**Dent Questions**

A starting point to defining culture is taking a closer look into Dent’s influential study of how accounting became implicated with organizational change at Euro Rail, a public railway company with roots in the Victorian era. The purpose of the study was aimed at examining how accounting is mobilized for reconstructing an organization’s culture; it helped to understand how culture shapes action. In his study, Dent goes on to define what culture is; he describes the culture as an elusive concept. (Dent, 1991) In Dent’s study, a cultural change occurred in the course of a complete organizational reorientation as the company was privatized, and the old service-focused operational management culture gave way to a more commercial executive ethos; here, a management system replaced the old-fashioned system. Top management’s reliance on the new accounting controls subsequently led to the language, decisions, and actions that reshaped other organizational participants’ views of problems, priorities, and possibilities for further action. According to Dent, culture is defined to be, “the broad constellation of interpretive structures through which actions and events are rendered meaningful in a community.”(Dent, 1991) The concept of culture relies on information taken from anthropology, and ethnography, which has come from the literature based on the ideational of organizations.

Organizational culture includes an organization's anticipations, shared experiences, attitudes, and shared values that make up the organization. It is expressed in its self-perception, within the organization, the outside view interactions, and future goals of the organization. “It is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time and are considered valid.” (Business Dictionary, n.d) Organizational culture is also referred to as corporate culture; it is viewed in the different ways that the organization conducts its organization, how well the employees are treated, how well the customers are served, and the impact on the community. Organization culture draws emphasis to the level to which employees are allowed in the decision-making process. The level that employees can develop new ideas, and express themselves. The organizations’ power and information flow through its hierarchy and it show how committed employees are towards collective goals. “The appreciation of organizations as cultures brings the interpretive, experiential aspects of their activities to the foreground of analysis, emphasizing their expressive qualities.”(Dent, 1991)

In defining culture it entails of ambiguous and unambiguous concepts, or patterns, from and for behavior learned and spread by symbols. Culture establishes the idiosyncratic feats of individuals, including their personifications in objects, the vital part of culture involves the traditional ideas and their close values. The systems in culture are considered the byproducts of actions, and on the other had as acclimatizing influences upon supplementary action. Within organizations culture is meant to be shared or collective assumptions or behaviors that are attached to people’s actions in certain situations. In Dent’s study, his views of culture are taken from previous literature that emphasizes that culture is a public or identical system that draws significance to the shared behavior that dictates their actions. As Dent implies, “Culture is public, the product of minds between minds. Culturally significant events give public expression to the ideational system.”(Dent, 1991) Pertaining to the Euro rail, within an organization, everything is expressive, in a culmination of everyone’s collective thought, their values devolve them with “symbolic qualities of meaning.”

Dent continues that culture within organizations also has subcultures that exist among groups or teams made up of members from different backgrounds, social classes, and norms. Distinct subcultures often gain prominence. Meaning systems differ within an organization and between occupational groups as Dent admits. “Cultures within organizations are not independent of their social context. They are interpreted by a wider system of thought, interacting with other organizations and social institutions, both importing and exporting values, beliefs, and knowledge.”(Dent, 1991) The concept of accounting is the likely bottom line in all the subcultures within the organization. Dent shares that cultures within the organization are, however, poorly understood. Dent considers culture as a political process; the many subcultures pitted against each other in order to gain the up hand and dominance over the other. The purpose of Dent’s study is to examine the culture change within organizations in define what culture is by using Euro Rail as an allegory in the conceptualization of the change as the separation of organizational action from one culture, and it is rejoining to another culture.

2. In Dent's study, the research method that he used in order to obtain his findings is “closer engagement in the research setting and interpretive methodology.”(Dent, 1991) His method of qualitative research consists of data collection of descriptions and personal accounts that are given by participants, personal observations, interactions, and activities at the research site. Information and data were recorded and processed over a lengthy period of time. As he recounted, “arm’s length analysis is clearly inappropriate for cultural analysis of the kind described here.”(Dent, 1991) Unlike other studies, no hypothesis is needed. However, the study is conjectured through the data in an inductive manner. In developing the data, Dent seeks to develop a sense of empathy in understanding the participants’ realism. The interpretations gathered must be continually constructed in the manner that Dent was satisfied with until they are grounded in context and consistent with the order of interactions and said events. The underlying goal of the study is to get the prime perspective, his inner self, and ultimately his perspective of the world.

The specific study that Dent implemented was done over a period of two years, with follow up visits at stages of one, and two years later. Within research for the study of Dent, had an ongoing method of data collection, analysis, and interaction. He offered no personal opinion except in the process of encouraging interviewees. Dent was able to through to gain information, and free range interviews, from the organization through various channels of contacts.

