honor Guard. The Honor Guard is made up of personnel from around the base and provides all military honors for the base. This would include not only military funeral services, but also ceremonial duties such as change-of-command

ceremonies, parades, etc.

Before looking at ways to determine how to develop an organizational culture that can enhance the improvement of a Services squadron, one has to first look at Services role or mission for the Air Force. According to Selznick (1957, p.82), the mission of an organization is tied to its basic methods or ways of acting and its place among organizations that carry on related activities. The formal Services mission statement says: "To provide skilled personnel and operate quality facilities to sustain food service, lodging, mortuary affairs, and related services in support of aerospace power in peace and war". This mission statement helps those unfamiliar with the Air Force to understand and appreciate the role Services plays, and it also helps form the foundation for organizational purpose that will be discussed in the following chapter.

As shown by this mission statement, Services' primary responsibility is to provide those services mentioned in support of the nation's aerospace power. Clearly, the quality and level of service will fluctuate in wartime as opposed to peacetime. For example, during hostilities, guest rooms will be replaced by tents; food selection (though hopefully not quality) will diminish; and customer services and conveniences will be reduced. Nonetheless, the idea of providing the best quality product and service

possible will not change. A strong sense of cultural values, embedded in a peacetime setting, should carry over to a wartime scenario. Wilkens (1983, p.34) believes that organizational culture asserts itself when organizational members change roles, subcultures conflict, or when top management makes and implements critical decisions about organization direction and style. If this is true, the goal for any Services leader will be to develop an organizational culture strong enough to withstand these pressures and still function in the desired manner.

Many proponents of organizational culture recommend the use of recruitment and selection as one of the primary means for shaping an organizational culture. Unfortunately, Air Force Services does not have this luxury and has to do the best with what it is handed. While there are numerous exceptional performers in this career field, Services can be characterized as being made up of relatively young, unskilled, minimally-educated individuals. Each person entering the Air Force is required to take the Air Force Occupational Qualification Test, which helps determine what specialty they will hold in the Air Force. The minimum score for Services is among the lowest in the Air Force; consequently, Services is often assigned personnel not qualified to hold skilled or technical positions. Often these individuals are dissatisfied with their

assignment to a Services squadron. The challenge for Services' leaders is to take this group of individuals working in a wide range of activities, and build them into a cohesive, effective organization. It is within this framework that I will attempt to show how a strong organizational culture, with the right sense of purpose, supported by complementary reinforcement mechanisms, can enhance the performance of an Air Force Services squadron.

## CHAPTER III

### LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE

In order to understand the role culture plays in an organization, one first needs to understand the leader's role in the organization, especially as it relates to defining a sense of organizational purpose. Defining a purpose for the organization through the leader's sense of vision and reinforcing this purpose or vision through superordinate goals will allow the needs of the individuals within the organization, as well as those of the organization itself, to be satisfied at the same time.

There are probably as many different views on leadership as there on religion, government, or why the Boston Red Sox perpetually fail to win a world championship. Virtually all studies of leadership agree, however, that one of the leader's primary responsibilities is to define the context under which an organization operates. Said in another way, the role of the leader is to develop an organization's culture. According to Schein (1985, p. 171):

... one cannot separate the process of leadership from the process of culture building, that the very issues identified as the problems around which culture is eventually evolved or learned are the issues identified as leadership functions in most theories. One might go so far as to say that a *unique* function of "leadership" as contrasted with "management" or administration,



is the *creation and management of culture*.

In Chapter I we saw that culture provides meaning, makes sense of events and symbols, spells out how people are to behave, and enables people to feel better about their role in the organization. This sense of meaning and understanding for the individual and its effect on the success of the organization is echoed by Henry Mintzberg (1973) in his classic study The Nature of Managerial Work. Mintzberg broke down the role of managers into ten separate roles, one being the leader role. Mintzberg believes the "... key purpose of the leader role is to effect an integration between individual needs and organizational goals. The manager must concentrate his efforts so as to bring subordinate and organizational needs into a common accord in order to promote efficient operations" (p.62).

This same point became the theme of Argyris' Integrating the Individual and the Organization, who clarifies the distinction between his thinking and the human relations school which sought worker satisfaction as its main goal. Rather, Argyris (1958, p. 4) recommends an active, viable, vital organization populated by individually competent, committed, self responsible, and fully functioning individuals. It is the author's opinion that this mutual interdependence between the individual and the organization can be satisfied through the development of an organizational culture. To miss this point would be to miss the very nature of

organizational leadership.

