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Introduction

Culture, as a concept, implies a stabilizing force that preserves the status quo—but organizations are seldom static. They are created, influenced, and transformed by many, not only by management, and are therefore not as susceptible to manipulation and control as many authors and management consultants might have us believe.

This chapter looks at what culture means in the context of behaviour in organizations. It wants you to question whether we can assume that we all mean the same thing when we are talking about culture. For example, in an age of globalization, does it make sense to talk about different cultures, and how viable is it to consider changing culture?

By the end of the chapter, you should have an appreciation of how the concept of 'organizational culture' is defined and discussed in the literature.

You will be able to assess the theory and evidence on offer critically, and have insight into a wide range of aspects of culture within organizations.

This chapter covers:

- the concept of culture;
- understanding culture;
- do the 'best' cultures lead to 'best' performance?
- critically assessing whether culture can be managed;
- national and organizational cultures;
- some problems with trying to manage culture;
- describing (rather than prescribing) culture;
- culture and change;
- culture and gender;
- culture and race;
- other aspects of culture.

The concept of culture

Culture is a popular explanatory concept frequently used to describe a company, a rationale for people's behaviour, a guideline for action, a cause for condemnation or praise, or a quality that makes a company 'what it is' (Kunda, 1992). The concept of organizational culture has been explicitly used only in the last few decades (Schein, 1990). It is a fascinating, but elusive, topic for researchers. Parker (2000) says that culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. Organizational culture is defined simply by Deal and Kennedy (1982: 4) as 'The way we do things round here', but more fully by Hofstede (1991: 262) as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another'. Schein (1985: 6) claims that the term 'should be reserved for the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared

by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic “taken-for-granted” fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment’.

It would be reasonable to expect that organizations that are set up for similar purposes would have similar cultures; it would be reasonable to expect this to be especially so in those sectors in which people move freely between organizations. But this has been found not to be the case. The National Health Service in the UK provides us with an example. Until recently, each health authority was run according to the same tight guidelines set down by central government. Doctors were trained using a rotation scheme that required them to move between hospitals and specialties. The doctors found that each authority had its own distinctive features that made the experience of each novel (Dale, 1994).

Culture is carefully defined by Schein (1990: 111) as (a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, (d) which has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. The culture of a particular group or organization can be distinguished at three fundamental levels at which the culture manifests itself: observable artefacts; values; and basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990).

Understanding culture

Culture is commonly theorized as a pervasive, eclectic, layered, and socially constructed phenomenon that is generated through values, artefacts, structures, and behaviours (Silvester et al., 1999; Detert et al., 2000). Geertz (1973) sees organizational cultures as webs of meaning; culture itself is an ongoing creation of those who live within its influence. Meanings around which consensus has already evolved are incorporated as norms, beliefs, symbols, and values of organizational culture, and become part and parcel of the way in which future interpretations are made. Values, beliefs, and shared meanings may be researched through interviews. Open-ended interviews can be very useful in getting at the level of how people feel and think about the culture. Questionnaires and survey instruments may prejudice the dimensions to be studied. There is no way of knowing whether the dimensions that are asked about are relevant or salient in that culture until the deeper levels are examined. Assumptions are usually unconscious and may be observed through intensive observation, more focused questions, or self-analysis by members of a group.

Schein (1985) argues that we can gain some understanding at a superficial level of any culture by analysing artefacts produced and consumed by that culture. These are visible, and can be deciphered or decoded by observation and analysis. To get a better feel for the ideas and orientations that have shaped the character and form of these artefacts, we need to understand the deeper value system. A ‘value system’ is like a code of practice or behaviour; artefacts offer us clues to this deeper value system. Beneath the level of values, there is a deeper level of ‘taken-for-granted’, unconscious assumptions. Unlike values and beliefs that exist at a conscious level, and which may therefore be challenged, the cultural forms and our ideas are not open to challenge. The unconscious shapes our norms, such as standards of behaviour, dress, personal interaction, and our values and beliefs. Schein has been criticized by, for example, Collins (1998) for implying that cultural norms and values act as templates for thought and action, and appear not to be open to change; in fact, unconscious assumptions must be open to change and negotiation. They should be thought of as dynamic and social phenomena that will tend to evolve and change as people attempt to negotiate and bend the rules.

