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• Su trabajo gira en torno a la organización de proyectos empresariales, gubernamentales y de OSC.

• Ha publicado sobre diferentes proyectos de desarrollo en el estado de Chiapas, incluyendo el Programa de las Ciudades Rurales Sustentables, la construcción de la presa Chicoasén II y los intentos de limpiar el Río Grijalva.

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BEYOND BEHAVIORS:

Changing corporate cultures

How can we change cultures in corporations and other organizations? The overwhelming majority of authors working in this field focuses on different ways to implement new behaviors to do so. Nobel prize laureate Esther Duflo assures the listeners to the podcast WorkLife with Adam Grant, that changes are made through new behaviors. These new behaviors will make people think about things in new ways, and thus lead to cultural changes. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in turn suggest that the best way to reach desired changes is by «nudging» people through the design of systems and spaces, to make them take the «right» decisions. And Strategy and Business, in one of the most viewed YouTube clips on corporate culture, suggest that changing an organizational culture has to start with changing behaviors in a group of a chosen few, who will then influence others.



However, not everybody agrees on these straightforward pieces of advice. Anthropologist John Van Maanen, for example, has actually stopped offering support to companies who wish to change their organizational cultures, because of the impossibility that he perceives in the task. What he has set out to do is instead to change managers' way of thinking, to help them trace the hidden values in the organizational culture that already exists.

How can we understand this sharp difference? One important aspect is what different authors think that they set out to change. What draws together the first proposals is obviously the focus on behavior. The clip by Strategy and Business is the clearest example in that sense. Referring to a quote attributed to Marvin Bower, managing director of McKinsey, they suggest that an organizational culture is «the way that we do things around here». In tales from the field, Van Maanen in turn suggests that culture is best understood as a black hole, an all-encompassing totality that is impossible to capture once and for all. Of course, changing certain behaviors appears more feasible to change than a black hole, but what is interesting here is that, despite the significant differences, there are points of contact that can suggest new ways of doing organizational changes.

On the one hand, when filtering Van Maanen's ideas through the behavioral lens offered by the first authors, more concrete changes appear to be viable after all. Even if we don't believe that it is possible to change a whole organizational culture, it is difficult to deny the possibility of changing certain behaviors. On the other hand, the critique concerning the immediate link between behavior and culture,

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implied in Van Mannen's concept of culture, could make attempts to change certain behaviors more realistic. Rather than claiming that a whole organizational culture is about to change, it would reduce the scope to the specific behaviors. But Van Mannen's concept also suggests that behaviors are not the only thing that can change. His work on managers' perceptions suggests that ideas can also drive change or see change that is already unfolding, albeit in unexpected ways, through an improved description of the own organizational culture.

This focus on description and perception in fact represents a common difference between Management Studies and Anthropology, as also Allen Batteau and Gladis Villegas have noticed in «Cultural Change Management in Organizations from Competing Perspectives». Several anthropologists have proposed frameworks to understand basic cultural needs in organizations, with this focus on description and perception. *The moment you can't ignore*, by Malachi O'Connor and Barry Dornfeld, is one good example here, as is the more recent *The culture puzzle*, by Mario Moussa, Derek Newberry and Greg Urban. Both focus on issues such as the place of identity, the informal organization and the way leaders can convey a sense of a shared future, despite all the conflicts that are part of any organization.

Together, what they put forward is then a clear case for the necessity to go beyond behavior when formulating strategies to bring about cultural changes in an organization. Perceptions, descriptions and cultural needs, they claim, are just as important. So, even if a black hole might seem like an odd starting point, it might just be that the most effective path to change begins precisely there. **C**

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