In his study of ninety leaders, Warren Bennis (1985, p. 218) found that leadership can be "morally purposeful and elevating" and "can move followers to higher degrees of consciousness", including self-actualization. With this view of leadership in mind, let us now turn our attention to the leader's role in defining organizational purpose .

It is hard to imagine a significant individual act or achievement that was not motivated by some underlying purpose or goal. It is no different for an organization. If a manager or leader wishes to coax anything other than the minimally acceptable performance from organizational members, that leader of necessity must imbue the organization with a sense of purpose. This may be the leader's most difficult challenge. As Philip Selznick (1957, pp.149-150) states:

The inbuilding of purpose is a challenge to creativity because it involves transforming men and groups from neutral, technical units into participants who have a peculiar stamp, sensitivity, and commitment. This is ultimately an educational process. . . The leader as educator requires an ability to interpret the role and character of the enterprise . . . The main practical import of this effort is that policy will gain spontaneous and reasoned support.

At first glance it would appear that this thinking is in conflict with the task-oriented management style prevalent in both the private and public sector; this is not the case. The question becomes whether one

wants to push the organization towards the desired ends by means of constant supervision, constricting work rules, and so forth, or whether that leader wants to have the organization pull with him/her because members identify with the organization's purpose. This type of leadership doesn't have to rely on personal charm or charisma, but can be achieved through a commitment to a set of values (Peters and Waterman 1982, pp. 287-288). In fact, Peters and Waterman found that none of the successful leaders they studied relied on personal magnetism for their success.

A Services officer reading this might argue that the Air Force mission and purpose of defending our nation should be purpose enough for any airman, *regardless of what their actual job in the Air Force might be.* While the Air Force certainly has its own distinct culture and purpose, individuals down the line in the hierarchy need a sense of purpose for the small organizational unit to which they belong. It is that unit and peer group that will most directly influence thoughts and actions. Chester Barnard (1938, p.137) recognized the need for small organizational sub-units to have their own sense of organizational purpose when he said:

Since every unit organization in a complex organization is a specialization, the general purpose of the complex must be broken into specific purposes for each unit of organization. Since purpose is the unifying element of formal organizations, it is this detailed purpose at the unit level that is effective in maintaining the unit. If this local or detailed purpose is not

understood or accepted, disintegration of the unit organization follows.

If one accepts the claim that organizations must have a sense of purpose, then we need to look for ways of developing an organizational purpose to which organizational members can relate and commit. One way to gain commitment to the organization's purpose is through the use of superordinate or overarching goals. Bradford and Cohen (1984, pp.85-86) argue that these overarching goals must transcend simple mission statements and must be a vivid description of the organization's specific purpose. Deal and Kennedy (1982, p.22) relate this sense of purpose to a set of shared values that provide meaning for organizational members. No matter whose definition you favor, it seems clear that an organization's superordinate, overarching goals must be clear, descriptive, easy-to-relate-to principles or values that link the individual to the organization.

Superordinate goals inspire members to put forth greater effort and also serve as a standard for decision-making (Bradford and Cohen 1984, pp. 85-86). In other words, not only are people willing to work harder if they're working for a cause they can relate to; the superordinate goals of the organization are an essential frame of reference that insure members' actions are in line with the values of the organization. As Pascale and

Athos (1981) point out in The Art of Japanese Management, these superordinate goals and values are very pragmatic in nature since the "boss" isn't always around and subordinates are often faced with making decisions without his/her knowledge. When this happens, members who know the organization's purpose will more likely make the appropriate call. Roger Harrison (1972, p.122) found that even in his task-oriented organizational ideology, achievement of a superordinate goal is the highest value in the organization.

Pascale and Athos argue that an organization's superordinate goals should be significant, durable, and achievable while tying in to higher-order human values. They use the example of McDonald's belief in their early years that they were performing a service to Americans living on a limited budget. Whether you agree with this or not is unimportant. The important issue is that McDonald's used this superordinate goal and sense of purpose to provide meaning to their workers. McDonald's found that the use of this superordinate goal made acceptance of their rigid standards more palatable for their workers.

I would argue that this is exactly the type of thinking that is required to develop an organizational purpose and superordinate goal for Air Force Services units. A person cannot get terribly excited about cooking eggs at

6:00 A.M., exchanging dirty linens, or performing most any task associated with the functions of Air Force Services outlined in Chapter II. If one thinks closely about the duties of a Search and Recovery team, it can be a gruesome thought. But if the Services leaders can show those team members how their performance insures the dignity of the deceased and the peace of mind of their families, then I would argue that team members can better appreciate their task and be moved to do the best job possible. Pascale (1985, p.32) reinforces this thinking when he argues that the countervailing force for commitment under difficult organizational circumstances is "the organization's set of transcendent values which connect its purpose with significant higher-order human values."

