

**Organizational Culture and Its Impact on the Campus Community: A Historical
Case Study of Reed College in Portland, Oregon**

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Does culture have any impact to an organization? How can organizational culture be changed? Schein (1985) defines organizational culture as a “shared belief or assumption among members of the organization – often invented or discovered by a given group to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration.” Generally, cultures can instill conflicts and address needs for differentiation among organizational elements. For instance, Schein (1985) suggest that culture may: 1) define institutions, 2) create institution, 3) transform institution, 4) create death in institution, and 5) become a managerial change, 6) integrate institutions, and 7) socialize new members. Organizational cultures are composed of various interlocking, nested, and often times, conflicting subcultures (Martin & Siehl, 1971: 53). Culture can generate commitment, create greater productivity and profitability, and serve as a control mechanism for institution. There are six common manifestations of an organizational culture: 1) rites and organizational ceremonies, 2) rituals and routines, 3) sagas/stories, 4) symbol, 5) physical setting, and 6) cultural network. But how does change in the organizational culture generate problems for organizations and institutions?

A unique example is the case study of Reed College during its formation years from 1911 to 1919. Reed College, founded by William Trufant Foster in the early twentieth century as a private and independent liberal arts institution in Portland, was established to restore the liberal arts education during the era when specialized research universities and pre-professional trainings were on the rise. President Foster sought to improve the local culture by creating an “ideal college” that was “molded around the individuality of one person’s theories.” President Foster envisioned that a campus should uphold three primary principles: 1) intellectual freedom, 2) academic rigor, and 3) egalitarian democracy. He believed that an ideal campus should have an atmosphere of intellectual excitement in which the institutional culture is both unique and evolutionary, or as Clark (1970) asserts, “a distinctive niche” (p. 96). Nonetheless, President Foster would encourage students to avoid the narrow utilitarian approach of the research universities. He embraced Charles Eliot’s idea

of the 'elective curriculum' as a way to capture students' intellectual mind and curiosity. Thus, Reed College would distinguish itself not by its physical campus, facilities, or sports teams but by the community it had created based upon the Honor Principle that was established as a base to encourage college students to become more responsible for each other's work.

Although Reed College went on to produce four Rhodes Scholars during its first six graduating class, William T. Foster ideological beliefs of an "ideal college" would be heavily criticized during his tenure as President. To enumerate, many faculty members and students would criticize about the hyper-intellectual environment of balancing both social independence and the college's rigorous and structured academic discipline. The rigorous demand created by President Foster would generate student anxiety and lower student participation in extracurricular activities, especially those in their senior year who were all required to write a thesis and oral examination. Although President Foster would ban the idea of fraternities, sororities, and other scholastic awards or honors on-campus, the distinctive and unique culture would generate inherent tensions – both internal and external – that would threaten the college's identity and stability.

Ultimately, the institutional features, such as, college's endowment, budget cuts, and salary reductions would create frictions between President Foster and the faculty members that resulted in the departure of numerous promising Professors. Faculty members would criticize President Foster by focusing too heavily on recruiting the best instructors who emphasize teaching over research. Members would also complain that President Foster ideological principles were too heavily focused on Pharisaism, or as Clark (1970) refers, as a "do-gooder", one that made no bones about its mission (p. 103). Consequently, many faculty members would view President Foster as a stubborn, hard-driving, and impatient individual who is both anti-traditional and anti-authoritarian. Foster's outspoken opposition to America's entry into World War I would drastically reduce student enrollment and diminish the faculty. Because of President Foster inability to collaborate with faculty

members and students, the distinctive culture would become vulnerable and often times under attack ranging from the lack of compulsory chapel services to women's smoking rights on-campus.

So the question arises: if I was advising the new President of Reed College, how should I respond to this situation? And what actions should I take to change the organizational culture of Reed College? One principle that I will definitely emphasize to the new President is that: 'multiple actors must be involved to effectively promote organizational change within the institution'. To clarify, most higher education institutions are governed by multiple authorities. Governance relies on multiple form of higher education authorities (administrative authority and parallel authority), especially professional bureaucracy. Within these professional bureaucracy, there consist of five elements in an organizational structure: 1) operating core or administrative authority, 2) standardized skills, 3) shared norms (self-regulating), 4) pigeon holing, and 5) decentralized. Because higher education is highly bureaucratized, many college and university Presidents are forced to collaborate with multiple actors to achieve certain goals or outcomes for administrative effectiveness.

Theoretically, most academic Presidents in higher education are worried about the concerns of trustees, community leaders, students, faculty members, and law enforcements. They are required to reconcile conflicting pressures and conflicting ideas. For instance, most colleges and universities would experience problems that are both internal and external, such as, unresponsiveness, tension between faculty and administrative work load, as well as the amount of output delivered. These problems would often generate an 'organized anarchy', where multiple actors are constantly pushing along different goals and outputs. Because formal organizations and institutions do not appreciate individual differences, Presidents in higher education are often pressured to create new strategy that requires them to act more politically in which the individual beliefs are no longer relevant.

To clarify, the job of the American college and university presidency is often described as a parochial job because they are not strangers to the institutions. Most University Presidents exhibit three common properties: 1) problematic goals, 2) unclear technology, and 3) fluid participation.

President Foster was no exception in which he displayed both inconsistent and ill-defined goals with a loose collection of changing ideas that affected different units of the institution, often termed as 'loosely coupled system'. Because President Foster held onto an ambiguous idea of producing outcomes, the institutional culture would suffer overtime as Reed College was forced to wrestle with the faculty in an effort to find the right power-sharing balance to keep the college moving forward.

Nevertheless, if I was advising the new President of Reed College, I would definitely advise the leader to push favorably towards a bottom-up strategy that focuses on increasing student enrollment and embracing individual differences. I would advise the new President to promote a cohesive rite of passage, to seek ways to tighten certain relationships between faculty members and staff, and to establish a groupthink in which members of the campus community would experience a sense of animosity. I would also encourage the President to adopt a widespread understanding of how responsibility and influence are shared among trustees and faculty members (Bowen, 2011: 7). I believe that Presidents in higher education must foster on building a committed organizational culture. Organizational commitment consists of five mechanisms: 1) sacrifice, 2) investment, 3) renunciation, 4) mortification, and 5) communion. By establishing a committed organizational culture, faculty members, staff, and students can embrace individual difference that could radically influence past cultural assumptions, re-create involvement and participation, and re-focus institutional goals and priorities that would better serve the entire community of Portland, Oregon.

In essence, I believe that multiple actors are vastly needed to promote administrative effectiveness. An organizational culture cannot be changed just by one person as displayed in the case with President Foster. Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1985) suggested that there are five functions to build and sustain a successful organizational culture: 1) adaptation to external environment, 2) integration of organizational internal process, 3) symbolically redefines outputs as possessing special qualities, 4) reviewing functions of managerial implications, and 5) identifying dysfunction of organizational culture. It is those five principles that can help Presidents intertwine leadership with

culture, formation, evolution, and transformation. As Steven Fak, Reed Class of 1983 aptly put it, “In listening to other people’s stories, I heard my own.”

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