But if this gives us only a superficial understanding, is this all that we can expect to gain? Grint (1995: 162) appears to think so when he notes: ‘Culture is rather like a black hole: the closer you get to it the less light is thrown upon the topic and the less chance you have of surviving the experience.’ There is a lack of consensus about the nature of culture and its amenability to managerial

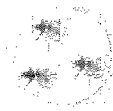
manipulation (Wilmott, 2000). Yet despite the fact that there is a lack of consensus as to what culture might be and how it may be best defined, management consultants, in particular, have been keen to sell the idea that it can be managed and that strong cultures can be manufactured.

Do the 'best' cultures lead to 'best' performance?

Since the late 1970s, a vast body of literature has looked at the importance of organizational culture for organizational outcomes. Early writings on culture management were premised on the assumption that culture management could lead to significant performance improvements (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982)—that is, that a strong culture could be 'manufactured'. For example, Deal and Kennedy (1982: 15) claimed: 'The impact of a strong culture on productivity is amazing. In the extreme, we estimate that a company can gain as much as one or two hours of productive work per employee per day.' The emphasis was on improving efficiency, growth, and success. Ouchi (1981), for example, proposed that this could be achieved through the creation of a strong, unifying organizational culture. 'Strong' cultures emphasized the values of 'being the best', of flexibility, initiative, and innovation, of superior quality and service, and of being open, participative companies in which employees were seen as the most important asset (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 285).

Peters and Waterman (1982) were employed as consultants by McKinsay, a large, well-known management consultancy firm. In looking at excellence in organizational culture, they say that there is a common culture to be found in excellent companies. This culture displays certain attributes, such as a bias for action (meaning that they make innovative decisions promptly), closeness to the customer (meaning that they focus upon meeting and exceeding customer expectations), and values innovation. They place considerable emphasis on the importance of positive reinforcement, rewarding desirable behaviour. We noted in the last chapter that, at IBM, one senior manager adopted the practice of writing out a cheque as a reward for achievements that he observed as he wandered about the organization. Well-known examples of companies who claim to have changed their culture are British Airways, which attempted to change the emphasis on flying routes to an emphasis on company service, and Nissan, which claimed that it achieved an entirely new sentiment and identification from its labour force (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). Culture, under this functionalist view, is seen as a variable that is subject to management manipulation and control.

Many culture interventions consequently continue to focus on creating strongly unified values and are promoted as performance-enhancing (Fey et al., 1999)—but not all fully understand the concepts of organizational culture and change in the same way.



EXAMPLE Organizational culture and misperception

Some uncertainty over the concept of organizational culture is well illustrated in a story told by Deal and Kennedy (1984). They tell us that, in one company, they presented the concept of culture, its functions, and elements to the senior executives.

At the end of the presentation, the chairman of the board remarked that it was the finest presentation that he had heard in ten years. He then turned to his CEO and said forcefully: 'George, I want a culture installed here next Monday.'

'With all due respect,' interrupted Deal and Kennedy, 'we believe you have a culture here now; that's one of our key points.'

'Bullshit!' said the chairman. 'We don't have one, and as you pointed out, that's the problem. George, I want a culture here and I want it now—by next week. Your butt is on the line.'

In *Change Masters* (1985), Rosabeth Moss Kanter tries to encourage North American companies to rekindle the spirit of innovation and enterprise. *Change Masters* studies ten major companies in depth. Moss Kanter concludes that if corporations are to flourish, then the 'change masters' must be allowed to redesign, to tap the talents and skills of employees. Successful companies will create a climate that encourages change, will encourage anticipation of external pressures, and will listen to new ideas. In similar terms to Peters and Waterman, she argues for the bias for action—that is, companies that work through people, allow autonomy, and are value driven. In her later work, *When Giants Learn to Dance* (1989), Moss Kanter tells us that organizations must be fast, flexible, focused on their customers, and friendly, allowing staff to experiment and develop their skills.

Interest in culture was sparked too by Japanese business success, which was thought to arise from competitive advantage secured through national and corporate culture (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1982). Throughout the 1970s, Japanese industry managed to establish a solid reputation for quality, reliability, value, and service—attributes that others wished to emulate. A large and profitable literature capitalized on the idea that culture can be diagnosed and changed to improve organizational effectiveness. It was thought that where US companies had adopted management practices that resembled those of the Japanese, as discussed by Peters and Waterman, and Ouchi, they achieved financial success (but see Chapter 14 for more on the Japanese model).

