Improving Culture Report



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INTRODUCTION

Initial Task

On November 28th, Dr. McKay requested Team Nourish to formulate a business report on the culture found within Cohort II's industry partner Improving. Throughout a two-week period, our team discussed her request.

Purpose

This report explains the common relationships we discovered through our interpersonal and exploratory research between Improving's current culture, the material that was discussed in the SPDA 4020 – Connections III: Cultural Contexts curriculum, and our possible recommendations to improve Improving's culture.

Content Covered

The content in this report will be broken into three main topics: an overview of Improving's company culture, Improving's leadership context culture, and standardized approaches to operations.

AN OUTLINE OF IMPROVING'S CULTURE

Main Overview

Our industry partner Improving is a complete IT services firm. Improving offers consulting services, which include training, project assistance, and consulting solutions. Improving has multiple locations that are located throughout the US, alongside Canada and Mexico. With a total of over 1,000 employees, Improving exerts its influence in a variety of industries: including financial services, energy, travel, retail, and government[1]. On the cultural side, Improving is continuously committed to creating a healthy work environment. Its workspace fosters growth for both personal and professional relationships. Positive approaches are taken to cultivate open communication, personal growth, and sustainable success. All these goals are related to Improving's three guiding principles: Excellence, Involvement, and Dedication[2].

Conscious Capitalism

One of the central foundations that Improving has consistently referenced is its commitment to the philosophy of Conscious Capitalism (CC). Through CC, Improving states that it can be a force for good by focusing on purpose and profitability alongside its capitalistic ventures. Improving focuses on the four pillars of CC: Higher Purpose, Conscious Culture, Stakeholder Operation, and Conscious Leadership[3]. Each pillar contributes to Improving's motivation to establish trust with all of its stakeholders. As a result, Improving has been independently recognized for customer satisfaction (service awards), employee engagement (best places to work), and community support (corporate caring awards).

Acquisition History

One of the main growth factors for Improving is its growing number of acquisitions. In order to continue expanding Improving's consulting capabilities into extended industries, Improving acquires relative firms and small businesses on a consistent basis[1]. These acquisitions range from high-end technology services to professional relationship marketing. From the information provided by Improving, we have discovered about 15 acquisitions in the last 17 years.

Company Culture Awards

Alongside Improving's continuous commitment to Conscious Capitalism, there have been numerous independently given awards in regard to its company culture. These awards are mentioned to be distributed throughout each of the office locations in which Improving operates. The most common type of award listed relates to *Best Places to Work*, having been voted for 10 years in a row[1].

CONTEXT CULTURE IN LEADERSHIP

Coding Improving's Context Culture

Every company culture has a dominant communication style pertaining to beliefs, norms, values, and more. As a result of Improving having a large amount of employees and acquisitions, managers have a consistent but mildly flexible communication style. With a large diversity of employees within the Dallas, TX location, the culture varies from low to high contexts[4]. Improving experiences a high-context culture through the tendency to receive insights from primarily implied messages within senior management. Improving also experiences a low-context culture through simple and clear directions and goals for middle to lower management. However, due to Conscious Leadership values and a wide change of culture-based activities offered to Improving employees, the relationships between managers and employees are continuously growing stronger. This allows low-context communication styles to become more prominent in more diverse environments.

Understanding Improving's Leadership Communication

The culture within Improving has a direct effect on the leading styles of managers and executives. Improving's C-Level leaders have an Egalitarian and Hierarchical leadership styles as there is a healthy balance between the power distance of managers and employees. This is evident within the quarterly Balanced Score Card (BSC) overview meetings. These meetings generally showcase a recap of the business's operations through a management tool commonly referred as the Balanced Score Card. According to prior interview findings, David O'Hara, the President of Improving, is the individual who primarily prompts discussion points during the BSC overview meetings as he has the most extensive experience. However, a consensus among management is also desired for decision making within the company. Moreover, upper-level management are the sole attendees within the quarterly BSC overview meetings, so the top-down communication scale causes Improving's employees to be updated at management's discretion. With Improving overseeing many employees, company leaders operate under a low-context communication scale to accommodate the high level of diversity as effectively as possible.

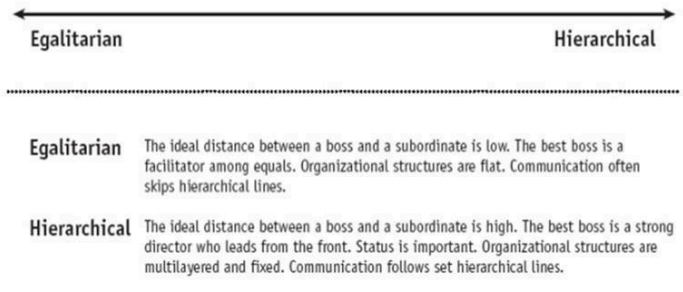


Figure 1: Egalitarian and Hierarchical Societies

Standardizing Strategies

Uniform Balanced Score Card Understanding

To ensure effective communication throughout all levels of the company, creating a uniform understanding of business practices is necessary. Standardization of processes and data within a company has proven to be effective in maintaining consistent quality of work and reducing overall inefficiencies. To evaluate the uniformity of information throughout all levels of the company, we focused on the BSC overview meetings and the importance of a uniform understanding of the data presented.

The BSC is currently discussed in two types of meetings; a quarterly BSC meeting that is reserved for upper-level management, and a company-wide meeting that the majority of the company attends. In the quarterly meetings, the BSC is given a deep analysis and is used to make business decisions, whereas, in the company-wide meetings, the BSC is only presented in a method that quickly reviews the company's performance. Through our interviews with executives at Improving, we saw how a specific level of experience and knowledge was required to effectively comprehend the BSC. At an upper level of management, all the executives interviewed and those who attend the quarterly BSC meetings had a consistent understanding of the BSC and appear to be in consensus. When we asked David O'Hara how they maintain this consistency and if there was a common process for teaching new representatives and acquisitions about how to interpret the information from the BSC, he said, "You probably just asked the question that makes me realize we don't do that" [5]. This implies that although they currently have a uniform understanding of the BSC, they don't have a standardized process to maintain it when new parties are involved. Additionally, because these quarterly meetings are only for upper-level management, the high level of understanding of the BSC does not extend below the director level. This can affect how the BSC is interpreted by the rest of the employees in the company-wide meetings.

> "We do not have a standardized teaching method for explaining the Balanced Scorecard. It is mainly tribal knowledge"[5]. - David

To help bridge this knowledge gap, we are presenting Improving with a better visualized Balanced Scorecard dashboard and a teaching guide that will aim to give new representatives, new acquisitions, and current employees a basic understanding of the data within the company's BSC. Moreover, the new visuals added to the BSC dashboard will be easier to interpret from an external perspective and be able to better communicate the story behind the data. Creating a more interpretable dashboard and a standardized training guide can ensure that the information traveling through the company is consistent.

Conclusion

Overall, Improving is highly ranked in regards to their workplace culture. From our research, Improving practices two types of context cultures: high-context for senior management and low-context for middle to low management. The type of context culture is also reliant on the diversity present within their company. Improving also practices a healthy balance between hierarchical and egalitarian leadership styles and uses a top-down approach for making decisions from their Balanced Scorecard. Lastly, we discussed how the executives we interviewed placed a high emphasis on the importance of maintaining a high level of understanding when regarding the BSC and our findings presented a knowledge gap between management levels. We recommended the use of a newly visualized BSC dashboard and a standardized training guide to address these concerns.

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