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Emma Finnigan

Balancing Social Responsibility and Employee Experience in B-Corporations

Organizational Communication Capstone Project

University of Portland

Fall 2018

Supervised by Alexa Dare, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The research conducted is based on the tensions created within a B-Corporation organization that also needs to keep in mind their social and environmental responsibility when making decisions about stakeholders. The question that guided my research was how does employee experience become affected by the pressure of many stakeholders within a B-Corp organization and how does this impact communication at the company. The data was analyzed from qualitative interviews with four employees, field notes of various environments, and artifacts found throughout the space. The disconnect between the perceptions and reality experienced by subjects in various roles within the organization showed that a lack of structure to properly hear and voice opinions resulted in more tensions between stakeholders. Pursuing a conflict model that acknowledges an employee focused communication system is needed in order for employees to speak up in a meaningful and inclusive manner is imperative to balancing multiple stakeholders in a way that is beneficial to all involved.

Key Words: b-corporations, employee, organizational communication, internal, external, stakeholders

Balancing Social Responsibility and Employee Experience

Rationale

Employing sustainable practices have become more popular in the last few years and companies are starting to see the economic and social benefits of obtaining a third party certification. The reasons a company would choose to implement methods used by benefit corporations can range from purely a marketing standpoint or because the company truly embodies these values and wishes to make a difference, or it could be a little of both. An organization that can brand themselves as having a B-Corp Certification allows them to differentiate themselves from competitors and forces them to keep up with issues of employee pay, benefits, and social responsibility. Building and maintaining good relationships with stakeholders is one of the main objectives of embodying the ethical values of benefit corporations, as well as keeping in mind “employee welfare and interests in workplace quality and wages, job satisfaction, including branding to attract employees, and the participatory role of employees in corporate governance, including the promotion of employee voice” (Bishara, 2015, p. 11). The issue involving employee benefits and organizations not following through to the extent in which they advertised or framed their mission to be, is being brought into the light because some companies may be utilizing the benefit corporation structure for reasons that have priority over protecting employee interests. *Organizational Culture in Action: A Cultural Analysis Workbook* states balancing creativity and constraint is difficult when running an organization that has a variety of moving parts, and knowing how much agency and independence to grant an individual versus following a more traditional business framework is a challenge that will be observed in this study (Driskill & Brenton, 2011, p.20).

The organization that was observed was called, Utopic Farm and it is a B-Corp certified grocery store and is home to a group of staff members that gives the company its life and character. The colorful and bright appearance of the store influences the identity and provides an intimate shopping experience that is only available because of the many stakeholders that work together to open it every day. The location in which the data was gathered is set in an area that incorporates the surrounding neighborhood into culture, and the location was also very close to many of the employees who work there. Utopic Farm's identity was built around the friendliness of their staff and the quality of their food, while embodying the close relationships they have with their various stakeholders in their story.

Theoretical Framework

The identity and communication structure that was created at Utopic Farm will be observed through an emic qualitative study and the observations of the organization will be of its parts in relation to the company as a whole. By paying attention to the mundane occurrences, some sort of meaning from the subjects interactions will emerge from unique patterns, which Tracy (2014) explains in *Qualitative research methods: collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. The research is framed through an interpretive paradigm which means it makes sense of the culture through the interactions between employees and other stakeholders whose experience is shaped by what they have experienced from the past and present (Tracy, 2014). The societal norms that are reproduced within the organization exist because of the company's independent drive to follow a more sustainable business structure, and their branding that upholds a responsibility to the public and their employees. The culture can be viewed using the lens of Structuration Theory (Tracy, 2014). This integrative frame describes and includes all of the levels that are included in organizational communication, and shows how interlinking

behaviors create a path to understanding how culture is built (Tracy, 2014). Remembering how communication happens in a smaller environment in relation to a larger environment should be kept in mind when analyzing relationships within an organization.