Functionalist management writers have prescribed how culture change may be achieved. Some have provided models for culture intervention, based on a typology or taxonomy of organizational culture: for example, Harrison (1972) and Schneider (1994). Targeted change models espouse the adoption of focused means of culture change. For example, Wilkinson et al. (1996) report a culture change effort dominated by training methods designed to change values. Gap or analytical frameworks champion culture change through analysing current culture, identifying the desired culture, and developing a programme of change to achieve the desired culture (for example, Hawkins, 1997).

Deal and Kennedy (1982: 15) claim that, with a strong culture, 'a company can gain as much as one or two hours of productive work per employee per day'. The prescriptive view shows how organizational culture can be designed and managed through the 'hearts and minds' of employees. The ideal employees are those who have internalized the organization's goals and values, and who no longer require rigid control. The trend has been towards a 'normative control' (Etzioni, 1961)—that is, an attempt to direct the efforts of employees by controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, and feelings that guide their actions (Kunda, 1992: 11). It is thought that inherent conflict can be transformed into cooperation in the interests of both employee and employer; through education, personal development, growth, and maturity, employees become better, healthier people—and are saved from alienation and conflict.



STOP AND THINK Has your company got soul?

Some management theorists have argued that corporations have souls (Frank, 2001), using the term to signify corporations that promote belief through culture, values, and the actions of leaders. They define soul as what the organization 'most deeply is', an inner intangible resource. Wal-Mart is listed as an exemplar of good practice in enabling the development of individual and organizational soul (Oliviera, 2004). Some accounts make significant claims in relation to ethics, stating, for example, that if the organization is spiritually oriented, it is more likely to avoid situations of ethical misconduct (Gull and Doh, 2004). Religious beliefs have been linked to improvements in performance as an aspect of corporate culture (Pfeffer, 1998). However, alongside the discussion of organizational life as soulful and positively ethical is a darker side. For example, Wal-Mart makes frequent legal appearances to contest employee rights cases and respond to accusations of ethical-legal transgressions (Bell et al., 2012).

Critically assessing whether culture can be managed

As Johnson and Gill (1993: 33) note, it is not clear whether the organizations that Deal and Kennedy, and Peters and Waterman, observed developed as they did through chance and spontaneity (that is, social control), or through conscious intent (that is, administrative control). Some have argued that organizational culture management is designed more to improve control than directly to increase profitability. Wilmott (1993: 522), for example, claims that cultural control is an intense and effective 'medium of domination'. The idea of equating the use of Japanese management practices with success in US companies was shaky, to say the least (Legge, 1994). Even Deal and Kennedy (1999) have themselves had to admit that the downsizing, outsourcing, and mergers that have characterized so much of management practice over the past twenty years have undermined relationships, trust, cohesion, and corporate culture. And the design and empirical basis of Peters and Waterman's research is highly suspect, as Guest (1992) and Collins (1998) demonstrate.

The more critical researchers have consequently raised concerns regarding the conceptual feasibility of culture management (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Legge, 1994). Some reject the view that culture can be managed, while others accept that culture may be malleable, but argue that change will be fraught with difficulties and ethical dilemmas. Some, such as Ogbonna and Harris (1998a), would argue that culture is not easily controlled, but can be manipulated under certain—rare—organizational conditions. They believe that organizational culture is not unitary: culture cannot be viewed in a unidimensional manner; there are likely to be different subcultures or types of culture in existence within organizations. Attempts to change culture may evolve in unpredictable ways (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998b; Harris and Ogbonna, 2002).

Despite this scepticism, practitioners continue to attempt—often unsuccessfully—to bring about culture management initiatives—perhaps because only adaptable cultural traits are linked to performance (Gordon and DiTomaso, 1992), or because non-imitable, rare, and adaptable cultures may represent a source of competitive advantage (Barley, 1991). Whatever the truth, it has to be acknowledged that employees are not passive objects of control (Goffman, 1961). They may accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, or conform, and create themselves within constraints imposed on them. Research, for example, on employee values and norms reflected in everyday practices (such as restriction of output), shows direct conflict with the aims and objectives of management (Roy, 1960; Lupton, 1963).



