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Organisational Culture in Learning Organisations: The Case of the Postal Sector

Greek Public Sector/Organisation

Type of organisational culture

"...our organisational culture is bureaucratic, for example, many things are hand-written instead of being automated." (postman)

Flexibility

"...leeway doesn't exist. Any initiative must go through your supervisor..." (department head)

Team behaviour

- "...I don't accept the term 'team/group', because this term doesn't exist in my organisation...I'm going to use this term during our conversation for the sake of our discussion." (department head)

-"Here, there's no dialogue." (hub of selection head)

Organisational support

"...nobody praised us, we don't want money, we just want to hear a compliment." (worker behind the counter)

Meritocracy

"...in all public administration, a non-meritocracy classification occurs...the problem is apparent". (worker behind the counter)

Permanency

"...one can have the required qualifications to hold a key position, but one doesn't want to apply for it because of the civil servant 'bit'..." (worker behind the counter)

Fear

"...we can't adapt the dictated goals...I'm afraid to do something different or to change something..." (postman)

Liberalisation of the postal market

"Our organisation is preparing for this open market, but I don't see how." (worker behind the counter)

Purpose

My purpose is to assess the extent to which team learning and collaboration are promoted or hindered by the organisational culture of public and private organisations.

Argument

My main theoretical argument is that team learning and collaboration are the crucial denominators of the concepts of organisational culture and learning culture. The learning organisation and organisational learning are seen as two sides of the same coin. Team learning and collaboration, which are vital to the learning organisation in terms of instilling a learning culture, appear to emphasise organisational learning.

Method

The research methodology consists of mixed methods research including a quantitative questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Two Greek organisations in the postal sector, one public and one private, were involved in this research. The selection of this sector was defined by the liberalisation of the postal market, which took place on 1st January 2013. A key research question is how the investigated organisations use their team learning and collaboration characteristic to prepare for this open market.

Findings

My findings suggest that the bureaucratic organisational culture of the public organisation hinders team learning and collaboration, whilst the supportive organisational culture of the private organisation promotes them. In effect, this implies whether or not organisational learning is achieved in the public and private organisation. There is a better culture for team learning and collaboration in the private organisation. From the participant's quotes one can see that the concepts of flexibility, team behaviour, organisational support, change, meritocracy, and liberalisation of the postal market appear to have no meaning for the public sector employees. However, this is not the case in the private organisation.

Conclusion

During a period of economic crisis, which especially affected Greece, public and private organisations should invest in the 'team learning and collaboration' characteristic. This, in turn, will allow them to take full advantage of external change and give them an edge on competitors.

Why the Greek public sector/organisation appears to be so bad?

1.The Greek state was already dominated by a deep crisis at all levels.

2.The Greek labour market has unique characteristics, and there is a clear distinction between the Greek public sector and other western European public sectors.

3.What has already happened since 2010 and what is intended for the future make Greece a unique case since the sovereign debt crisis impacted especially on the Greek public sector, which entered a new era in conditions of extreme fiscal stringency.

Greek Private Sector/Organisation

Type of organisational culture

"Our work is based on teamwork, and we help each other. It's a supportive organisational culture." (worker behind the counter)

Flexibility

-"... the upper and lower personnel are very close, because we're all operating within a united team." (worker behind the counter)

Team behaviour

-"...we've a high demand for teamwork, and that's the reason we're a strong team."(postman)

Organisational support

"...with moral rewards everything is possible...." (postmaster)

Meritocracy

"...those who make the decisions are those who must indeed make them, because they have the experience that is needed for this position and...they know what they're doing....they deserve to hold their current position." (postman)

Permanency

"...we don't have 'truancy' here, it's a private company you know." (postman)

Fear

"I'm not the 'boogieman'. If your employee is afraid of you, then he/she'll grab the opportunity to stab you in the back". (postmaster)

Liberalisation of the postal market

"...this is manifest in the efforts made by our company to be ready for this open market...to be ready to accept an extra tight schedule...and this is understood by our employees...the entire workforce knows that something big is going to happen from the 1st January 2013. " (regional manager)