Structuration Theory summarizes the structure and agency of an organization or any environment with a cultural boundary (Tracy, 2014). This is where rules and expectations manifest themselves, and notices how organizations have different ways of doing things when it comes to the structure and treatment of employees. The organization might have specific rules on how they want to handle tensions, but this could conflict with individuals within the company or other stakeholders. Having a culture where speaking up is valued and bringing something different into the conversation is encouraged can transform workplace conflict because participants will have less fear of repercussions or being ignored all together. Noticing how an organization articulates their own rules and expectations helps negotiate to employees how conflicts can be handled and can result in a more fair outcome for everyone involved (Littlejohn and Domenici, 2007, p. 65).

Applied Literature

Many certified B-Corporations wish to promote a resilient standard that is continually being negotiated within the organization and the image that these companies project to the world is ideally a reflection of their internal values and structures. Tensions within the workplace are inevitable, especially between workers and employers, and the nature of these relationships are slowly evolving with a new era of sustainable collaboration. Based on thousands of projects with BSR membership companies and over fifty interviews with sustainable leaders, a research study redefined sustainable business as a crucial foundation rather than just implementing individual strategies based on the shift towards framing business as a collaboration of all stakeholders

(Cramer, Allison-Hope, Taylor, Richmond, & Bancilhon, 2018, p. 9). Resilience should be an organization's priority and “will be most effective if they are based upon an “act, enable, influence” approach to company strategy, governance, and management” (Cramer et al., 2018, p. 6). Transparency, mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships, and “communicating internally and externally about company ethics, vision, and values” act as points of reference when painting a picture of a successful sustainable businesses (Cramer et al., 2018, p. 9). From a business management perspective of organizations, this research shows how Benefit are always in conflict with having an efficient and profitable business while maintaining their mission statements and responsibility to their employees and corporate social responsibility.

Seeking meaningful work and balancing stakeholders. Looking further into the culture of an organization can tell a lot about how closely a company aligns with the values they promote externally. Research done in “Benefit corporations and implications for employee welfare” explains how psychological contract theory (“PCT”) refers to “employer-employee relationships and is marked by the parties’ understanding of the nature of the relationship and expectations for current and future interactions, which are shaped by forces like culture and law” (Bishara, 2015, p. 9). The lack of loyalty in current high turnover employment relationships have been a result from less investment in employees, and from workers who now desire more meaningful work and want to feel fulfilled within organizations (Bishara, 2015, p. 9). The study suggests that employers have evolved their employee recruiting tactics by emphasizing the “socially conscious nature of their businesses or other activities” and plays into the desire that employees want “autonomy and self-directedness at work” (Bishara, 2015, p. 10). The idea of “mission matters” is not applicable to all workers and this highlights the diversity of intentions each employee possesses when choosing to work at a more accommodating and mission-driven

organization (Bishara, 2015, p. 10). With these factors in mind, the study examined a B-Corp certified company called Etsy, and looked into if the “employee-focused” welfare practices are more productive than traditional business structures. The benefits Etsy has provided their workers consisted of healthcare, living wage, and paid volunteer work, and the research observed how they can scale up as a socially conscious company while maintaining their “stakeholder-focused values” (Bishara, 2015, p. 11). The research explains why a company would want to become a benefit corporation and explains that branding is one of the reasons why an organization has the desire to maintain employee satisfaction in order to keep an image of being a beneficial company to work for (Bishara, 2015, p. 13). It also hints that “virtue washing” would become a marketing ploy geared towards future employees looking to work at mission-driven companies (Bishara, 2015, p. 13).

Benefit corporations have “the potential to be an innovative vehicle for employee voice and participation because of the mission-driven nature of the company and the depth of requiring to report on employee issues,” but the current social entrepreneur model that puts employees as more of a priority is “difficult to measure” and is unknown until further research is conducted about issues of overpromising (Bishara, 2015, p. 16). The study concluded with the concept that benefit corporations are not being held accountable enough and do not have to follow through on their social responsibility and their obligation to stakeholders, including employees (Bishara, 2015, p. 16).

Another study by Lăzăroiu (2015) called “Employee motivation and job performance” found similar findings in that there was a correlation between employee needs in relation to job value and how important this is in creating a productive environment. It explores these concepts through multiple theories such as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer’s ERG Theory.