EXAMPLE Gender, culture, and control

An example of a company that attempted to change its culture and control the behaviour of its employees is Emsite, a mining company in Australia. The management believed that employing large numbers of females helped to improve the behaviour of male employees. Talking about the men, one of the managers said: 'I mean, they're just your average peacock and it's amazing how they dress better, stay cleaner, behave more appropriately, when there are females around than when there are not' (Eveline and Booth, 2002: 564). When women are part of the workforce, superintendents say that better care is taken of equipment, there is less antagonism among men, and the overall safety record improves. Management therefore sees the women as 'minders' of the men. The male employees consented to this designation of the women's 'housewifely' position. With women around, male operators said that the place was cleaner, that women took orders more readily, that there were fewer fights (between men), and that there was always someone different to talk to or to discuss family problems with (Eveline and Booth, 2002: 566).

But all was not positive. A number of men refused to be trained by women to use equipment on which women excelled—particularly the huge computerized trucks and the 824 dozer, which had been designated ‘women’s machines’. The men called the women offensive names, such as ‘bush pigs’ and ‘dykes’, and told sexually explicit stories and jokes. The ‘belt shop’ was designated ‘male territory’ and was lavishly adorned with lewd pin-ups. Men found that they could keep women away—or at least to a minimum—with pornography.

Hofstede (1998) believes that there are no shared values at the core of an organization’s culture. While there is little doubt that practices are designed according to the values of the founder and significant top managers, this does not mean that all members of the organization share these values. Organizations can be composed of various subcultures that may be mutually antagonistic. These subcultures can compete overtly and covertly, as different groups of organizational members seek to establish or impose their distinctive meaning systems and definitions of reality. There may be various sites of culture embedded in the various groups that make up the organization, creating subcultures, or even counter-cultures (Smircich, 1983a; see Smircich, 1983b, for how networks of meaning can be researched). As Smircich (1983a) argues, organizations can change only those variables that they ‘have’, such as payment and information systems, mission statements, and corporate image; they cannot change what an organization ‘is’—that is, the common values and beliefs that emerge from people’s shared experiences. Individuals act out their work roles based on customary definitions and understandings. These meanings are themselves embedded in class, regional, and national cultures. There will therefore be distinctive patterns and connections that will be beyond the capacity of influence, never mind managerial control.

National and organizational cultures

Hofstede’s work looks at the relationship between national and organizational cultures. He claims to have successfully uncovered the secrets of entire national cultures (Hofstede, 1980). Extracting primary data for employee attitude surveys within IBM subsidiaries in sixty-six countries between 1967 and 1973 (McSweeney, 2002), Hofstede (1991) studied differences in work-related values by analysing national cultures along five main dimensions: ‘power distance’; ‘individualism/collectivism’; ‘masculinity/ femininity’; ‘uncertainty avoidance’; and ‘Confucian dynamism’.

- Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations, and institutions such as families, expect and accept that power will be distributed evenly. Those societies with high power distance scores tend to exhibit more authoritarian management styles.
- In cultures high in individualism, ties between individuals tend to be loose and there is an expectation that individuals are responsible for their own well-being. In collectivist societies, there is a high degree of social solidarity; it would be less acceptable in this culture to dismiss workers for economic reasons.
- In masculine forms of society, males are expected to be strong, tough, competitive, and assertive, while women are expected to be meek, gentle, modest, caring, and nurturing. In more feminine societies, both men and women are expected to demonstrate a degree of modesty, and a concern for the quality of life. More feminine organizations would operate using intuition and negotiation, while the masculine would use assertion and competition. Hofstede is, then, drawing on gender stereotypes here.

- Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity. Those with high scores tend to have obvious routines and a need to be busy.
- Confucian dynamism is the extent to which societies adopt a short-term or long-term approach to life. Those with a short-term approach demand quick results, yet are respectful of traditions and social obligation. Those with a long-term approach also respect traditions, but would argue that they have to be adapted to meet modern contexts.

For Hofstede, culture is 'mental programming', 'software of the mind', subjective, and territorially unique. The inhabitants of a particular nation individually carry a unique national culture, which is itself a common component of a wider culture that contains both global and sub-national constituents.

