

WORKPLACE CULTURE AND ITS IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Analyses of IKEA organisation culture using Edgar Schein model

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration.”.(Schein, 1990, p.111.)

The Culture describes the environment in which behaviours are encouraged or not. It represents the group’s values, beliefs, written or unwritten rules” what we want to be versus what we actually are “. (A. Brown p.141.)

Reflecting on this point, organisational culture is not just another piece of puzzle, it is the puzzle. From this point of view, a culture is not something an organisation has; a culture is something an organisation is (Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1982:126).

This report will present the Analyses of IKEA organization culture using Edgar Schein model and how the culture contributed to its success.

Edgar Schein is a former professor at the MIT Sloan School Management and known for his famous work on the Organisational culture model. Schein’s “believed that organisations take time to develop a culture as the employees go through various changes and adapt to the external environment and solve organisational problems. They learn from their past experiences and start implementing practices, and collectively the employees attitudes form the culture within the organisation”.(E Schein Organisational Psychology)

IKEA is a multinational group of companies and prides its self to be the most successful and largest furniture retailer and charitable organisation. IKEA was established in 1943 and was named after its founder, furniture billionaire Ingvar Kamprad.

The company expanded rapidly from its first store in Stockholm to, Scandinavia, conquering Europe, then entering in Asia, Canada and US market. The rapidly expansion was due to its culture which drew both on its founder Mr Ingvar personality and the national culture of Sweden. Currently, IKEA operates more than a hundred stores across the globe with prospects of growth in the future. (*IKEA International A/S - Company Profile, Information, Business Description, History, Background Information on IKEA International A/S, n.d.*)

The idea was to create a better life for people .This fact helped to accelerate the fundamental change in customers’ needs and furniture industry.

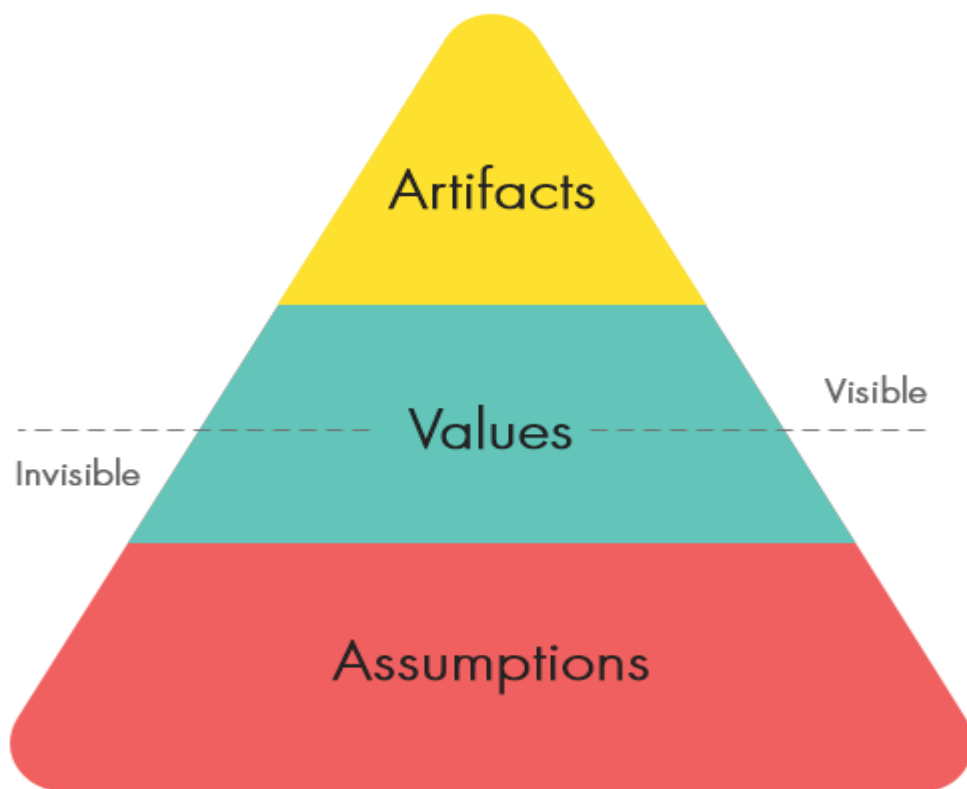
The organisation’s aim is to “create better everyday life for the many people and help live a better life providing customer’s high quality home living experience”. (IKEA, us and idea, 2019)

Introduction

This report describes IKEA Organisation culture using Edgar Schein model.