 Dent’s collected data from staff in several ways. The first being of a series of approximately 30 managers within the head offices, and senior level management that he interviewed more than once. The interviews with different staff within the finance and engineering departments would typically last from 60 to 90 minutes, were recorded and transcribed over the two year research period. In his second data collection method, he observed different debates in various internal meetings, where he noted on specific dialogue when necessary. The third method, data were collected through casual encounters and conversations. As Dent shares, the study was immersed in tons of transcripts and notes that were incoherent first to understand, after realizing a pattern after exploring different ways in analyzing work, the research begins to produce viable results.

“Ultimately, the analysis hinged on three dimensions: role (function), and level of hierarchy of the subject than time.”(Dent, 1991) the data was first categorized by the context and value of the research. The data collected from the transcripts, interviews, and conversations were used. The data was broken down into similar clusters as many that worked on the same levels had similar perspectives that differed in the level of hierarchy established. The third dimension was set to represent the elapse in time. The third dimension studies the content of data that is moved the forces of time that have revealed that the opinions, views, and interpretations of each group were evolving in a way that was systematic. All three dimensions were used in forming the organization culture and the data in the emergence of the different cultures. In his method of data collection, he was able to get a clear perspective from participants without interfering in the process. Cultural research differs from regular research methods, as the high volume of opinions, observations, interviews from participants’ produces an overwhelming amount of data that must be analyzed. “Cultural research seeks to find out is the way in which societies or groups see the world and their part in that world and, perhaps most pertinently, how such groups express their place in that world.”(Sage Research, 2006)

In Dent’s cultural study, he relies on an empirical setting that followed a sociological approach that revolves around the observation of the people within the culture. All the factors that affect society, such as the socioeconomic class or situations, the many religions within the culture, different family structures, various traditions, family backgrounds, and the different educational levels are factored into the research to define what the culture signifies. It predicts how the people of the organizational culture will respond to certain situations. This method proved to be of significance in drawing personal perspectives in drawing realism to finding conclusions to the theory presented. In his study, he seeks to develop an empathy with the data progressively. In understanding how the thought processes of the participants accumulated, and their view of the realities in which they work in.

3. Within his study Dent outlines the dynamics of change where Euro Rail shifted from the “railway” to a “business culture.” In Dent's study, he uses the organization of the Euro Rail, a large company consisting of 160,000 employees, going from the private sector to the public-sector railway ownership. The history of the Euro Rail entails how they raised capital to fund their projects, and the world famous engineered who pioneered the emergence of the industrial technology. At the time, the companies were considered a monopoly that was the main mode of transportation within the country. The companies previously had maintained good relationships with the governments, “paid consistent dividends and their shares were blue-chip stocks.”(Dent, 1991) The importance of these companies is that they embraced a public service attitude that provided, “a transport infrastructure much needed for the pursuit of trade and manufacturing, and for social mobility. Euro rail’s cultural reorientation to the change in the dominant institutional logic of the company’s environment that is a shift from the old railway service logic to a commercial one. Management was conservative and followed a clear chain of command, and took pride in their professional management of the railway system. Soon the railway companies became nationalized and consolidated the structure into a representation or the radial route into the major cities. However, times were changing, and the railway system was seen as old-fashioned. The government was laying sanctions as the pressures for profitability were arduous.

After the organization of the Executive Committee, they created new management positions that appointed Business Managers (outside the hierarchy of the mainline management) that broke down railway operations into market sectors. The skills of the Business Managers brought along knowledge in marketing, long-term planning, ‘bottom line’ management. Each skill that the Business Managers had had an image of modernism, allowing the railway to throw off the image of being “old-fashioned. They obtained roles of developing strategies to enhance the performance of each business sector. The appointment of the Business Managers within Euro Rail introduced a new business culture.

Business Managers had an influence on the General Managers and shifted the ideal of the organization the business culture that the Business Managers endorsed. The Business Managers brought a different perspective of reality. The Business Managers had no real authority or control over the railway operations, however, had ample persuasion in shifting the culture of seeing the railway as a business whose purpose is to make a profit. They reported to the Chief Executive and joined as members of the Executive Committee. As the organization changed into the Business culture, many within the organization left, and the policies changed from the old way of doing business into new kinds of policies and decisions molded from the new business culture. “The railway culture has been substantially displaced by the business perspective, the belief that railways should be instrumental in making a profit and managed to that end.”(Dent, 1991)