The critique of Hofstede

A number of writers on culture have criticized Hofstede's work (see Hofstede, 2002; Smith, 2002; Williamson, 2002). There are richer conceptions of culture (for example, Geertz, 1973), and it is possible to dismiss his project as an attempt to measure the immeasurable (MacIntyre, 1971; Smelser, 1992). But it is mainly his presuppositions and methodology that come under fire. Schein (1990) notes how culture in Hofstede's research is viewed as the property of groups that can be measured by questionnaires leading to Likert-type profiles. The problem with this approach is that it assumes knowledge of the relevant dimensions to be studied. Even if these are statistically derived from large samples of items, it is not clear whether the initial item set is broad enough, or relevant enough, to capture what may be the critical cultural themes for any given organization. And it is not clear whether something as abstract as 'culture' can be measured with survey instruments at all. Further, the method is flawed because it is assumed that national samples can be taken from a single company, and from mainly marketing and sales staff (McSweeney, 2002). It is therefore assumed that, in IBM, there is a single uniform monopolistic organizational culture—although Hofstede later acknowledged cultural heterogeneity.

Some problems with trying to manage culture

Organizational cultures are not mirror images of the cultures of the wider society. There are other factors that shape the cultures of organization. The founders, for example, can act to shape the nature and conduct of a business; the nature of the business, the markets that it serves, and the technology that it uses may all influence the culture to some degree. Stakeholders too, like customers, can influence the nature and characteristics of the products or services.

Harris and Ogbonna (1998) found that the initial objectives of management—that is, to inculcate clearly defined cultural values in staff—resulted in a range of undesired responses. Some employees apparently genuinely, or instrumentally, complied with the newly espoused organizational culture traits, but the majority of workers reacted to the culture change efforts in an ambivalent manner. They reinvented or reinterpreted the change in ways that were counter to the desires of management. Later research (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002) found that management efforts to impose time frames on culture change detrimentally ritualized the initiative, which led to negative interpretations of the change such as: 'Every three months or so we get a pack—yeah, yeah—"this is how we're supposed to act this month". Yeah, yeah—this is now your philosophy for life!' In some cases, the objectives were adulterated or hijacked by others for their own purposes. For example, in one company,

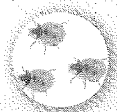
the financial control department hijacked the aim of employee empowerment towards reducing the management by 4,000 managers. Further, cultural traits might become eroded by high staff turnover because there is not enough time to train all new staff.

Describing (rather than prescribing) culture

When and if we do find occupational cultures, shared values, and norms of behaviour, how can they best be described and researched? Stephen Barley (1991) argues that few organizational researchers have actually bothered to study the deep structure of a work setting; instead, they have focused on symbols, such as stories, myths, logos, heroes, and so on, while failing to reveal the core of the system that lends a culture its coherence. He looks at the occupation of funeral directors and analyses the meanings of funeral directors' activities, offering a seamlessly integrated interpretation of what may have otherwise appeared as disparate tasks. Closing the corpse's eyes, making the bed, opening the windows and curtains of the death room to allow fresh air to remove any odours, and embalming the body are all ways of making death seem lifelike. The strategic arrangement of the room is intended to reconstruct it to look as it would have done before it became a death room. The corpse's features are posed to make it look as though it is only engaged in restful sleep; peaceful sleep will appear familiar and natural to the mourners, so they are less likely to disrupt a smooth-flowing funeral. No emotionally disruptive hint of ambiguity or conflict is allowed to mar the funeral directors' choreographed presentation of a lifelike death. Barley (1991) provides us then with some insight and understanding of how the occupational culture created by the undertakers serves their purposes and makes their job easier.

For other researchers, the focus has been on describing, but not prescribing, the relationship between culture and ideological and discriminatory practices (for example, Collinson, 1987; 1992; Mills, 1988). One way of examining the culture of an organization is to look at its corporate image to see what and who is valued in the organization. A 'corporate image' is the mental picture that the clients, customers, employees, and others have of an organization. This impression is the combination of unconscious, unintended, conscious, and intended factors, found among annual reports, advertisements, or in-house magazines. Clues to the culture of an organization can be found in its norms, its values, and its rituals; the language of an organization, the metaphors, myths, and stories that are in common use, and the ceremonies, symbols, physical artefacts, taboos, and rites are also indicators.