Maslow's theory explains the external and internal needs of employees which can be met with a fulfillment of their professional position, "demand for self-respect, a sentiment of trust, accomplishment, and self-determination" (Lăzăroiu, 2015, p. 98). Satisfaction with one's work increases when managers give workers a chance to show their competence by getting involved in activities that allow for independent decision making and by clarifying what is expected of them within the organization (Lăzăroiu, 2015, p. 98). By framing the value of meaningful work with the concept existence, resistance, and growth (ERG), it can help explain what influences employees to act a certain way by connecting patterns. Alderfer's ERG theory allows workers to "to pursue fulfillment of higher level demands before lower level demands are satisfied" and this ties back to the importance of feeling satisfied and content with one's work (Lăzăroiu, 2015, p. 100). Which is the responsibility of the organization to help shape the motivational processes of employees.

Continuing with the theme of how employee attitudes should coexist with job satisfaction, another article called "Source of recruitment and employee attitudes: An analysis of job involvement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction" by Latham and Leddy (1987) investigates the recruitment process and how this influences employee attitudes throughout their career. The data was collected with a voluntary short questionnaire with 68 employees and the findings suggested that employees hired through "word of mouth" had more positive attitudes toward their job compared to those recruited through newspaper and journal advertisement (Latham & Leddy, 1987, p. 232). All three of these studies show the importance of implementing communication practices for employees to increase feelings of fulfillment and thus resulting in a more successful company.

Davis (2005) establishes this theme of meaningful work by focusing on a study that involves students from two different schools and how narrative plays a role in how well the students are integrated into that environment in “Narrative as a tool in organizational socialization: Secular sermonic rhetoric in employee orientation programs.” Stories act as a way for workers to get involved in corporate culture and help them navigate situations which results in increased motivation from an understanding of the shared systems (Davis, 2005, p. 119). A feeling of belonging to a space occurs when narratives help create certain awareness’s of power structures, and explains that “people who are well socialized in their organizational roles have greater personal incomes, are more satisfied, more involved with their careers, more adaptable, and have a better sense of their personal identity” (Davis, 2005, p. 120). Being familiar with the organizations language, goals, history and values are what creates a stronger sense of attachment and feeling of meaningful interaction in the workplace (Davis, 2005, p.121).

Employee Voice. Feeling empowered and perceiving one's purpose as more than replaceable in an organization can change the work environment, and all three of these studies propose tools that allow employees to fully utilize their skills and abilities by giving them a voice. In the article, “New employee development tactics: Perceived availability, helpfulness, and relationship with job attitude,” Holton (2001) surveyed 378 new bachelor graduates and reported low availability of many tactics but high perceived helpfulness. The results showed that the amount of training programs and mentoring are less available to new employees, even though a large amount of them found these helpful in adapting to a foreign culture (Holton, 2001, p. 82). The lack of proper training does not allow employees to fully use their skills and inhibits one's success, while “devoting resources to providing high quality new employee development initiatives pays off with higher job satisfaction, commitment and psychological success and with

lower post-decision dissonance and intent to leave” (Holton, 2001, p. 84). This shows how training people to remember that they have a voice within the company is important in developing new employee-employer interactions.

Consistently keeping track of how an organization's employees are feeling about their work gives them the voice that is missing from the communication processes a lot of the time. “The impact of leadership style and employee empowerment on perceived organizational reputation” by Men and Stacks (2013) utilized an online survey given to 700 employees from a diverse set of companies. The study found that employees felt more empowered when given the chance to show competence and decision-making control, and perceived to be more supportive of the organizational reputation because of factors such as organizational leadership (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 171). Autonomy in decision making results in workers being satisfied with their jobs, and have them become more committed to the team and organization. Empowered employees that are promoted to have self-determination can revolutionize a more positive environment by engaging and showing transparency with one another (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 176). Creating a more constructive relationship with an organization stems from employees learning about the organization’s mission, performance, future goals, providing high expectations and then employers showing a concern for the employee’s well-being through transformational leadership (Men & Stacks, 2013, p. 176). Employee voice can only be heard if the employees feel empowered enough to speak up.