Each individual leader of an Air Force Services squadron will have to find a way to express Services' pre-defined mission and role in a manner that is easily communicated and touches upon organization members' higher-order human values. Something along the lines of "our job is to provide the essential human services necessary for the safety and well-being of Air Force personnel and their families" should enjoy greater success than the use of concrete numerical objectives as goals.

## CHAPTER IV

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE USAF SERVICES CULTURE

Before presenting any recommendations for the values an effective Services culture might embrace, one needs to first determine the existing culture of the particular organization in question. There appear to be numerous opinions on the best way to accomplish this task. The Normative Systems approach (Silverzweig and Allen, 1976) and Kilmann-Saxton Culture Gap Survey recommend establishing a norm gap by measuring the desired culture against organizational indicators of the existing culture. Beyer and Trice (1987) argue that an organization's culture will be revealed through the rites and rituals of the organization. Likewise, Pettigrew (1979) views culture through the symbolism evidenced in the organization's language, belief, rituals, and myths.

While the first view may be naive in believing that organizational culture will reveal itself so thoroughly that it can be measured against specific objectives, the second view (rites, rituals, myths, etc.) runs the risk of making a superficial diagnosis of the organization's culture. Both Schein (1985) and Wilkins (1983) caution against looking at these more superficial measures and instead suggest that the underlying assumptions

that govern the group's activities provide a more rational basis for research.

Schein (1985) argues that there are three basic levels to an organization's culture - artifacts and creations which would include rites, rituals, etc.; values that govern behavior; and the taken-for-granted, underlying assumptions that determine how group members perceive, think, and feel. He believes looking strictly at the more superficial levels of organizational culture will explain how the culture is manifested, but not why the group acts the way it does.

Vijay Sathe (1983, pp. 9-10) offers a caution to anyone attempting to shape or build an organization's culture:

Culture is both an asset and a liability. It is an asset because shared beliefs ease and economize communications, and shared values generate higher levels of cooperation and commitment than is otherwise possible. Culture is a liability when the shared beliefs and values are not in keeping with the needs of the organization, its members, and its other constituencies.

For this reason, it is imperative that an organizational leader effectively "measures" the pulse of the organization before indiscriminately attempting to change the organization's culture.

For Air Force Services, I would argue that some combination of these differing theories is appropriate. Schein's set of basic assumptions include: relationship to environment; nature of reality, time, and space;



nature of human nature; nature of human activity; nature of human relationships. Such a melange would appear to raise more questions than is necessary for most organizations. Analyzing these type of basic assumptions might be valuable in a study of the military in terms of explaining the justification for having a separate military judicial code, the officer/enlisted dichotomy, or other such weighty subjects, but it does little to help us understand the functioning of any of the Air Force's sub-organizational units. What we really need to determine are the set of values that are at the heart of the organization's culture. This brings Deal and Kennedy's practical thinking in line with the second level of culture espoused by Schein's social science theory.

If we accept that what needs to be determined are the basic values that govern organizational behavior, the question is, where do we look. All proponents of organizational culture seem to agree that discussions with key individuals in the organization are one way to unearth the organization's values. For Services, the squadron commander should start with him/her self by asking: what do I emphasize as being important; what type of behavior do I tend to reward; where do I spend the most time; what do I talk to the troops about; what do the rites, rituals, and stories that abound in the squadron really say about our values and priorities; and what

does our socialization process tell new members about the organization.

This list of questions is by no means all inclusive and is meant only to provide a glimpse of the the types of questions that need to be asked.

The squadron commander will need to ask similar questions of other key personnel in the squadron, for as we all know, what we think about our own words and actions may not square with how they are perceived by others. The First Sergeant, whose responsibilities encompass enlisted morale, welfare, and discipline, also should be able to shed light on the squadron's existing culture. Deal and Kennedy have a whole set of informal key players in the organization's cultural network -

"storytellers", "priests", "whisperers", "gossips", "secretarial sources", "spies", and "cabals". While it is not important for the purpose of this study to define each one of these roles, any organizational leader should be able to identify their own informal communication network. Determining what messages this informal network carries will be invaluable in deciphering the existing culture.

