



Case Study: Socialisation at Disneyland

Ever since 1955 Disneyland has been a major source of income for Walt Disney Enterprises. With operations in more than 40 countries, Walt Disney's parks and resorts are among the leading attractions for family vacations and leisure experiences.

Potential candidates for ride operators or other hourly-paid theme park jobs are a fairly homogeneous group, mostly twenty-something tall white males and females with perfect skin and radiating good health. Facial hair, fancy jewellery and excessive make-up are to be avoided.

Introductory seminars are held and inspirational films shown to explain Disney's history, traditions and mission. This encourages the newcomer to feel part of the company and become integrated into the team. Moreover, new recruits go through a forty-hour apprenticeship programme to learn about regulations and procedures. One important aspect is language. Employees receive a vocabulary list with terms used in the company. Customers are called 'guests', rides are referred to as 'attractions', accidents are rather called 'incidents' and Disneyland is not an amusement centre but a 'park'.

Introducing newcomers to basic values is another important aspect of the introductory sessions. They learn that 'the customer is king' or 'everyone is a child at heart when at Disneyland'. Furthermore, recruits receive a lesson on how to behave when guests misbehave, or how to respond when they face difficult questions. A training manual is handed out so that no one can forget what has been taught.

Apart from the formal socialisation processes, informal socialisation takes place as well. For example, newcomers who do not 'fit in' may be the subject of gossip and/or ostracism. They quickly learn that there are differences in how the employees are esteemed. For example the type of job, the costume and the working area of the park determine the social status of the recruits. Highly skilled work and glamorous costumes will signify higher individual status. And they will listen to stories attesting to the fact that employees are not infrequently fired for taking too long a break, not wearing part of the official uniform, or providing longer than usual rides.

Supervisors are there to help, but if recruits do not play the roles expected of them or do not perform well on-stage, their supervisor will know immediately, as it is their task to monitor and evaluate employees' performance.

All in all, the socialisation processes at Disneyland is highly structured and effective. Indeed, it is surprising that employees appear to be willing to play the roles expected of them with a positive attitude and kind smiles while being constantly monitored, notoriously underpaid and under strict supervision.

(cf. Brown, Andrew 1995. 'Organizational Culture'. London:Prentice Hall; p.55; The Walt Disney Company <https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about/#global> 4.4.2017)