In 1960 Edgar Schein developed an organisational culture more visible within organisation which includes the mission and statement of an organisation. (Schein, E H (2010) Organisational Culture and Leadership).

According to Schein Assumptions are the most visible and observable level of culture.



Based on Schein's Culture Triangle basic underlying assumption is in the base core of a culture which helps to understand the organisation culture.

IKEA'S culture reflects Swedish roots , with hard –working and down to earth people, pointing out that togetherness is at the heart of the IKEA culture. As mentioned in one of IKEA 's article "We are strong when we trust each other, pull in the same direction and have fun together".

Analysis of the internal context of IKEA using Edgar Schein culture model

According to Schein, the organisational culture model is directly influenced by direct and indirect mechanism. IKEA logo is identified by the bold blue and social yellow colours of the Swedish flag which can be easily identified by customers. Schein theory on brainwash was that those colours made customers to interact with the organisation before even interacting with the personnel.

IKEA would employ young recruits with inexperienced organisational culture which had a positive effect on organisation because they were not only hard workers but modest and with respect for others. Many workers in IKEA Wales were rewarding the experience and good relationships between co-workers and managers. Moreover, employees praised the organisation for their opportunities to develop their skills and promotions.

There are stories circulating that Mr Kamprad was meeting workers while they were working and shaking hands even with the cleaners. Workers would use metaphors' such as "Daddy" and "Grandfather". Stories that workers love to talk about as influences the way they work, behave and think; which clearly show IKEA's core values of simplicity and humility. As stated by Schoenberger (2001), the CEO's self can become "intertwined with transformation of the organisation".

The organisation would prize creative solutions the same as common sense. An example is that when the store was struggling to cope with the rush of customers, the store manager allowed customers to enter in the warehouse and pick up their furniture, resulting in a fast service and also in reduced costs.

The next level according to Schein which constitute the organisation culture is the values of the employees. In this regard, the culture of IKEA is based upon VALUES that are shared by their members. IKEA's success is due to the Value aspect of its culture, because IKEA's statement is: "Home is the most important place in the world."

"The Wonderful Everyday" is an idea of living our best and most wonderful lives everyday. With IKEA's help, we can achieve this through clever, well thought out, strong and affordable home furnishings. (Quora 2019).

The organisation's value based on Edgar model also relates to the organisation's sustainable development where IKEA 'S' framework includes economical but also friendly environment.

One hand the whole process of purchasing and storage of raw materials, the unique design, including manufacturing, packaging and transportation and on the other hand IKEA is responsible for selling the product which includes customers service. The organisation takes environmentally friendly decisions by using renewable and recycled materials in production. (IKEA Address Ethical and Social Responsibility Challenges)"

As stated by one of inter IKEA spokeswomen: "We are committed to taking the lead, working together with everyone-from raw material suppliers all the way to our customers and partners; to inspire and help people to live better lives, within the limits of the planet."

Edgar artefact level point out the organisation's logo; which stands for simple domestic products, durable, well designed at a good price. The products design and style are unique as are done by customers themselves, ready-to-assemble furniture affordable from students to the elderly at a great price.

IKEA's slogan- "Not for the rich but for the smart", is the way of making "everyday life" wonderful through clever price cuts and affordable home furnishings. (ikea .com 2019)

Internal context and their effect on culture

Some of the cultural performance in IKEA success is called norm or rules, which effect sustaining the organisation culture. For instance the dress code is informal, to jeans and sweaters, the office atmosphere is very relaxed and the level of management is removed from a hierarchy to adopt a flat structure.

Even though IKEA presents itself as a flat organisation, starting with the simplicity of the dress code ; named by an employee "the ugly yellow shirt" makes difficult to identify the level of hierarchy of employees ,which means that "you don't always know who you are talking to ,but that doesn't matter very much" . The reason behind this is the slow moving corporate bureaucracy and the strict uniformity enforced in the organisation .According to Mullins bureaucracies "provide a safe haven where managers can hide from responsibility and avoid being held accountable for errors of judgement or problems they created or failed to solve.(Mullins 2005.p 78)

Empowerment is where employees at all levels are responsible for their action and should have the power to take decisions. IKEA has recently recruited new internal managers providing opportunity of advancement for lower level employees. This is important to the organisation's culture because employees can make the decision to advance or not.