As mentioned earlier, Beyer and Trice argue that an organization's rites and rituals are the best source for understanding an organization's culture. I would agree that they can be, but only if the organization's rites and rituals are viewed in terms of the values they communicate. A

Services' commander would be well advised to look at his/her award ceremonies, commander's calls, staff meetings, going away parties, picnics, and so on to see what values these events communicate.

This combination of self-analysis, interviews, and discussions with key players in the organization, and analysis of the messages conveyed by the squadron's rites and rituals, should give the Services squadron commander a good feel for the values that shape the organization's culture. Once this is accomplished, the squadron commander can then compare these findings against the type of culture s/he desires. While it may seem foolhardy to recommend a specific culture for an organization, one can recommend some specific principles or values to form the general shape of the culture, if one understands the role, mission, and purpose of the organization. Since this study centers around an organization with which I possess this understanding, I will present four basic values that I believe could increase the effectiveness of any Services squadron.

The four principles or values that should govern any Services organization are: (1) a commitment to the organization's purpose, (2) customer service orientation, (3) an emphasis on quality, and (4) a high level of competence for all organization members. A first glance at these values may seem like pie-in-the-sky thinking, but this is not the case. A

Services officer looking to achieve success needs to set aside short-term thinking for a moment and concentrate on the long-term growth and effectiveness of the organization. If this can be achieved, (and this is not meant for a moment to dismiss the reality that you cannot change everyone nor solve every problem), many of the crises that consume a commander's time and effort can be resolved with a little less pain and anguish.

In wondering which value truly represented the cornerstone of an effective Services culture, my initial reaction was to think of an orientation towards customer service. After all, as I have previously mentioned, customer service is the common thread that holds the various Services functions together. However, I would argue that the real cornerstone has to be commitment to the organization; absent commitment to the organization and its purpose, role, and mission, individuals certainly cannot be expected to care about customer service, quality, or competence.

Proponents of the need for commitment to the organization seem to agree that gaining that commitment is dependent upon the individual's identification with the organization. Selznick argues that it is the embodiment of organizational purpose which transforms individuals into a

committed unit. Others (Peters and Austin 1985; Walton 1986) argue that it is only through employee commitment to the organization that outstanding performance can be attained. Indeed, Peters and Austin (1985, p. 210) relay a simple truth that too often is missed in organizations when they say:

...You can order the average person who reports to you to come to work five days a week and work his or her eight and a half hour day. But you cannot order anyone to perform in an excellent fashion - "excellent" meaning courteous, creative. Excellence by its very definition and at all levels, is a purely voluntary commitment.

With this statement, Peters and Austin tell us nothing any frontline supervisor or lower level manager doesn't learn the first day on the job. Unfortunately, the pressures inherent in most work environments push managers away from this simple truth.

For the Services commander, the development of commitment to the organization must be at the center of any organization values or strategy. While military officers have more latitude than their civilian counterparts to order compliance, that may be all they will get - compliance. While it is true that in certain circumstances compliance is all that is needed, particularly in the achievement of short-term objectives, the attainment of an overall level of excellence will require a committed group of

individuals working towards a common goal. March and Simon's research found that an individual's goals will be in line with group norms and values if there is a strong individual identification with the group (March and Simon 1958, p. 65). The importance of this finding for the organization leader is that effective socialization and integration into the organization's culture will be dependent on the ability of the individual to commit to the organization.

Closely tied to a commitment strategy is the need to develop a high level of both individual and group competence. A group of unskilled individuals, however committed, cannot achieve a level of performance excellence. Probably the most important thing to remember about the need for individual competence is that no job is so simple that it cannot be done improperly, nor is there any job so simple that a competent individual cannot make a difference. Hickman and Silva (1984) argue that a leader will most effectively foster competence by focusing on a few key skills at a time rather than addressing a large number of skills all at once. Ultimately, even the smallest of skills will need to be addressed since it is often those little things that make for the exceptional performance, particularly in a service industry; however, this can be left to the lower levels of supervision or on-the-job training.

The Services leader will need to develop the mechanisms for development of competence. This includes paying attention to training efforts, not simply viewing training as a time consuming task that takes away from the "real" work. Supporting individual self development efforts through such methods as professional development or college courses is another way to signal support for individual competence.

While commitment and competence are necessary to achieve a high level of performance, the final two values, customer service orientation and an emphasis on quality, will be the outwardly espoused values around which the Services officer must build the organization's culture.

Alternately, commitment and competence will be the internal values used to develop this orientation around the products and services generated and the individuals who consume and use them.

