Social Structure Of Barlett And Sabol Law Officies Essay, Research Paper

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SOC 100X

Paper One

Social Structure of Bartlett and Sabol Law Offices

Social structure is a part of every organization, whether formal or informal. A very defined social structure is often evident in the workplace. In my workplace, Bartlett and Sabol Law Offices, the social structure is very concrete. There are many perspectives from which the social structure can be viewed. It can best be discussed in terms of statuses, roles, interactions, formal and informal organization, how members are socialized, norms, and how compliance with the norms is assured.

A brief description of the setup of the office is helpful. There are three lawyers in the office. The actual office is owned by Del, the elderly male lawyer. The two female lawyers rent their office space from Del. In addition to the attorneys, there are two employees. The full time employee is Eric, the paralegal. I am the part time employee. My duties include office management and secretarial tasks.

A look at the statuses in this workplace is key in understanding the social structure. All three attorneys are similar in the fact that they have the achieved status of having become a lawyer. They all attended additional schooling and training to reach this respected status. Eric has the achieved status of college graduate and is treated with the respect deserving of this achievement. He also has the status of paralegal. However, even though becoming a paralegal requires training, his status is considered equal to mine without my having training. My duties do not require special training, but they do require computer and organizational skills. Del has the additional status of owner and head operator of the firm.

The statuses held by the members of this workplace determine the roles in which they are involved. Role performance is fairly easy to determine. Del holds the role of supreme authoritarian on decisions that affect the entire office. He also has the role of paying the employees. The other two lawyers hold the roles as secondary authoritarians. Eric and I have roles as production workers. This means all work that needs to be done or documents that need to be produced occurs through us. I also have other roles which constitute a role set. In addition to a production work role, I have the role of accountant and file clerk as well.

All three attorneys often find themselves in a situation of role strain. Since the practice of choice in this firm is family law, many of the cases involve messy and emotional divorces and adoptions. On one hand, the attorneys are supposed to be caring and help their clients through the case. On the other hand, the attorneys have to be ruthless in the collection of fees for their work. This can entail suing clients who have been extremely delinquent in the payment of their bills. However, more often than not, the attorneys find themselves caught in a humanitarian role and allow the delinquent client to trade a service, such as office cleaning, for the payment of the fees (Zanden).

Interactions are another part of the social structure in this workplace. Del keeps his interactions with Eric formal. This is due to the fact that Eric is new to the firm. With time his interactions will become more informal. All other interactions in the office are informal. Often, interactions are done in writing and notes are left on chairs and desks. One of the female attorneys prefers non-confrontational interactions, while the other prefers face-to-face interactions. This way she feels her instructions and requests are fully and completely understood. Eric and I have very informal interactions. All information passed between us is verbal. In fact, our interactions have fallen into a daily pattern that helps to break up the long workday. This is an often found occurrence in work situations when the work performed is tedious and boring (Roy). We begin the day by discussing the list of work that needs to be done. At lunchtime, Eric gives me an update on the attorneys’ schedules for the rest of the day, then leaves for lunch. After lunch, I update Eric. Then there is the 3:00 “social break” to discuss between us things that are bothering us about the attorneys on that day.

Interactions in the workplace lead to the formal and informal organization of the office. Formally, Del is the head attorney in the office. The other attorneys are secondary in the formal structure. I am next in the line of formal organization with Eric just below me. Eric’s place in the formal organization will change to become equal with mine after he has been with the office for a few more months.

Informally, there is a different organization in the office. In this structure, the reverse of the formal structure is true. Eric and I have control of the office. This is evident in the fact that neither of us can take a sick day without several panic-stricken calls from the attorneys. Also, Eric and I make the decisions for the office and plant them with the attorneys so they appear as their own ideas. This is done through the two female attorneys who then go to Del.

As is the case in most places of work, there is a method for being socialized into the office family. The largest factor for socialization is time. It takes time for everyone to relax and be comfortable enough with a new person to trust them without keeping a close eye on them. For instance, the attorneys rarely check to see if my work is being completed or being completed correctly since I have been with the office for a year. However, Eric has been with the office for only a few weeks. The attorneys often check him on and they go over everything he does with a fine toothed comb. Also, you can only be socialized once you adopt the attitude that belongs in the office. This is a fairly relaxed atmosphere for an office, so if you do not have a sense of humor and take everything said personally, you will not be socialized. The last part of the socialization is complying with the norms. The attorneys are not comfortable with change, and therefore, the norms are very important to them.

The norms of the office allow us to function without having discord among the members of the office and allow us to keep from making contradictory statements to clients. They help to define the appropriate way to act around clients and others who come through our office. Most of the norms are directed toward Eric and I. They consist of proper ways to dress and proper ways to answer the phone or speak with clients. These allow us to coordinate our efforts instead of creating havoc (Becker). Another set of norms deals with the correct way to put papers away and to distribute work to be reviewed. Without these norms the office could not function.

Compliance with the norms is rarely a problem. If an employee does not follow the norms, they will be fired. With as few rules as exist in the office there is no reason for not following them. Another enforcement of complying with the norms is the production of work. If a person does not go along with these norms, files, documents, and other important items are lost and time becomes wasted. If a person is not following the norms set forth in this office, one of the attorneys will talk to him or her and set the person back in the right direction. If one of the attorneys is not following the norms, it simply takes a quick conversation by either Eric or I to find out if new norms are coming into play or if we should continue with the existing norms. The attorneys rarely stray from the norms since they are not fond of any kind of change.

In conclusion, this office offers an interesting social structure. Depending on how you look at the intricacies of the structure, several layers of activity can be seen. The formal and informal organizations are complete opposites in this office. This is why the norms remain simple and easy to adopt. The norms are easily followed by all ends of the spectrum in the organization of the office. The statuses and roles of the office are changing daily and can be seen in the way interactions take place. Overall, it is a complex structure not often found in such a small office.

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