

Organization of The St. Norbert Women's Basketball Team

Introduction

While St. Norbert College is an important organization, I am focusing on the specifics of the organization of the St. Norbert Women's basketball team. The team is in De Pere, Wisconsin where they compete against other DIII collegiate teams. Luckily, I am an athlete of this team, so I will be able to provide insight on some of their organizational practices. Organizational communication is seen through six different approaches: classical, human relations, human resources, systems, constitutive, and critical. Going further in depth, I will translate how the St. Norbert women's basketball team recognizes these approaches within their organization. From there, I will discuss how the St. Norbert women's basketball team characterizes their organizational processes through conflict management and organizational change and leadership, which filters into how the St. Norbert women's basketball team handles challenges they face today.

Organizational Framework

The St. Norbert women's basketball team works together as an organization to achieve success during their season and in the off season. The machine metaphor is a concept from the classical approach, "The notion of a metaphor in organizational theorizing suggests that we can learn something about organizations by considering a disparate object that an organization resembles" (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 18). An organization is brought together by different parts, but they are all working together to achieve the same goal. Specialization is one of the aspects used to describe the machine metaphor; for example, think of a car engine having different parts, but each part has a specific function that allows the car to run smoothly (Miller &

Barbour, 2022, pg. 18). Likewise to this example, the women's basketball team is made up of different positions within the organization. Within this organization is the athletic director, the committee board, the coaches, players, and fans. The athletic director works with the team to ensure there are games scheduled for competition, the committee board works as a financial aid in allowing the team to have new apparel each year or potential equipment that is needed, the coaches are there to help and guide the players, the players are obviously there to compete for success, and the fans are in the gym cheering their team on. The different positions within this organization show the importance of specialization because without one of those five aspects, there would be no cooperating organization. The next two components of the machine metaphor are standardization and replaceability, meaning that there are similar parts within an organization that can be easily replaced. The five positions of the St. Norbert women's basketball team can easily be replaced by another person. For example, if the coach does not fulfill the organization's standard of winning games, they can easily be replaced by another coach. Similarly, if a player quits, there are more athletes out there that can replace the one who quit. The last component of the machine metaphor is predictability meaning "There are rules that govern the way a machine is built and how it operates" (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 19). The basketball team is predictable, we know what their main goals are, which are winning and making it to the championship. To do this, the organization needs to follow set rules and standards to achieve this goal. Some of the rules are winning a certain number of games to be eligible for the NCAA tournament or not practicing for more than seven days in a row. Overall, the St. Norbert women's basketball team reflects the classical approach through the machine metaphor because of the different positions that operate together, the easy replaceability of those positions, and the organization following set standards or rules to remain successful.

The St. Norbert women's basketball team encapsulates the human relations approach through Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y approach. The two different theories are related towards managers of an organization, but in this case, I reflect it based on the coaches. Theory X coaches are those who lack ambition, dislikes responsibility, is self-centered, and resistant to change (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 43). Theory Y coaches are those who are committed to rewarding their players for their achievements, seek responsibility, exercises imagination and creativity, and are motivated to encourage their players (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 43). Within the St. Norbert women's basketball team, our coaches do a great job in practicing Theory Y tendencies, they reward their girls by playing the athletes who are successful in working hard and show talent on the court. While that is one example, there are multiple different instances in which they show Theory Y habits.

Rensis Likert, the creator of the Likert System IV, contributes to the human resources approach. While discussing the organization of the St. Norbert women's basketball team, I recognized system III within their culture. System III, the consultative organization, is when decisions are made from the people at the top of the hierarchy; however, before these decisions are made, they consult their employees to ensure everyone approves of the arrangement (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 51). The top of the hierarchy is the athletic director, Cam Fuller, who makes the important decisions. Before he does this, he needs to consider the approval of the coaches, players, and everyone else. This is a very productive way to make sure everyone in an organization is satisfied, it allows everyone's opinions to be heard because they need approval from all participants before making a final judgement.