Role of relationships and emotional trust. The imperative role of developing strong relationships with employees is highlighted by De Chernatony, Drury, and Segal-Horn (2004) who studied in-depth interviews with services branding consultants in “Identifying and sustaining services brands’ values.” Identifying the values of services brands is constructed

internally within the organization and this is where the issue of gaps between image and identity can be found (De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2004, p. 73). Internal and external brand values need to be discussed in different ways and human resources management can help express the trustworthiness of a company which comes from the companies own confidence in who they are and how well they are structured in order to support a conducive environment for staff support (De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2004, p. 73). A statement from a market research consultant proposed that an organization cannot work properly without the staff “[living] and [breathing] the brand...it has got to permeate through all levels of the company,” and having brand values of treating customers like friends or family can only exist if the staff are treated with respect and have their well-being in mind (De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2004, p. 83). Processes that allow for open and ongoing dialogue between people in senior positions and any other type of employees about tensions within the company can help build relationships after a development of trust is made (De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2004, p. 84).

Kumara and Koichi (1989) in the study “Employee satisfaction and job climate: An empirical study of Japanese manufacturing employees” identified supportive supervision, co-worker social support, and job awareness as communication tactics that worked to develop a positive work environment. After giving questionnaires to 150 employees at two Japanese manufacturing companies, they found that supportive supervision of employee’s resulted in satisfaction with job climate and co-workers felt satisfied when they were being socially supportive by being shown “cooperation, personal commitment, mutual trust and respect” (Kumara & Koichi, 1989, p. 328). The emphasis on trust and developing relationships within the workplace is again highlighted by this study and this research also brings into question what factors specifically determine satisfaction within American workers, who possess more

individualistic characteristics. “Refined understanding of perspectives on employee-organization relationships” by Ni (2007) follows a similar theme that emphasizes the importance of healthy organizational relationships and how the perceptions of organizational members influence employee-organization relationships (EOR). The study used 58 qualitative interviews with managers and employees in companies in China, and the study found that EOR results in increased “trust, control mutuality, and commitment” (Ni, 2007, p. 53). On the individual level, it was separated into core employees (those who have an emotional attachment to organization) versus non-core employees (employees who are there just for employment), and found there was a demand for a deeper relationship for most employees, and that companies should strive to meet these expectations.

Structuration theory has helped guide the understanding of the concepts found in the quantitative research studies by translating them into a communication based approach that focuses more on how an organizations culture can affect employee experience. The data proposed in these quantitative studies have helped frame and explain some aspects of the research that falls under a more antiquated business model, and showed studies that focused on how large groups felt about specific communication avenues which added to the depth of this research.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do employees within a B-Corp make work meaningful?

RQ2. How is employee experience affected by the pressure of many stakeholders within a B-Corp organization?

Proposed Methodology

In order to observe and learn from the experiences of employees at a B-Corp Certified organization and how they personally identify with the company, I collected data with head notes during the shifts and meetings I attended, and then documented the experience in field notes (Tracy, 2014). I also conducted four interviews with employees from a variety of positions and departments. Interview subjects were contacted in person or via email, and a different set of interviewees could be collected by asking for permission at another location if necessary. My role as an insider has allowed me to get a deeper look into the world of Utopic Farm, but it has been done in an ethical manner and with the least amount of bias possible. I observed and interviewed employees who I am not too familiar with and have kept my personal opinions about the company out of my analysis of the data.

The two managers who I interviewed had worked at larger companies before Utopic Farm and were in similar positions before they got their current job. The floor level interviewees are in their early twenties and have picked to work at the company because of the proximity to their homes and had known people in the company before they started working there. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended so that employees did not feel constrained or guided to answer a certain way. Throughout the forty pages of interviews, field notes, and artifacts, certain trends and patterns were highlighted by the data. Also, I used pseudonyms when referring to their experiences in my research and made sure to hide their position within the company and any unique characteristics that could potentially reveal their identity (Tracy, 2014).