The values and norms are important for the organisation's leadership, rituals and also social structures and roles. Hoogan and Coote points out that these values and norms are needed in order to provide responsibility, openness and flexibility between workers.

Analysis of the External Context of IKEA

In 1979 Michael E Porter developed Porter's Five Forces Model, a simple framework for analysing and evaluating competitor's strengths and position of a business organisation. (Porter's Five Forces of Competitive Position Analysis, 2013).

SWOT Analyses of IKEA

STRENGTHS

Firstly what makes IKEA's strengths is the Brand; which is one of the most recognizable furniture worldwide.

IKEA promotes D.I.Y or do it yourself culture, by supplying ready to assemble furniture which are easy to be constructed by anyone. This method illustrates IKEAS' strength as its minimizing the overall cost of manufacturing of the furniture.

Exactly the cheap prices on the products bring IKEA in competitive advantages. The usage of raw materials, keeping stylish design products for easy transports and assembly affordable to everyone's budget it's the key component to the business sustainable growth.

IKEA also invested in independent resources as in my country Romania with 74,700 hectares of forest which help with sustainable supply of wood.

IKEA'S competitors are rent based furniture organisations offering ready to use furniture's which creates a negative impact on customers on DIYIKE's strategy. TARGET - one of IKEA's competitors also offers low prices products but not specialized that much on furniture. ILVA the second competitor also offers trendy designed furniture but it is a small company at the moment and does not represent a big threat.

IKIA's strong organizational culture is one of the reason makes this organization so successful.

WEAKNESSES

Looking at the company's management style is proved to be IKEA's weakness. The positive aspect which contributed to the rapidly growth of the company is the opportunity in development in high position of a store administrator that rose to become IKEA's CEO.

One of IKEA's weakness components is the few bad reviews which refer to injuries due to dangerous products. The brand is known as cheap which leads to poor quality of products.

OPPORTUNITIES

IKEA has invested in “green” products which could lead to a larger market. Although IKEA is a well known furniture brand has stores only in 38 countries, with opportunity to expand. Also the online shopping is quite limited and could offer more products online.

THREATS

Due to the successful business strategy model, other organisations are copying IKEA's style for their own use.

Another threat is coming from the Fast competitors like WalMart whom offers inexpensive home products but not as many yet. Also there are possible lawsuits from customers who were injured assembling a product.

PESTEL analyses of IKEA

POLITICAL:

IKEA's political situation refers to its revenue and factors such as Government attitude towards the brand. Some political factors influence negatively IKEA's business which include the level of bureaucracy, corruption, home market lobbying and import restrictions around the places it operates. (IKEA Group Report - Research-Methodology, 2017)

IKEA has been involved in various issues on political grounds. In 1970's and 1980's IKEA used prison labour in East of Germany for producing its products, which created a significant dispute in the world. (Shaw, 2019)

Another issue is that IKEA relies on local manufacturers rather than external ones which benefit the business to sell at the local prices but have a low impact on the organisation's profits.

ECONOMIC:

IKEA with its strengths on environmental social factors in the production of usage of raw materials with great design and cheap price helped the organisation to grow economically and also made IKEA a sustainable and socially responsible brand. The “assemble to order” approach has been also effective helping to maximize costs. From the Economical point of view, Brexit might have an impact on price increase. Currency changes will effect IKEA in exporting and importing goods. The pricing strategy might become an issue as well, as customers' are used to low cost but stylish furnisher which affects IKEA to increase prices. (Master of Business Administration in Marketing Management, 2010)

SOCIAL:

Understanding IKEA's social and cultural factors is important.

IKEA have initiatives to provide long term employment and special services by providing customers with the opportunity to create their own design, which makes IKEA reaching their customers more directly.

Due to the current situation, Coronavirus Covid-19, IKEA will close their doors to the public for shopping, while the online orders and online pick up(click & collect) will remain in operation. IKEA will support employees through benefits packages and paid leave policy. (IKEA, 2020).

Every action is taken with measured decisions to take care of co-workers and working environment, and operate its business as long as possible; because in this time of uncertainty is not about profit, but if the business is protected so the co-workers are.