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EXAMPLE Metaphors used to describe organizations

The following are some examples of the metaphors that have been used to describe organizations and their cultures (Alvesson, 1993; Lloyd-Jones et al., 1999):

- the *machine*—that is, managed and designed like a machine made up of interlocking parts that each play a clearly defined role in the functioning of the whole;
- the *brain*—that is, drawing attention to the importance of information processing, learning, and intelligence;
- the *organism*—that is, a metaphor focusing attention on understanding and managing the organization's needs and environmental relations. Different organizations belong to different species, of which bureaucracy is only one. Different species are suited for coping with the demands of different environments.

For more examples, see Morgan (1986).



EXAMPLE Culture as metaphor: The example of Raleigh bicycles

Raleigh's culture was described as having a 'social glue' that held the company together. A reciprocal relationship was fostered between the firm and its employees, based upon the norms of loyalty and obligation. A high premium was placed on continuity and long service. It believed in 'growing its own timber'—that is, educating and training staff for internal promotion. Adopting a functionalist approach, the company evoked notes of culture as 'clan'. Articulating the notion of a unitary organization, all employees were members of the same team or 'same family'.

(Source: Lloyd-Jones et al., 1999)

Others who have looked at the language of organization include, for example, Gherardi (1994), who notes how the business environment echoes the great male saga of conquest (of new markets) and of campaigns (to launch new products), while the services echo the language of care and concern for needs, and relationality. The informal use of military, athletic, and sexual language in the workplace can produce a subtle separation between men and women, and alienates those who do not participate in its use (Bates, 1988; Wilson, 1992). Culture is a characteristic of the organization, not of individuals, but is manifested in—and can be measured from—the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of individuals. Traditionally, the study of organizational culture has centred on case studies, often involving participant observation (Hofstede, 1994). But while these studies provide interesting insights, the problem is that different researchers might arrive at different conclusions.

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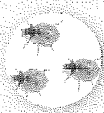


STOP AND THINK Downsizing and corporate anorexia: Does my bottom line look big in this?

In an interview with a manager in a declining industry, the manager talked of his fear that so many individuals would be made redundant that the organization would become 'anorexic'—that is, too thin to function when an upturn in business came about. Some academics and management practitioners (Tyler and Wilkinson, 2007) use slimming metaphors to talk about downsizing, layering, and redundancy. Burrell (1992) talks of 'corporate liposuction', within which senior managers have to 'slim down' the 'bulky' middle layers of the organization.

What metaphors have you heard used recently to describe an organization and events?

In addition, occupational cultures consist of ideologies (that is, emotionally charged, taken-for-granted beliefs) and cultural forms (that is, mechanisms for affirming and expressing those beliefs); ideologies tell members what they ought to do (Trice, 1993). Culture is therefore a major carrier of social order. Cultures and subcultures bind people emotionally. Charismatic leaders are thought to be able to manage emotion: corporate leaders, for example, have crafted their words and arranged the physical setting to create emotional images intended to capture the imagination of their audience, and to 'move minds and hearts' (Fineman, 1993). Consequently, companies such as IBM offer an elaborate social calendar and extensive training to impress the company spirit on new recruits, so that employees report greater pride on seeing the IBM flag flying over corporate offices than when they see their national flag. Home sales organizations, such as Tupperware, create a cozy, warm, and cheery party feeling for their domestic sales teams. Regular sales meetings and reward ceremonies have a distinctly evangelical tone to keep spirits high (Fineman, 1993).



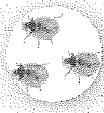
EXAMPLE Creating a culture at Consultancyco

The founding owner-manager of this company created a 'distinctive culture' (Grugulis et al., 2000). When it was first founded, it consisted of a group of twelve friends who worked and socialized together. As the company grew, these social events continued and were seen as an important part of the way in which the organization was managed. 'Work hard and play hard' appeared to be the way in which to describe the company culture.

A 'culture manager' was appointed to manage the 'play'. The social events included weekends away, with families, nights out, competitions, and fund-raising. Employees were expected to want to participate actively. It was hoped that socializing together outside work would encourage employees to cooperate with one another in work and that subsidized social events would encourage loyalty. Families could join in on training days. The company's graduate open day was planned to coincide with Red Nose Day (a day of fun designed to raise money for charities).