With the exception of biographies and success stories about corporate leaders, very little appears to be written on the role of the customer in the formation of an organization's culture or philosophy. Yet the customer, and his/her needs, and how the values of an organization affect their satisfaction with the service, is imperative to our understanding of organizational culture. As Major General George E. Ellis, Director of Engineering and Services, United States Air Force states, "It is

unimportant how we internally assess our performance or how we measure our internal standards. The only relevant 'parameter' set is established by the expectations of our customers; we must aggressively find it and use it" (Ellis 1987, p. 21).

In her study of successful service organizations, Dinah Nemeroff found this type of philosophy essential to organizational effectiveness (Peters and Waterman 1982, pp. 165-166). It is important to understand that the organizational sub-unit leader, in this case the Services squadron commander, must bring this message down to the lowest levels of the organization. Every airman needs to know that the highest ranking officer (General Ellis) in Engineering and Services, the umbrella organization for Services, is deeply committed to a customer service perspective.

In A Passion for Excellence, Peters and Austin found that taking exceptional care of your customers was an essential ingredient to sustained superior performance. Stanley M. Davis (1985) also argues for an external orientation with the customer being the most important factor in determining the organization's culture. What these individuals are telling us is basically the same - if your role or mission is to provide services to the customer, the organization must have as its focus the satisfaction of customer needs.



The pitfall that Services leaders need to steer their troops away from is the belief that our customers are somehow less important since, in most cases, they are required to use the services we provide. This fact seems entirely irrelevant. Drawing from the discussions of both organizational mission and purpose clearly show the responsibilities of an Air Force Services squadron. That our customers often do not have a choice about using our services, does not at all impinge on Services' *raison d'être*. Our airmen must understand and believe that we as leaders are committed to excellence.

The final value that must be part of any effective Services culture is an emphasis on quality, not only in the food products we prepare or the services we provide, but an overall pervading sense of quality about the organization. When asked how he motivated players, Red Auerbach, longtime coach and general manager of the Boston Celtics, one of the most successful organization in recent times, replied - "Pride, that's all. Pride of excellence. Pride of winning" (Webber 1987, p. 87). Whether you call it pride of winning or a commitment to quality, everyone wants to be part of a successful organization. Have you ever talked to anyone who was proud to be associated with a loser, proud to produce a low quality product? I doubt it! When talking about quality, it is important to be working with

same definition. Quality does not have to mean filet mignon; it can mean hamburgers if they are excellent hamburgers. Air Force lodging quarters by their very nature will never be able to compete with many commercial hotels, but that does not mean Services cannot strive to provide the best lodging possible, given the constraints. What seems to matter is a high level of service quality compared with the level customers expect (Heskett 1986, p. 122).

Peters and others argue that quality must be an obsession for organizational leaders. Pascale (1985, p.37) found that quality was one of the four most common "obsessions" of successful organizations. A Passion for Excellence dedicates an entire chapter towards dispelling the notion that there is any such thing as a commodity, that basic services cannot somehow be differentiated. As leaders in Services, all officers must develop, if they don't already have it, this "obsession" for quality that communicates to everyone in the organization the need for quality in the services they provide, and the value these services provide.

These four principles - commitment, competence, customer service, and quality - comprise the central values I recommend for an organizational culture. While there are certainly a large number of factors that can be attributed to successful organizations, the ones mentioned

here appear to be at the heart not only of Air Force Services, but many other service-oriented organizations. Assuming we now have an idea of the type of organizational culture desired, we now need to look at the process of managing cultural change.

## CHAPTER V

### MANAGING CULTURAL CHANGE

Cultural change, perhaps more than any other type of organizational change, will effect the lives of every member in the organization, and this may cause great resistance. Sathe (1985) estimates such resistance mathematically - the magnitude of the change in the content of the culture, times the strength of the prevailing culture. Using this formula, organizational leaders can project expected resistance to the culture changes they plan to implement, assuming they have an accurate picture of the existing culture based on a realistic audit.

Tichy and Ulrich (1984, p.61) suggest that there are three main types of culture resistance systems: selective perception; security based on the past; and the lack of climate for change. "Selective perception" refers to the difficulty in conceiving of new ways of doing things as a result of the old culture; "security based on the past" simply means people's inability to let go of the past; while "lack of climate for change" explains why cultures which require a high degree of conformity will often meet with resistance to the actual change management desires. In general, all three forms of resistance would apply to most Air Force organizations since

they are often guided by conformity, habit, and a long history of "how we do things around here".

None of these factors is meant to dissuade a manager from seeking to implement cultural change. Rather, it is meant to prepare the organization's leaders for the task at hand. Pettigrew (1979, p. 574) warns us that despite the everyday work pressures that surround us all, the social tissue or culture of an organization is essential to people's functioning on the job. For this reason, the implementer of cultural change must remain sensitive to organizational members reactions.