The purpose of implementing the Business Manager is to turn the railway of old ways into a business that makes a profit. The role of accounting was as Dent put in the operations, that the importance of the operations were the trains, staff, and the infrastructure was the costs. At the time, no accounting system was in place that measured the profit and profit loss for the organization. The appointment of the Business Managers changes the system of unallocated costs to an allocation of common costs. Business Managers were responsible for all the costs and the consequences of incurring costs. Upon the appointment of the Business Managers individuals within the accounting department were also appointed to develop loss and profit measures for each business sector. The accountant was involved in all dealings with the Business Managers and business executives that discussed the different ways in apportioning costs, and cost exhaustion. The method of profit and loss for each business sector was, “founded on principles reflecting the primacy of use of resources, and that the development of computer systems to operationalize the principle in full took some while.”(Dent, 1991) Each measure that was introduced was fundamental in the emergence of the new “business culture.” The accounting measures provided a clear construct of operational and physical means for an economic view.

The Business Managers brought a new counter business culture than the previously held railway culture that was in place. The Business Managers were able to provide a dialogue in the railway method of engineering and operations into a business language of profits and markets. Changes were not only seen within the organizational culture but also the accounting system. Changes within the systems that include the budgeting, capital investment, and planning to interpenetrate the occurrence and amplification of the business culture. Accounting within the old system or railway culture, it was revolved around ensuring that revenues were accounted for, suppliers and vendors paid, and to contain waste. However, it was limited in its meaning.

Within the business culture that involved around the “bottom line,” and accounting involved looking to product markets, and revenues of the products. Accounting became increasingly influential in searching for opportunities in profits and eliminating business sectors that were not making the business profit in order to survive in the business with increasing competition from other modes of transportation. “This shift in knowledge which accounting helps to construct, the shift from looking to the state for subsistence to looking to markets, is fundamental, and it interpenetrates the operation and management of ER’s one technology with pervasive effects.”(Dent, 1991)

4. Accounting within both cultures plays a significant role in constructing the knowledge embodied in the particular assumptions about, the organization, authority, time, rationality, and so on. Accounting introduces a framework of a new organization, patterns, and influences that help to dictate the current actions of the organization into a profitable business. Within accounting are two issues that convey the relationship between forms of organizational knowledge and accounting, and what the role of accounting in procedures of the organizational collation. The particular knowledge that was obtained shifting to the new business culture was obtained over a period in with the initial accounts and joining of actions had to be created. Dent implies the business culture unfolded in episodes. “Bursts of exhausting creativity, each building on what had previously been accomplished, and punctuated by a concluding event; followed by a pause or consolidation, recovery, and imagination before the next.”(Dent, 1991) These episodes continued to replay in the railway culture was redefined.

Within the culture of organization events and activities unfold at different periods of time, each uncoupling and recoupling at separate times to share different knowledge and rationales of the culture. Accounting can enter into organizational settings to constitute cultural knowledge in particular ways by creating particular rationalities for organizational action, and in turn, it shows how it can lead to new patterns of organizational or author influence, a new concept so time and legitimate action. The cultural system involves the knowledge about the environments, the different strategies for excavating the subsistence from the culture, and other various things. This shift in knowledge is seen with the incorporation of accounting within the new business culture that turns the focus into markets, and operations and management of the new counter-culture within Euro Rail. In the organization, it reverted from just the main operations of trains but also the new operational management structure of just production, and channels of marketing. The main focus has shifted towards markets. The new knowledge is left to the Business Managers that have supposed expertise in the channels of marketing, and getting resources to make the organization more profitable. The appropriate form of action within the business culture redefined the changing knowledge.

In the old system or knowledge trains and engineers that ran them had to be taken care of in order to maintain a profit. Activities that were costing them an organization more than helping them included, training employees to smile at customers. In the new system or new knowledge, these activities were eliminated as they did not have any benefit towards the helping into markets. The bottom line activities of the Business Managers were seen as more desirable as they added more value than what they would cost the organization. The bottom line engineering specification, mentioned earlier, means that the Business Managers were designing for the market. The added comfort, speed, reliability, and customer service provided the returns that far outweighed the costs.

Their actions within their business culture also differed in the old knowledge system and the new knowledge system. In the old knowledge, the time that Euro Rail had seemed endless. The railways were built to last as the country would always need travel methods. In the new knowledge, the measure of time is shorter as much emphasis is placed on the government pressure to deliver amongst the competition and the entrance into the markets. “Accounting coming into the organization to construct a new theory of subsistence, which in turn implies particular modes of organizing, patterns of influence and authority, criteria for action, and a new concept of time.”(Dent, 1991) The belief in markets today for organizational culture is entrenched in the political cultures of the government. Accounting systems are implementing in unique ways that serve the better purpose of reorganizing the management structure by obtaining new knowledge. Dent implies that the purpose of the study was to explain a mode of hypothesizing relations between accounting and culture.

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