

Four Dimensional System Thinking and Corporate Cultural Change: Three Prescriptions Are Better than One

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This paper is an extension of the author's work on cultural types of business entities (Hu, 2001) and Four-Dimensional System Thinking (4-DST) (Hu, 2004), applying 4-DST to address the issue of corporate cultural change. Through consulting and training activities being conducted in China, the author identified cases of difficulties or failures when organizations tried to implement change on any one dimension: be it cultural (such as, promoting a culture of a "Learning Organization"); structural (such as introducing Business Process Re-engineering or Enterprise Resource Planning or even Stanford Beer's Viable System Model); or micro-process improvements (Detail Management, 5S, TQM, etc). Especially, through the practice of promoting a participatory cultural change through a corporate training course called "Roundtable Leadership" in China (where a non-participatory culture is dominant), feedback from clients indicates that single-dimensional efforts have a much higher failure rate compared with multi-dimensional ones.

The author's hypothesis is that, for effective changes within an organization to happen, change efforts must be implemented on all three basic dimensions – organizational culture, organizational structure, and individual behavior – based on the 4-DST model. A few cases of "single-dimension" efforts at implementing change in organizations are discussed using the 4-DST model, along with suggested improvements. The hypothesis presented in this paper is subject to further experimentation to test its usefulness. Fellow cyberneticians doing consulting work are invited to join this interesting exploration.

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