It would be extremely naive to think that cultural change can be managed in the same fashion as other management tasks, through the classical approach to management - planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, and controlling. While these steps still form the basis of much management theory, they are not the the right tools for managing cultural change, which requires a subtle, flexible, leadership touch to be successful. Probably the best lesson to be learned from Ouchi's Theory Z concerns the complexity of relationships within the organization. Ouchi (1981) argues that it is this understanding of organizational subtleties which accounts for much of the success of Japanese firms.

Wilkins and Patterson (1985, p. 285) suggest that managers seeking

to change an organization's culture, while obviously following a well thought out plan, should appear to be acting naturally and "winging it," rather than appearing to be the rational planner. This brings us to the type of leadership required to affect organizational culture change.

Tichy and Ulrich, as well as Peters and Waterman draw from James MacGregor Burns' Leadership when they propose that leaders seeking to change an organization's culture must become transformational leaders. To play the role, such a leader must develop a vision, mobilize the organization to accept that vision, and institutionalize changes that last over time (Tichy and Ulrich 1984, p.59). Acceptance of this leadership role is essential to successful cultural change. Further, unless the organization is successful and healthy, with a culture that enhances the accomplishment of group goals and individual needs, management attention to cultural dynamics will be necessary. Attempting to change an organization's shortcomings without addressing the cultural implications will likely prove unsuccessful.

In The Change Masters, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983, p. 296) tells us that any major organizational change must have what she calls a "prime mover" - someone with power who pushes for that change. In the case of cultural change in an Air Force Services squadron, this push for cultural

change is the direct responsibility of the squadron commander.

Sathe (1985, pp. 244-245) offers the argument that there are two major ways to affect a cultural change - (1) get people in the organization to accept a new pattern of beliefs and values and (2) add and socialize new people into the organization and remove people from the organization as appropriate. While some of the specific measures for accomplishing these steps will be discussed in the following chapter, it is important to note that these are clearly the only two ways to make cultural change come about. While the Services officer is fairly limited in his/her ability to remove people from the organization, it can be done. As for changing beliefs and values, as well as the socialization process, it is important to remember that it is an individual's experiences within the organization that will effect cultural change, not simply changing a few of the outward manifestations of the organization's culture (Wilkins and Patterson 1985, p. 289).

This discussion is meant to sensitize managers, whether in the private or public sector, to their responsibilities in affecting cultural change, including some of the dangers inherent in the process itself. In the following chapter, seven specific ways of changing the culture of an Air Force Services squadron will be discussed, but the tools themselves

can be applied to any organization, large or small, looking to structure a new organizational culture.



## CHAPTER VI

### TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING THE DESIRED CULTURE

As mentioned at the outset of this monograph, my intent was to not only theorize on the role of organizational culture in the leadership of Air Force Services squadrons, but also to provide leaders of these organizations with specific means of developing the desired culture. The seven methods that will be discussed are: (1) creation of a vision, (2) communication of the vision and the values that go along with that vision, (3) socialization of new organizational members, (4) role modeling by the organization's leader, (5) use of the reward system to reinforce the desired values, (6) symbolic management, and (7) organization rites and rituals.

Creation of a vision for the organization is at the heart of culture formation. Extreme care must be taken when deciding upon a vision for the organization. According to Pettigrew (1979, p. 577):

...Visions are not merely the stated purposes of an organization, though they may imply such purpose, but they also represent the system of beliefs and language which give the organization texture and coherence. The vision will state the beliefs, perhaps implying a sacredness of quality to them, use a distinctive language to define roles, activities, challenges, and purposes, and in doing so help to create the patterns of meanings and consciousness defined as organizational culture.

As this statement implies, the Services leader must employ the skills of a visionary, orator, and inspirational leader when establishing a vision for the organization. This vision must succinctly, yet dramatically, state the organization's purpose and superordinate goal, as well as the role organization members will play in achieving both. Further, Hickman and Silva (1984, p.32) suggest that leaders who wish to provide organizations with a vision must be able to envision the future from a set of facts, figures, hopes, dreams, dangers, and opportunities.

Major General Ellis recognized this importance of organizational vision when he stated, "I sensed a critical need to give the Engineering and Services business an unambiguous direction, a clear focus, a solid platform from which we could direct our talents and energies" (Ellis 1987, p. 18). With this need in mind, he created a vision which he refers to as the "Four Principles of Excellence." In the same manner, it is incumbent upon each individual Services commander to provide this focus or vision for their particular squadron. Clearly, this vision should tie the Services mission, purpose, superordinate goals, and values into an easily communicated and understood direction for the squadron's future.