When I think of the women's basketball team, I think of it has a learning experience for young women to grow throughout their college years. Because of this, I see the input-

throughput-output processes within this organization. The basic explanation of this is putting information into an environment, then that information is transformed within that environment, finally the output is returning that transformed information back into the original environment. Likewise to the basketball team, the girls are put into this environment when they are freshman. From there, they are transformed into mature and organized adults that learn important concepts through basketball, such as, learning how to manage their time properly between school and sports. Once they are seniors, the output is putting these young women back into an environment where they are not athletes anymore, but they carry the information they have learned with them throughout life.

The Four Flows, which cooperates with the constitutive approach, is seen in the St. Norbert women's basketball team program. Specifically, the self-structuring flow which "provides norms, standards, and rules for getting work done in organizations" (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 91). Not only that, but it also involves communication that is more permanent such as legal documents, policy procedures, and schedules (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 91). The basketball team has many communicative methods to ensure progress is seen. For example, there are set standards for practices; for instance, making sure we have different color jerseys for certain drills, bringing energy to the team while practicing, and always giving your best effort to make practice meaningful. As for legal documents, the team must sign somewhat of a "contract" that is provided from the NCAA. When the athlete signs this contract, it means that they are not allowed to do certain things; for example, we cannot participate in sports betting or take any illegal substances even if they are legal in other states (i.e., marijuana).

The critical approach refers to an idea called hegemony, "a process in which a dominant group leads another group to accept subordination as the norm" (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg.

105). While reading about hegemony, I thought of the actual athletes of the organization. There is a certain hierarchy within the athletes that are followed because of tradition and norms. For instance, the norm is that the captains of the team are the leaders and everyone on the team must listen to them. If there are no captains, then it is most common that the seniors of the team are the leaders because of the experience difference. The seniors are seen as the dominant group while the rest of the team, the underclassman, are the subordinate group who abides to what the leaders have to say.

Organizational Processes Analysis

Every organization experiences conflict from time to time, but the way they manage this conflict will either make or break their business. There are three I's of conflict: incompatible goals, interdependence, and interaction. At times, the organization can have incompatible goals between the people within the organization. For example, last year was the first season we had since Covid. Therefore, there were strict guidelines on masking up while playing basketball. Obviously, this was hard to do because of the constant headache of keeping the mask up, not being able to breathe well, and so on. My coach, who is very cautious of our health, got to a point at the end of the season where she did not care about the masks anymore. For obvious reasons, the athletic director was still very strict on wearing masks during practice and in games. There were incompatible goals between the two, which started a conflict between our team and our athletic director. Organizational conflict has multiple phases: latent conflict, perceived conflict, felt conflict, manifest conflict, and conflict aftermath. In the example above, the most apparent phase was manifest conflict which is, "Conflict is enacted through communication. Interaction might involve cycles of escalation and de-escalation as various strategies are used" (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 161). The conflict between my coach and our athletic director was

very up and down. At first, there was an escalation of negative feelings towards each other because both were upset, but it eventually de-escalated, and they figured out a way to work with each other and resolve their conflict. In the textbook, I read something that I thought was very intriguing, “We use the term conflict management rather than conflict resolution because of the point made previously about the ongoing nature of conflict and because of the complexity of most conflict situations” (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 161). I thought this was very thought-provoking because many people believe that conflict needs to be resolved immediately; in fact, that is not the case because organizations continuously experience conflict in some way.