Findings

Utopic Farm's most characterizing trait is its close knit community and one-of-a-kind staff that play off of each other's goofiness and ability to make light of their everyday work activities while still keeping a sort of professionalism. By being an insider, these qualities are

made even more apparent and being able to feel that tangible energy in the store is something that differentiates it from other organizations. Living the experience of someone who is a part of the culture allows the visibility of the more hidden tensions to come alive in the breakroom and throughout the work day where employees are constantly changing the face they portray to the world. The constant movement within departments, the continual conversational customer-employee interactions, and playful music that is perpetually sounding throughout the store encompasses the reality that exists from an outside perspective. Once an employee is behind the counter or has a brown apron or chefs coat on, this whole experience shifts from a store that seemingly moves smoothly from a customer perspective, but in reality it's chaotic and complex, and only calms down once the last customer leaves. The polarizing difference in the answers and opinions of the subjects on their specific work life experiences showcases the duality of perception when it comes to working for a large company. The similarities in the data shows the unspoken desire for more change, but highlights there is not an efficient system in place to properly understand one another's perspective and to resolve conflict. The themes were established based on the obvious divide between experience and perception. The employee accounts were then categorized into different codes that stuck out as either being characterized by identity, culture, or issues. Many interviewees stated the same wants and issues, and this helped shape the themes into more distinct areas of communication that create the culture and structures existing within Utopic Farm.

The research question that guided my findings was focused mainly on the sole experience of employees from different positions within the company, and how their personal hierarchical level affected how they viewed the benefits accessible to them and the company as a whole. The tensions and lack of proper communication avenues was painted by the stark contrast of beliefs

between employees in higher power positions and lower power positions. The lack of clear communication was the result of floor staff and the management team not having a mutual understanding of each other's jobs and how stakeholders influence the dynamic of support and perceived expectations. There is a constant struggle to maintain a strict hierarchy and structure within the organization while also creating an environment where voices are encouraged to speak up. Creativity and constraint are constantly pushing back and forth on one another and comes to be a point of tension between employees (Driskill & Brenton, 2011, p.20). The lack of structure for employees on the lower level of the hierarchy affects how they see their identity within the culture of Utopic Farm. This means employee perceptions are more likely to be misguided, and this lack of information doesn't allow them to rationalize the behaviors of those who are higher up in the hierarchy.

Employee Perceptions

Communication Avenues In an interview with Adam, a knowledgeable character within the company that also reports to headquarters about the situation at that specific location, acknowledged a lack of strong communication avenues that would have the ability to spread opportunities and important information throughout the different levels and departments in Utopic Farm. Adam stated:

I think from a store support, down to store leadership, down to department manager and leads and clerk level, I think there's a big opportunity there. First of all that's a fairly long game of telephone and I think that's something we're trying to learn how to reduce that, we're trying to leverage our boards better in the breakroom and other parts of the store, you know we're trying to leverage huddles more regularly, so all of those things we're working on, I don't think we've cracked it yet. [F2, P10]

A perspective from this type of position recognizes the hardship of effectively communicating the same information to all of the stakeholders involved in running the organization, and the comparison to a “game of telephone” characterizes how much can truly be lost in translation. He also voices communication can be spread with huddles and event boards, which shows the value in a variety of communication avenues.

Speaking Up vs Being Heard Another aspect of communication that shows potential for employees to share their true perceptions of their working experience is a program that promotes speaking up by allowing the person to write their concerns on a piece of paper and put it in a box that is read on a weekly basis. It allows more controversial thoughts to be put out in the open which lessens the fear of repercussions when past communication avenues have failed to give employees this outlet. This form of communication highlights the difference between speaking up versus being heard and this example was posted on the whiteboard in the breakroom by an anonymous subject:

“All I see is management being absent from the floor and ops people being spread thin + taken advantage of. One of the happiest, busiest people in this store is being let go because they can’t get a title change.” QUIT TAKING ADVANTAGE OF GOOD PEOPLE

RESPONSE: “Thank you so much for taking the time to speak up and share your concerns! I’d really love the opportunity to connect about these concerns in person. Talking face to face allows us to understand each other better and make sure we have all the facts. Some of what you said was not factual and we can talk about those things and any other concerns you have if you’d like to connect with me.” 8/6/18 [Artifact 2]

In large companies, differing perceptions of the quality of life are constantly being felt, but are not always being voiced. This exemplar shows this disconnect, but the way in which this conflict resolving model is structured allows both parties to learn the others perspective without having hierarchical structures pose as a barrier to emerging perceptions.