Communication of this vision is the next step in building a Services squadron culture. Commander's calls, staff meetings, announcements,

written documents, and other formal media are clearly one way of communicating the vision. The Services commander should use each of these means to reinforce his/her vision for the organization and should do so regularly and often. Besides this formal explicit communication, there is an implicit means of communication that can effectively communicate the organization's vision (Sathe 1983). These implicit communications encompass the rites, rituals, and symbols to be discussed shortly.

Deal and Kennedy also recommend use of implicit or informal means of communication in what they refer to as the cultural network. In fact, while the formal communication channels are essential to the expression of a vision, the informal methods may often carry the message more powerfully. Schein (1985) makes the argument that it is what the manager or leader pays attention to that is one of the best methods for communicating beliefs. As he states, "By paying attention to," I mean anything from what is noticed and commented on, to what is measured, controlled, rewarded and in other ways systematically dealt with. Even casual remarks and questions that are consistently geared to a certain area can be potent as formal control mechanisms and measurements" (p. 225). In practical terms, this means everytime a Services commander visits the dining hall or lodging facilities, he/she can communicate the

organization's values by simply commenting on something as mundane as the freshness of a dessert or the promptness of a receptionist answering the phone. It should be noted that this places a burden upon the Services leader to be consistent in what he/she pays attention to. By doing this, the leader can effectively communicate the vision and values of the organization.

Socialization of new members into the organization can also be an extremely effective means for the Services commander to develop the desired culture, particularly as a result of the constant turnover typical in most military units. Schein (1984, p. 10) emphasizes the importance of socialization in the development and maintenance of an organizations's culture when he says:

Because culture serves the function of stabilizing the external and internal environment for an organization, it must be taught to new members. It would not serve its function if every generation of new members could introduce new perceptions, language, thinking patterns, and rules of interaction. For culture to serve its function, it must be perceived as correct and valid, and if it is perceived that way, it automatically follows that it must be taught to newcomers.

Services commanders can use the initial newcomer's interview as one primary way to communicate the organization's culture to new members. The way a new member is treated when they arrive on the base can also be an effective means of communicating culture. If Services commanders

want an individual to be committed to the organization and buy into its value system, then they need to show concern for individual needs. Simply insuring the smooth transition to a new environment and providing any necessary assistance can effectively begin the socialization process. As Pascale (1985, p. 34) argues, socialization counterbalances the more explicit formal controls in the organization - "When an organization instills a strong, consistent set of implicit understandings, it is effectively establishing a common law to supplement its statutory laws." These implicit understandings are best communicated during the initial socialization process.

Closely related is the effect role modeling has in developing an organization's culture. Simply stated, role modeling restates the axiom that actions speak louder than words. As Schein (1985, p. 232) states, ". . . [O]perating cultural assumptions will always be manifested first in what the leaders demonstrate, not in what is written down or inferred from designs and procedures." Silverzweig and Allen (1976, p. 36) take this one step further with their belief that it is not even what managers or leaders actually do, but what it is perceived that they value. In either case, it seems clear that a manager's actions will tell organization members a lot about the true nature of an organization's commitment to its own cultural

values. If quality is to be perceived as a central value of the culture, then the organization leader cannot be perceived as taking actions which will reduce the quality of goods and services being produced. To do so would undermine this cultural value. To say that organization leaders must be alert to the implications of their own actions would be an understatement; leaders must be aware of the expressive consequences of their activities and modify these actions accordingly (Beyer and Trice 1987, p. 8).

While there are no specific guidelines I can offer the Services leader, s/he must keep their actions, and the possible implications of these actions, intended or otherwise, in line with the values espoused by the organization's culture. Doing otherwise will make a mockery of the organization's culture and lead to organizational disarray.

Using positive reinforcement and the reward system can be an extremely effective means of developing cultural norms. The practices and behaviors that are systematically rewarded will form the core of an organization's culture (Tichy and Ulrich 1984, p.67). And, as Baker (1980, p. 12) notes, leaders can shape an organization's culture by rewarding the types of behaviors and attitudes it wants to develop.

