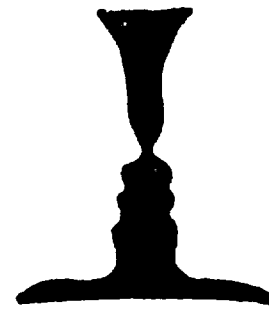


DEA-CIDA CORPORATE CULTURES: TWO SOLITUDES?



The partial decentralization of the Canadian government's development assistance program has led to discussions about the evolving relationship between DEA and CIDA. As a consequence "corporate culture" has become a subject of interest, not only to those who are directly involved at decentralized posts, but to management which must deal with the phenomenon of co-management.

What do we mean when we speak of corporate culture? Most of us associate the word culture with ethnic groups and nationalities, but in fact, it is equally applicable to any distinctive group of people – families, schools, occupational groups, clubs, corporations or nations.

Cultures, like individual characters or personalities, are infinitely complex. They develop slowly over time, and are influenced by a multitude of internal and external factors. Cultural characteristics may, at times, be almost intangible, since individual members of a cultural group subscribe to a set of vague norms (i.e., attitudes, behaviours, and values), which they often find difficult to describe.

Government departments also have their own corporate cultures. They are essentially, groups of people with distinct purposes, genesis, circumstances, histories, constituencies, etc.. As in any group, individual members, share to some degree the values, perceptions, and attitudes of the group. CIDA and DEA are no exceptions.

Decentralization demands a closer working relationship between the two Departments. As with individuals, interaction between two organizations for a common purpose provides an opportunity for their respective organizational development. And benefiting of course, depends on realistic

self-knowledge being accompanied by an openness of mind to what can be learned from the other organization.

Unfortunately, the interaction of two cultures is often governed more by myth than mutual interest in the shared objectives. Understanding the other culture would appear to be a first step towards a more effective relationship. However, cross-cultural studies suggest the old adage First Know Thyself holds true. Understanding one's own culture (be it social or corporate) is the most effective means to understanding others. This acknowledges the impossibility of totally knowing without becoming, and is the real key to acceptance.

Although CIDA and DEA are different organizations in many ways, they also share some common ground. For instance, both organizations are critically dependent on understanding the role of culture in communications and working relationships. Perhaps this skill provides a good jumping-off point for members of both departments to begin to understand the role of corporate culture in the quality of their working environment.

Many of the people involved in the decentralization process, especially those who have been fortunate enough to prove their ability to thrive in both organizations (including Associate Under-Secretary of State, Raymond Chrétien, and the President of CIDA, Marcel Massé) are now beginning to reflect on these two distinctive corporate cultures. What can be learned for the benefit, not only of decentralized aid programs, but for all of us as individuals developing our careers? Your views would be welcomed, signed or anonymous.

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