Trust and Morale Issues A lack of trust and morale issues is a problem that is hidden below the surface and adds to the underlying tensions that are in every company or organization. This is a response from a store wide “coffee talk” that employees and management could attend to ask questions and share updates about the company:

People still feel like they can't speak up, concerns about getting in trouble or their career being impacted. They feel they need to speak around instead. Also, people aren't feeling heard. People are giving up, tired of not feeling heard or feeling criticized or shot down. There has been a loss of trust- this gets rebuilt when we can be in the same room and have a candid conversation. Sometimes the people who can actually address the issue don't actually know about the issue, which means the issue doesn't get addressed. Kathy is always available, Bianca is always available, your store leadership is available. Don't give up on speaking up. Suggestion: More communication around the speak up box in the store. [A1, P1]

Disconnect Again, this showcases the large disconnect between the employee perceptions of leadership and floor staff. To note, the title “floor staff” is not exactly correct because a lot of people in leadership positions help out on the floor when a specific department is understaffed to make sure everything is running to the expectations of the company. To even further show the amount of disconnect between telling employees to speak up if they feel uncomfortable and creating an environment that actually allows for people to voice their

concerns in a meaningful and comfortable way is shown by Brad, whose responsibility is to act as an outlet for people to disclose perceptions of their work experience:

Well speaking up from the staff perspective is one to be able to share their concerns, we want people to be able to get what they need and you can't really get that if you don't speak up and are heard. It's one thing to be able to speak up, it's another thing to know that what you're speaking up about is actually going to land and be heard. [F3, P4]

By implying that staff needs to speak up in order to be heard, this statement doesn't focus on active listening and it doesn't look into why staff do not feel comfortable to speak up in the first place. Another quote from the coffee talks that was responded to by Lisa, shows how "Speaking Up" is a concept that is easier said than done, and acknowledges that employees feel personally affected when management can't understand the amount of support that is needed in that type of position.

The meetings didn't feel engaging and people are working hard and don't feel supported- "people" feels to some like third priority in the 3 Ps. Response: We are a people company that cares about the planet and has to make a profit, in order to continue to exist. If you are feeling like the company doesn't care about you, talk to Karen, talk to Alice, talk to Kelsey or Finn or Ben, talk to your store managers. [A1, P2]

The tension between the seemingly two distinct perspectives of management and staff leads to the complex and messy relationship of multiple stakeholders trying to interact in a way that gets their specific job done, but this reveals there's little knowledge of the perspective of the stakeholder they are working with. For example, employees do not truly know the perspective of the supplier, but all staff will see is that an order didn't come in and this acts as a barrier for them to make their selling goals. From an insider perspective, the feeling of lack of support and an

always existing tension was similar to the experiences of those stated above and I was unaware of the quantity of responsibilities leadership must deal with when organizing with other stakeholders. The data showcases that it is easy for employees to be blinded by their specific department bubble and tend to go straight to blaming without keeping in mind the hundreds of other stakeholders who help keep the company afloat.

Stakeholder Relationships

Balancing Stakeholder Relationships Balance is one of the most difficult aspects of running a company and many stakeholders may feel like they are not receiving enough support, based on past exemplars. When prompted about the existing tensions, there was a discursive shift that shifted the communication from a leadership-staff issue, to a more broader and complex issue that took into consideration the many outside influences that affect the experience in that one location. When asked if they felt that each department feels equally supported, Brad's response was:

You know support is a really difficult thing to categorize because at the end of the day it's largely subjective, your perception of support is largely going to be different than someone else's. So I don't know if I can really answer that really cleanly, but think about it like this, like you've got stakeholders. Right, customers are a stakeholder, our employees are stakeholders, you've got kind of the community at large...when you consider that, that's a lot of different people to have feel supported. Obviously we are here because of our customers, they're really important, but we couldn't do the work we do if we didn't have our staff. We wouldn't have any products on the shelves if we didn't have our vendors, so in my mind support is kind of like balancing all of those

stakeholders in the most even and fair way possible. So it can be really difficult but I would say in general most people are really supported. [F3, P4]

Besides the expectations versus the reality presented by people with different amounts of power within the walls of Utopic Farm, this exemplar provided another perspective of how all stakeholders need to be present in the conversation in order to talk about issues in a way that can help expand an overall understanding.