While Services leaders are limited in their ability to have any impact on an individual's pay or rank structure beyond specified parameters, they

can use the reward system to develop their desired culture. Three-day passes, promotion to positions with greater responsibilities and prestige, nominations for individual awards, selection to attend Professional Military Education schools, and comments on the Airmen's Performance Report all are ways in which rewards (or their inverse - negative reinforcements) can be used to signal the organizational values held dear by organizational leaders. As Schein (1985, p. 79) states:

...Once one has identified what kinds of behavior are "heroic" and what kinds of behavior are "sinful" one can begin to infer the beliefs and assumptions that lie behind those evaluations. The manner in which heroic and sinful behaviors are rewarded and punished then provides further evidence about the underlying assumptions.

While this may seem manipulative to some, subordinates will easily and quickly learn the values and behavior leaders desire if the reward system is used effectively.

The use of symbols to communicate organizational values is central to many current proponents of organizational culture and leadership. These symbols can be transmitted through the use of myths, stories, metaphors, heroes, etc. As short term actions, symbolic management might entail something as seemingly insignificant as the arrangement of office furniture, changes in office protocol, or simply calling attention to someone who's actions embody the desired cultural values. Symbolism in

Services squadrons might also take the form of squadron patches, hats, or mottoes. Whichever symbolic method is chosen, the intent is to communicate values in an easily understood and remembered manner.

Etzioni (1964) describes three types of control in organizations - physical, material, and symbolic. For the purposes of building a shared set of values, he reasons that symbolism will be the most effective since ". . . the application of symbolic means tends to convince people, that of material means tends to build up their self-oriented interests in conforming, and the use of physical means tends to force them to comply" (pp. 59-60). Remembering that commitment to the organization and its values is one cornerstone of the recommended Services culture, symbolism can and should be used by Services leaders to reach the desired end.

Deal and Kennedy describe shapers of organizational culture as symbolic managers since they view their primary role as one of managing the organization's value and cultural system. In his study of successful general managers, John Kotter (1982, p. 163), too, found general managers achieved most of their indirect influence through the use of symbolic methods. The symbolism or morals behind this type of leadership and management should be carefully considered to insure they communicate not only the desired message, but one that can be easily interpreted by



organizational members.

Organization rites and rituals can be thought of as a means for shaping the organization's culture that cuts across all other methods. Rites and rituals can be used to communicate the organization's vision, to socialize and reward organization members, and provides the organization's leader with an opportunity for role modeling and symbolic management. While Beyer and Trice (1987) identified twelve cultural forms, they found that an organization's rites and rituals contained most other cultural forms and provided the best understanding of an organization's culture. As already mentioned, the concern with using rites and rituals as a determinant of organizational culture is the requirement to examine the underlying values these rituals convey, since rituals can possibly belie the organization's cultural norms. This may be the case in organizations where rituals, ceremonies, etc. are perpetuated in the organization without the leader fully understanding the symbolic nature of the events. Nonetheless, if an organization's rites and rituals are carefully considered and managed, they can be an effective means of defining the organization's culture system.

While both Beyer and Trice and Deal and Kennedy offer typologies of rites and rituals, for the practitioner it is enough to understand that rites

and rituals can include award ceremonies, meetings, going-away parties, office luncheons, and other regularly held get-togethers among organization members. Commander's calls, squadron softball games, dormitory or uniform inspections, and squadron-fund raising activities are other common rituals found in the military setting. The goal of an organization's leader is to use these rituals not only for its stated purpose (ie. recreational activity, squadron farewells, socializing, etc.), but also as a way of communicating and building the organization's culture. If this expressive side of an organization's rites and rituals are effectively managed, they can be a powerful tool for developing the organization's culture.

The seven methods presented here can be effective means for affecting change in the social structure of an organization. However, their real power lies in using them as a means of reinforcing the value system of the organization's culture. Used alone or without truly representing the organization's values, they will only serve to confuse and undermine the organization's cultural system. The leader's challenge, then, is to use organizational culture and the "art" of management to develop a vibrant, healthy organization that is governed by a set of shared meanings and values.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to explain the principles of organizational culture and their effect on the leadership of Air Force Services squadrons. One of my primary goals at the outset was to enhance my own understanding of the role culture plays in the leadership of organizations. I believe I have done so.

Just as in the battlefield there must be a strategy that governs tactics, so in organizations must there be a culture that provides meaning to the workplace and defines the purpose of organizational worklife. To ignore the human side of organizations would be short-sighted in the extreme. By first recognizing that all organizations operate under a set of guiding values and beliefs, organizational leaders can then begin to shape the organization's culture so that both individual needs and organizational goals can be mutually satisfied. The organizational leader who can accomplish this task will be successful in whatever their chosen field of endeavor.

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