

CHAPTER 14. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN ACTION

CHAPTER 14 OVERVIEW

Chapter 14 Summary

Chapter 14 explores how leaders and managers can build a culture that bonds a group in pursuit of a shared mission. The story of Data General's Eagle Group shows how initiation rituals, specialized language, group stories, humor and play, and ceremonies combine to transform a diverse collection of individuals into a spirited, high-functioning team. Tenets drawn from the Eagle Group's story include the following:

1. How someone becomes a group member is important.
2. Diversity is a team's competitive advantage.
3. Example, not command, holds a team together.
4. A specialized language fosters cohesion and commitment.
5. Stories carry history and values while reinforcing group identity.
6. Humor and play reduce tension and encourage creativity.
7. Ritual and ceremony lift spirits and reinforce values.
8. Informal cultural players make contributions disproportionate to their formal roles.
9. Soul is the secret of success.

Chapter 14 Major Case Examples

- The Data General Eagle Group
- U.S. Air Force
- Ford Motor Company
- Mitsubishi Corporation
- SAS
- Outback Steakhouse

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CHAPTER 14

The central ideas in Chapter 14 revolve around principles for building and shaping a strong group culture. Instructors can use this chapter to:

1. Explore groups from a symbolic perspective.
2. Examine essential skills for building a positive culture.

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3. Scrutinize the strengths and limitations of the symbolic frame (since Chapter 14 concludes the chapters examining this frame).

Teaching methods appropriate for each approach are described in the sections that follow. Student exercises keyed to the approaches appear in “Student Exercises for Chapter 14,” beginning on page 3.

Chapter 14: A Focus on a Symbolic Perspective on Groups

Much of the literature on small groups comes from a human resource or social psychological perspective. Chapter 14 can be used to broaden student understandings about small groups and to contrast structural, human resource, and symbolic prescriptions for effectiveness. This enables students to review small-group theory from Chapters 5 and 8, as well as begin the process of integrating two frames.

Chapter 14: Cases Focusing on a Symbolic Perspective on Groups

Discussion of the Eagle Group case as presented in Chapter 14 works well for comparing the symbolic perspective with other perspectives. The chapter is rich in description of the Eagle Group’s story, but instructors may want to assign Kidder’s *Soul of a New Machine* as supplemental reading (a paperback version published by Little, Brown in 2000 is available).

In large or small groups, students can discuss the ways in which the symbolic frame accounts for the Eagle Group’s success and compare how human resource, structural, or political elements might also have contributed. The structural characteristics of high-performing teams outlined in Chapter 5, the human resource elements discussed in Chapter 8, and the characteristics of constructive politicians described in Chapter 10 provide alternative ways of understanding what happened in the Eagle Group. This can lead into a discussion of the unique contributions of each frame and the overlap among them.

Instructors could add another case to work on these same issues, comparing the case group with the Eagle Group. Possible cases include:

- The team videos from Workvideos discussed in the notes for Chapter 5 (*Computer Emergency Response Team, Chamber Music Quartet, Chinese String Quartet, and Rowing in an 8*; see “Chapter 5: Films or Videos Focusing on Understanding Structure and Group Effectiveness”) are multiframe examples with rich material on cultural, as well as interpersonal and structural, issues in groups. Since all the teams portrayed are high-performance teams, they can be compared with the Eagle group to examine how well the ideas in Chapter 14 transfer to other teams.
- Corning—1983-96: *Transition at the Top* (HBS 9-401-034) takes a multiyear look at the evolution of a top management team and the relationship between team and organizational cultures.

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- Acting Out of Character (HBS 9-414-012).
- Acton Burnett (HBS 9-476-018).
- Claremont Instruments Co. (HBS 9-406-032).
- Meeting of the Overhead Reduction Task Force (HBS 9-478-013) and accompanying video (HBS 9-884-002).
- London Symphony Orchestra (HBS 9-494-034).
- Slade Company (HBS 9-406-074).

Chapter 14: A Focus on Essential Skills for Culture Building _____

The Eagle Group case highlights skills needed for building strong and productive cultures. Instructors may want to use this chapter to drill the ideas outlined in the text and to use the Eagle Group case to test student understanding of the core ideas. Ideas for skill building in small groups are presented in Exercises 14.1 and 14.2.

Chapter 14: A Focus on the Strengths and Limits of the Symbolic Frame _____

Finally, instructors may want to use this chapter as a jumping-off point for exploring the strengths and limits of the symbolic frame. Since this is often the most difficult perspective for students to grasp or appreciate, instructors can explore student responses to symbolism before moving on to the integrative chapters. Symbolic issues can be discussed in class or teams or woven into discussions of cases or films. (See the teaching notes for Chapters 12 and 13 for suggestions of appropriate, frame-relevant cases and films.)

STUDENT EXERCISES FOR CHAPTER 14

EXERCISE 14.1 _____

Focus: Essential Skills for Culture Building

In courses with ongoing small groups, have students apply the prescriptions for shaping and building a productive culture to the history and workings of their own teams. Groups should focus on both diagnosis (Where are we now? What is our culture? How is it

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expressed? How is it reinforced?) and action planning (Where are we going? How could we strengthen our culture to better support our mission? What, if anything, needs to change?)

EXERCISE 14.2

Focus: Essential Skills for Culture Building

Either as a small-group activity or a written assignment, have students examine their past experiences in groups, briefly describing their best and worst group experiences. They can then compare their descriptions of best and worst group experiences with the Eagle Group's experiences and the guidelines in the chapter for productive groups.