Antiquated business model A more systemic and business centric model of looking at communication was brought up by Brad, one of the stores main leadership guidances and he stated:

I think the things that I would change, a lot of those really go back to systems and processes that are antiquated and it's a challenge that almost every business is facing right now. You know like our customers kind of changing in front of us every day. In terms of how they utilize technology, the expectations are getting a lot higher, gaging what those are and actually going on the back end and addressing those is really difficult and very costly, but we hear about those things everyday like in my mind the biggest issue that we face is grocery running out of stock of items and a lot of it doesn't have to do with what we can control in the store, it's what our business model needs to adjust to, we need to get more efficient, we need to get faster, being out of stock today shouldn't be considered okay you know but it's a really difficult challenge when you start to think about all of the stakeholders and all that, how that spiral can go, it's a big challenge. [F3, P6]

This paints a helpful picture of what a company's product life cycle truly looks like and doesn't just focus on interactions within the store. All stakeholders are equally important in the success of the business, but it is important to note that not all stakeholders carry the same amount of

power, and it is highlighted by the experiences of the staff that some stakeholders do need more support in order to feel cared for.

Indirect Communication

Passivity Both of these factors of differing employee perceptions and the difficulty of balancing stakeholders impedes the amount of support management can give to floor staff. This information is lost in translation and it leads to less efficient and even tension building communication. Differing opinions about the effectiveness of the current interpersonal relationship dynamic within the organization shows itself as passive aggressive statements and unclear communication about the expectations of what management wants from staff and vice versa. Thomas spoke about what he thinks could change about the communication within the company and stated:

I would want more communication because there's a lot of...like at any workplace there's favoritism and with retail I feel like it has a lot to do with management too. And like, it's hard to fathom the words, but they like, they're very passive with telling you how, like how they actually feel, or go to your friend and be like hey, this guy is, he is doing something wrong, they won't actually go straight to you. [F1,P3]

This exemplar speaks to the tangible conflict that occurs with leadership and how it is acted out within the workplace.

The Power of Huddles The lack of a structure put in place such the involvement of huddles for the night crew and other employees that are not able to participate in one because they need to be working emphasizes the gap in areas where employees can voice their opinions on a smaller scale. Adam mentions after stating that leadership is good at doing morning check ins, but states:

We're not great at doing our afternoon huddles regularly so a lot of the times the information that's passed along during the morning huddle doesn't necessarily get to our later shift folks. [F2, P11]

The amount of information that is given to employees with this particular communication avenue does make a huge difference in how the rest of the day is framed. The unequal distribution of information translates into more separated teamwork and effects the collaborative mission of the company. This next exemplar highlights the disconnect that Mike shared when he used to work with the company:

It's good for everyone being on the same page and morale and there's a lot of good reasons but if anything, that's one of my biggest complaints that there is no, feels like everyone is just doing their own thing even if they're in the same department. [F1, P4]

Sharing the same line of thought and having the same expectations are imperative in having a department run smoothly and so there are no mess ups. Although friendship and community are heavily intertwined in the culture, there is a difference between friendly work relationships and divided and indirect work collaboration.

Identity/Values Indirect communication stems from how an employee sees themselves in relation to their job and how their job comes to identify them. This then shapes their work experience and affects whether they feel comfortable enough to speak up. Not everyone has that Utopic Farm vibe and this shown by the conversation between two floor staff:

Nick: He's just very, he's not New Seasony if that makes sense. Mike: He's not seasoned.

Nick: He's not seasoned newly. Mike: He's not freshly seasoned like you guys [F1, P2].

The comparison of who fits in and who doesn't means that there is a certain type of person who is favored at Utopic Farm and this could be a reference point in finding what makes people not want to speak up if they do feel different than everyone else.