“While taking care of each other and our customers, each of you is putting our values into action and demonstrating the true spirit of togetherness”which express again the organisation’s culture. “You are the key to securing our future, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart”.(Javier Q, March23,2020)

TECHNOLOGICAL:

IKEA offers catalog, but also advertising their products on IKEA's website allowing, customers to place online orders. The aim is to satisfy those customers as well who cannot make it to the store and have part of the same experience online. Using digital channels, the business is benefiting from high customers satisfaction and brand loyalty but also a cost effective way in increasing sells. (Frue, 2018)

LEGAL:

Political and legal factor presents new laws in development in a more safety and environmental' way.

IKEA had faced legal issues due to the poor quality of products quality resulting in injuries and death .An awful incident happened in 2017, in California when a toddler was crushed to death by a faulty chest of drawers. Although, IKEA has paid t \$46 million to the grieving parents, they might recover monetary, but their reputation might not. (The Sun, 2020).

ENVIRONMENTAL:

This aspect is focusing on IKEA's sustainability, social responsibilities and committed investments in renewable energy. IKEA has invested in Climate –in renewable energy as wind and solar panels,furthermore in wood, cotton obtained from sustainable sources. This contributes to reduce costs and improve IKEA's brand image. (Marketing Tutor for Marketing Professional and Business Owners, 2020)

Analysis of The Organization's Ethical Stance

A critical perspective of the organization culture was utilized to consider ethical concerns and questions if creating a strong organisation culture does increase efficiency. In addition to this, a "strong culture is often presented as one that give employees an increase sense of self determination (Schein,1996).

IKEA'S ethical conduct is the vision "to create a better life for the many people "including stakeholders and customers, employees, suppliers and communities. (IKEA Sustainability Report, 2017).

Developing a sustainable strategy to produce as much renewable energy as it consumers, and that is at least 70 percent its rate of consumption. Throughout this process, IKEA wants to be transparent to its stakeholders providing "frequent disclosures" about the process.

IKEA's ethics includes training programs for employees as well as codes and policies to guide this ethical conduct. (IKEA and companies, 2018)

Looking outside the organisation Wilson challenges this term "organisational behaviour "and questions if looking into organisations behaviour only inside ,when is a reciprocal relationship that happens outside of organisation as well. The suggestion points out that is important to look outside of organisation of what are normally thought about the organisation and what we think of work. (Fröding and Lawrence, 2017)

Overall IKEA is demonstrating a good leadership in its approach to sustainability and ethics in the home decor and furniture industry. IKEA's competitive advantage is its unique designed of products which give the company the strength of producing high quality of products at lower price compeering to competitors as Oak Furniture. (Sustainability Report 2011).

IKEA's mission about its values is a "secure "employer "providing a pleasant and long term employment as called by some "their second home",

In order to maintain the organisational culture each individuals is required to be team player. The Key is leaders and managers with effective and efficient skills to establish methods of operations channels to provide for flexibility and adaptability characteristics to a dynamic corporate environment.

Analysis of the skills, knowledge and behaviour of an employee who is likely to perform well at the organization, with references to the organization's values

A current research was conducted on question "how employees perform in IKEA'S culture" based on interviews from current and former IKEA's employees, as stated by Schein (2009) interviews are believed to be the "best tool for obtaining perceptions and accounts of IKEA's organisational Culture".

Some employees have a positive attitude towards their job; for example an IKEA's salesman expressed his commitment to the organisation's goals saying: " My vision is to get where I want to be, where that is I'm not quite sure of yet. But I want to keep working with people who have a burning interest in the company and home decoration, and who wants to take extra step to attain our goals and strengthen our IKEA vision ".(Ewan, salesman)

Other employees have a negative attitude with regards to the level of commitment expected from them: Everyone can't be dictated to the values." But at IKEA it feels like everyone is expected to love working there. They don't do that anywhere else. Then you can give people full time contracts, but they get part time anyway. You can get full time at others work places.(Scott, salesman)

In summation, one of the most common reason for working at IKEA is the job security: "Is a large company and I feel that it's a company that gives you a safe and secure workplace".(Mark, salesman).

However, some employees were disappointed that their career prospective with the organisation was limited. They felt that they have been misleading during the recruitment process and that the possibility for career advancement is few. Citing an IKEA restaurant worker: " It was a lot of talk before you got the job about how and could advance, but I don't think it was very good at all. Shift manager was the next step. It was no difference in pay and not that appreciated by the ones I worked with. (Leonard, former restaurant worker).

