

employee or manager to understand his or her organization better in order to improve it. In between is the consultant's and change agent's need to decipher the culture to facilitate some change program that the organization has launched to solve a business problem. What differs greatly in these cases is the focus and level of depth involved in the deciphering and who needs to know the results. At the end of this chapter, we will also discuss the ethical issues and risks involved in each of these approaches.

Deciphering from the Outside

It is not only the ethnographer or researcher who needs to decipher an organization's culture. The job applicant, the customer, and the journalist all have the need from time to time to figure out what goes on inside a particular organization. They do not need to know the totality of a given culture, but they need to know some of its essences in relation to their goal. The commonest version of this need is the graduate wanting to know whether or not to go to work in a particular organization. Exhibit 11.1 shows the major activities that might be involved in such deciphering.

The essential point is not to get too involved with the content of the culture until you have experienced it at the artifact level. That means visiting the public aspects, taking tours, asking to see inside areas, and reading whatever literature the organization makes available. The first cut at thinking about content areas should come out of the things that puzzle you. Why are the offices laid out the way they are, why is it so quiet or noisy, why are

Exhibit 11.1 How to Decipher an Organization from the Outside.

1. Visit and observe.
2. Identify artifacts and processes that puzzle you.
3. Ask insiders why things are done that way.
4. Identify espoused values that appeal to you, and ask how they are implemented in the organization.
5. Look for inconsistencies, and ask about them.
6. Figure out from all you have heard what deeper assumptions actually determine the behavior you observe.