“No organization that remains static – stuck in particular ways of doing things and particular modes of thinking – will survive long” (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 177). Four years ago, the St. Norbert women’s basketball team got a new head coach, Amanda Perry. This was extreme change in the organization because Connie Tilley was the head coach for 42 years, but it was time for the program to experience someone new. In most organizations, there are usually problems that occur for there to be change; however, this was not the case for my organization. When this change occurred, the tactic tell and sell was used to communicate what was about to happen in the organization. There are four strategies for communicating about change: spray and pray, tell and sell, underscore and explore, identify and reply, and withhold and uphold. Tell and sell is when, “Management selects a limited set of messages regarding core organizational issues. Management “tells” employees about these issues and then “sells” employees on the wisdom of the chosen approach” (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 181). While Tilley retired from her position, the organization and herself decided to use this approach when communicating what her plan of action was going to be. Her sell point was that she was getting too old to continue with coaching and it was time for her to step down. The employees, or players, were disappointed at first, but

came to understand the reasoning of the organization changing. What is interesting about this development is that it was an adjustment in the leadership position. Leadership is critical in times of organizational change, so Coach Perry had to come in with many responsibilities on her shoulders because of this major change. Her communication methods within this change showed how she obtained great leadership skills from her previous coaching experiences. In press releases, interviews, and communication with the team she promised to bring the team to excellence and not let the traditions set from Tilley be forgotten.

Organizational Challenges

The St. Norbert women's basketball team does not face many outside challenges that a typical organization would face. One challenge the organization did face was when Covid canceled our 2020-2021 season. We practiced every day, but had no games scheduled because of the pandemic. Therefore, communication with the coach was very necessary to know when practices were, if they were canceled, or if you could not make it because you were sick. A lot of asynchronous communication was involved during this time, "communication between individuals at different points in time" (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 238). Technology allowed the team to stay connected when we were separated, ICT (information and communication technology) made messages be delivered and received faster, so we could communicate appropriately on any questions, concerns, or comments we had for each other. For example, I unfortunately got Covid and had to miss some days of practice. Because of technological advances, it was easy for me to contact my coach and tell her about my illness. Throughout my quarantine, I remained connected with my team through technology, so they knew I was healthy and going to be back at practice soon. Another challenge that this organization still faces is the underrepresentation in their new conference. As of the 2021-2022 season, we compete in a new

conference with new teams. To this day, we are still disrespected from these other teams about how competitive we are and that we are constantly playing with a target on our backs. Our organizational identity continues to be diminished by other teams in this conference. In the textbook, they provide an example of a company that upheld a negative reputation, “Some of these name choices may have been based on size (Delta taking a front seat in branding to the smaller Northwest), but some might also say that the issue of reputation may have also made a difference (as American West was sometimes referred to by customers as ‘Americas Worst’)” (Miller & Barbour, 2022, pg. 260). Our reputation is being belittled every day, but it adds fuel to the fire to compete and practice harder to prove a point that our reputation should not be discredited.

Assessment of the Organization

The St. Norbert women’s basketball team has been very successful the past two years. Whether that be based on records or how the organization operates. It can be clearly seen that this organization is ran smoothly and productively because we compete hard, and the outcome is usually positive. The culture of this organization remains supportive of each other, between coaches and players and the positions that are higher on the hierarchy. How the organization structures themselves proves that they are well-established because in times of crisis, they do not back down, but use that conflict to become greater. I note the importance of conflict because it is easy for an organization to break during those times, but the St. Norbert women’s basketball team proves themselves every day that conflict will only make them stronger.

This organization has experienced many changes in the past couple of years, a new coach and a new athletic director made a considerable impact on the program. Some additional changes that I believe would constructively change this organization is allowing the players to have more

input of what happens during their season. In other words, the players should have more responsibility and a voice for what they want during their respected season. I say this because we are the ones who make sure this organization continues, and with that I believe we should be allowed to make decisions or at least have a voice in what decisions are to be made.

Conclusion

The organization of the St. Norbert women's basketball team continues to strive because of the way they display themselves through their structure and processes. Their approaches are apparent through classical, human relations, human resources, systems, constitutive, and critical, while conflict management and change in leadership aids them in striving for greatness. When it comes to organizational conflict, the St. Norbert women's basketball team knows how to work through it and use that conflict to get better. Overall, this organization continues to prove themselves as reputable and respectful in the eyes of others.

References

Miller , K., & Barbour , J. (2022). Chapter Four: System and Cultural Approaches. In *Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes* (7th ed., pp. 62–64). essay, Cengage Learning.