The issues on the values regarding the recruitment process did not appeal to everyone. For the successful recruiters, the organisational value was followed by initial job training. Although, the value system seem impaired on new employees a highly structured manner, some aspects of the introduction process appears to be lacking. A not uncommon view, the introduction of the work tasks was disorganised and insufficient between employees in different departments. An example is where an new employee was asked to close up the cashier, but had never done that and did not know how to do it;" I should have had an introduction on that , but they had forgotten that".(Felicity –restaurant worker).

Another case was when an employee with loyalty to the company and positive attitude was denied advancement and internal training without explanation resulting in resigning for getting tired trying to step up in position.

The use of the value system is predominant in the day to day activities to the furnishing employee's area. For instance the company's values are mentioned often with stories and sayings of Kamprad's words like "most things are still undone, glorious future is often occurring with the company".

The general view is that IKEA affords employing staff regardless their background without demanding any specific academic merits which seem to be a problem as is not sufficient to fulfil manager's positions.

The art of managing people is the heart of the management .Organisational behaviour can be viewed in the prospect of employees, the organisation and the environment. People differ, and so their environment, orientation to work and their work ethic, which also implies employees expectation and satisfaction needs.

The all above, shown that IKEA's employees appeared to intertwine their interest with those of the company's and the managers adhere to the value system in their behaviour.

Managers and long-time employees at IKEA "were portrayed as representatives of not only the company itself, but its entire value system.(Warrick, 2016)

CONCLUSIONS

Organisational culture is made on the assumptions and beliefs that construct purpose, recommendations and collectivism. (Model, 2018)

The culture within an organization is very important. In IKEA's case is difficult to sustain a high performance culture in a large and geographically diverse organisation.

IKEA's cultural web model dissects the organisation culture to enhance deeper understanding of the company: - The routines of how IKEA does things; Kamprad shopping at the local stores going through the market class represents IKEA's simplicity and the stories of Kamprad's spirit points out the method of supporting the culture. The symbols and logos of IKEA express the Swedish heritage approach towards diversification and hierarchical framework. The Paradigm encloses all the elements in the ethic web in individual ways of performing the organisation's culture. (IKEA Group Report - Research-Methodology, 2017). Corporate culture reflects the organisation's values and determines the way the organisation moves. IKEA's culture is hard to describe but easy to embrace.

As mentioned above, IKEA's culture is based on willpower, togetherness and enthusiasm born in their roots in Southern Sweden and inspired by its founder Ingvar Kamprad.

IKEA is aware and proud of its Swedish heritage and culture which is seen by the approach on the products design ;ideas that are closely linked to IKEA's origins where the people have a reputation for working hard, living on little and making the best possible use of the limited resources they have. (Swedish heritage - IKEA, 2017)

IKEA's culture has contributed to the organisation's success. The prices and offering middle class access to high quality products needs to ensure that the Swedish values are not compromised. (Stenebo, 2014).

"Maintaining a strong IKEA culture is one of the most crucial factors behind the continued success of the IKEA concept." Ingvar Kamprad.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IKEA has set high expectations to keep its values of sustainability at low cost operations, therefore to maintain the success, the recommendation on HR department should recruit specific personal to lead the departments and also it should provide educational programs to all staff on importance of sustainability, quality at low cost products and services.; with comparison to Walmart who nearly lost its relationship with its customers due to the quality of products and customer service. All these will contribute to IKEA's main goals and need to be transparent to all levels of management. (Fröding and Lawrence, 2017).

IKEA supply chain management might significantly improve as the organization is now taking greater measures to ensure the authenticity of its products and recommendation is that IKEA should plan their forestry better and make it more ecologically friendly.

To survive in the changing environment, IKEA have to constantly adapt changes and be aware on customer's preference trend. For example Walmart offers a variety of high branded and unbranded products at lowest price possible with a large investment in equipments that generates more profits.IKEA also should change its strategy and increase price to enter into the new market and provide discounts on products in different occasions, so the customers will feel compelled to purchase an IKEA product. (Culture & Values, 2018)

"We want to be a force for positive change. We have the possibility to make a significant and lasting impact - today and for the generations to come". (KEA, us and are, 2020)

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