Discussion

Setting up expectations for all stakeholders involved in the process of an organization is important in understanding where the gap in perspective stems from and helps in facing the tensions that comes from indirect communication. The lack of understanding of other stakeholders leads to passivity between the different between management and staff, and this results in more conflict and a less conducive working environment which will then affect the overall identity of the company. Incorporating B-Corp values into the mix makes the issue that much more complex because of the pressure to keep up with the variety of social and environmental rules and regulations. With so many stakeholders and systems involved, the best way to simplify it so that the tension are acknowledged in a non-passive way is through the sharing of information with huddles, boards, and discussions about the influence of other stakeholders. This organization has overlooked the importance of giving their employees more learning opportunities and the necessary structures needed to implement them.

The difference in experience between the morning and night crew showed how huddles deeply affects the quality of work life and this is different for each department. Utopic Farm is a relatively smaller corporation and it has been disadvantaged from the fast paced growth of the company because there are not systems put in place that can account for and responsibly handle the voices of many stakeholders effectively and this affects employee experience. Many employees lack the knowledge of all of the other stakeholders involved which makes it more difficult for them to feel heard and feel like they are getting the support they need. Also,

acknowledging that management speaks about the culture and identity of Utopic Farm from a place of power can help the process of creating a plan that encompasses the demands of multiple stakeholders. Since employees have the least amount of power out of the stakeholders, looking into this dynamic is powerful in understanding that even though all stakeholders may be equally important, some stakeholders need more attention and spaces where they feel heard than other ones. This can then help create a plan that encompasses the demands of every single person that contributes to a company. Not all stakeholders are being taken enough into consideration when concerning matters such as communication within the workplace and complex relationships.

Structuration theory can be used to discuss the interconnectedness of stakeholders and the reliance on one another to function efficiently in an organization because they need each other in order to do their job (Driskill & Brenton, 2011, p. 19). The current structure of how the organization operates favors a more traditional business model rather than implementing systems that allow for voices to be heard and not just listened to. The employees experience in the company and how they feel about Utopic Farm is based on their unique experience within their department and the amount of support they receive within that department sets the tone for their whole outlook on the culture. Structuration helps further explain this by explaining each employee has choices and constraints within an organization and employees are able to change or question these structures in place (Driskill & Brenton, 2011, p. 19). From the data, the employees that voiced their opinion didn't care how high the company scored as a B-Corporation or what values were celebrated, they were unhappy with how they were being treated and didn't understand how the structure functions as a whole which showcased how the issues and tensions arose.

This research provides value to any organization that have tension promoting power dynamics and multiple stakeholders involved in important decision-making. For example, this research can be applied to a hospital environment where doctor-nurse conflict is widely apparent and can lead to deadly medical mistakes. Implementing pre-shift huddles that includes doctors and nurses or even discussing before consulting a patient can increase “the amount of understanding of the nature of the relationship and expectations for current and future interactions” which is stated by the Psychological contract theory (“PCT”) (Bishara, 2015, p. 9). This deeper understanding is the foundation for growth between employees and other stakeholders.

The mission driven structure of B-Corporations allow them to be an “innovative vehicle for employee voice and participation” because it calls for a system where employees can meaningfully report on employee issues (Bishara, 2015, p. 16). This study backs up that statement, but there is still a gap that involves the overpromising of properly hearing employee voices (Bishara, 2015, p. 16). It would misguided to say that this organization is not following through on their value of employee welfare, but there does need to be a stronger system in place that holds them accountable if they do not follow through on their obligation to their stakeholders, especially employees.

Conclusion

It is naive to say that a company is good or bad, and it is healthy to acknowledge the polar opposite views within a company is a breeding ground for growth and creativity. The limitations that was experienced during this study was the difficulty to not be bias when examining the data, especially when collecting it. It was easy to think I thought I knew what I was looking for, but being so familiar with the site and the people within it proved to provide me

with blind spots when trying to make sense of the data. In the future, it would be wise to collect data from the other locations and have a mix between the smaller and larger stores. Interviewing employees from more departments and headquarters would also provide a larger look at employee experience. Possibilities for future research would be to look into how the less strict nature of Utopic Farms culture creates for more productivity and how one's own identity can affect their work experience. Delving deeper into the site itself and observing a variety of departments and how they function would shed light on more communication concerns and could act as a point of reference when analyzing the extent to which the company follows through on their values.

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