But the whole image is not all positive. The selection process sought to replicate the characteristics of the small group of friends who founded the company. Almost all were white, male, and aged between 20 and 40. Those who chose not to participate voluntarily in the social activities, those who criticized the company, and those who did not immerse themselves in the company culture were sacked. In this way, the company recalls how home behaviour and regular church attendance were a condition of the \$5 day for Henry Ford (Beynon, 1984).

Kunda (1992) provides us with a very detailed study of one organization and its culture, as an example of successful culture management. He concentrates on how the culture was 'engineered', exploring, describing, and evaluating the reality behind the rhetoric of corporate culture. The company at which he looked was called Tech Engineering, and represented an intense and complex environment. The rhetoric was taken seriously by management, and considerable time and energy was expended on embedding the rules, prescriptions, and admonitions of the culture into the fabric of everyday life. The company was portrayed as morally sound, organic, and undifferentiated. Kunda describes how social reality was formed around key words and strong images. Relentless repetition was the rule and the ideological formulations were to be found in the ready-made words of wisdom—that is, platitudes posing as insight and found in public places, in the mail, in workshops, and used in decoration, to the extent that they became constant background noise. Metaphors characterizing Tech as a social entity were based on imagery of the family or analogies with moral—religious or scientific—institutions. The ideal state was one of self-control and self-discipline. And while many members managed to maintain a sense of freedom, they also experienced a pull that was not easy to resist—that is, an escalating commitment to the corporation and its definitions of reality, coupled with a systematic and persistent attack on the boundaries of their privacy.



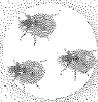
EXAMPLE How to break the boundaries of personal time at work

If an investment bank were to treat all of its employees, from clerk to partner, to a very good lunch, ordered from a menu and delivered to their desks, what will be the impact of this on the employees' behaviour?

The effect on the employees is likely to be that they feel that they must sit at their desk at lunchtime, eat lunch, and carry on working. It will be very hard for them to say 'Well, I think I'll take some time out now', having been given a gift of lunch.

While an organization may wish to engineer a culture, or a working atmosphere, it is not always totally successful in inducing harmonious relationships. Aktouf (1996) provides us with some excellent examples of how competence and promotability were displayed by charge-hands and workers

in two breweries in Canada and Algeria in which he worked as a participant observer. He looks at the signs and indicators that made middle-level and lower-level employees look competent. They had to demonstrate that they had something extra or different from ordinary workers, for example, by being zealous and doing more work, by being ruthless, and by keeping their distance from other workers. There are some interesting omissions from the list of necessary attributes: for example, technical competence was not mentioned as an attribute necessary for being a foreman. Less surprisingly, the workers' idea of an 'ideal' foreman was found to be the exact opposite of that of management. Career-minded employees had to learn to use the language of the power holder and adhere to their values—for example, talking about costs, productivity, rates, and so on—when dealing with superiors—particularly if senior managers were around. The required non-verbal symbolic activity included adopting behaviour that conformed to management prescriptions (such as zeal in observing rules and quotas) and doing everything possible to help management, from 'seeing with the master's eye', to outright spying. Even more enlightening are the names given to promotion candidates, including 'blockheads', 'shit eaters', 'brown noses', and 'limp wrists' in Montreal, and 'traitors', 'lickers', 'porters', and 'yes-men' in Algiers. So however zealous management may be in trying to promote a culture, it may be undermined by the workforce. Further, there is a possibility—if not likelihood—that the culture will not be self-consistent.



EXAMPLE Cultural ambiguity at Hans Kardiner Design

At Hans Kardiner Design, a small European luxury gift retailer, candour was seen as a central value in the company culture. It appeared in a written list of company values and could be seen in practice to guide much behaviour. Staff meetings were held with frank exchanges of views. But when harsh decisions were made, almost tortured contortions were adopted that obscured what had been decided. For example, the dismissal of staff was packaged in the guise of job opportunities, inviting staff to apply for posts that they could not get, or would not want, or would not like. This disguise appeared to go unnoticed.

(Source: Myers, 2002)

The way in which language in the organization culture differentiates managers' views of competence from the workers' can also be seen in the use of symbols. An earlier study of symbolism by Thompson (1983) reports on his work in a slaughterhouse. He documents the workers' interaction as they cope with the danger, strain, and monotony of their jobs, as well as the consumer-spending norms that trap them in their jobs. Non-verbal gestures were the primary form of communication in this work culture. Knives were used to beat against the tubs to communicate time. Because managers had refused to install a clock in the work area, the gesture symbolized the workers' efforts to regain the control that management had taken from them—but these gestures could not free them from their oppressive jobs or an oppressive work culture.

Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) also look at the case of slaughterhouse men and raise questions about how much control management had over the work culture. Much of the culture could not be explained by (and was highly resistant to) management action. Management did not decide the precise nature of the division of labour; the work cycle and therefore the pace of the line varied with the kind of animal being processed. The men worked fast and hard, habitually aiming to finish available batches of animals in the minimum time. Toughness and strength were the heroic qualities of the culture. Typically, they worked without a break until the work was done. Although management fixed meal breaks, the men would vary them, according to the batches that they had to process. High levels of sustained effort were needed to ensure large payouts from the piece-work bonus system. This also removed the need for close managerial supervision. Each gang had

a strong informal hierarchy dominated by the fastest and most accomplished workers. The gang decided how to distribute tasks and people, and fixed the pace of the line. The lead—that is, the most senior man—worked at the first work station, at which the animals were killed; he dictated the pace of work. The average pace of work led to a build-up at the work stations of the slower men; these men would be harassed (for example, by flying entrails) into working harder and faster. Liquid excreta would be sprayed or practical jokes played on the lower-status members of the gang. Very few seemed to resent the harassment and degradation to which they were subjected, believing that anyone was ‘fair game’. Casual absenteeism was almost unknown and some of the men visited the plant while supposedly on vacation; they also brought their children to the plant and leisure activities were frequently communal. Would management therefore want to change the culture?

Culture and change

Studies of the impact of culture change have concentrated on the extent to which change objectives are achieved and the performance indicators of such change efforts (Denison, 1990; Gordon and DiTomaso, 1992). There is, however, a lack of attention paid to the unintended consequences that can impede or prevent the desired cultural change, as we noted earlier (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Legge, 1994; Harris and Ogbonna, 2002).

The culture of an organization is determined, in part, by its rules (see also the sections on stress in Chapter 18, emotional labour in Chapter 5, and routinization in Chapter 4). If change is to be brought about, some of those rules will have to change. One change that six major supermarkets in the UK brought about was the development of ‘surface-acting skills’—that is, staff were expected to tailor their responses carefully in order to please the customer (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990). For example, cashiers were encouraged to smile all of the time and to note that the customer is ‘always right’. The customer is ‘king’, not ‘punter’. The cashiers adopt these values for instrumental reasons (because it disarms the customer) or under threat of sanction (‘I smile because I am told to’). Random visits by mystery shoppers and head office management reinforce the threat of sanctions. But Ogbonna and Wilkinson argue that these are not changes in values at all; rather, they are changes in behaviour.

Other supermarkets have taken a different tack and decided to reward desired behaviour, such as the friendly smile. If an employee is ‘caught’ being friendly to a mystery shopper, he or she is rewarded with a gift ranging from \$25 to a new car (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; 1989). In the UK, McDonald’s restaurants rate surface-acting skills in their staff: whether there is a smile, the greeting is pleasant, audible, and sincere, the staff member looks the customer in the eye, and there is always a ‘thank you’ and some pleasant parting comment (Newton and Findlay, 1996). Interactive style is thus stripped of its improvisation; affective demeanour, precise words, and sometimes physical posture are scripted for production of the ‘right’ image.

Asda has tried to introduce a ‘culture of service’ (Du Gay, 1996: 121), finding that, in the Disney Corporation, people were recruited and interviewed in threes to see how they related to others. One girl had been fired because she was too introverted and did not have enough eye contact to go with the ‘Have a nice day’ routine. Asda thus wanted to move attention to the recruitment and training of employees, and to their effective ‘enculturation’ into its corporate norms and values.

Because consumers often resent the routinized interactions such as ‘Have a nice day’, seeing them as mechanical and phoney, organizations try to design routines that have some of the qualities of a more spontaneous interaction. For example, Marriott hotel porters were instructed to notice and comment on the home town of the guests whose bags they carried, to make the guests feel

welcome. In this way, it becomes part of the service worker's job to hide the scripting through persuasive acting (Leidner, 1993).

Hopfl (1995) recounts the story of being on a British Airways domestic flight between Manchester and London. Having made the pre-landing announcements, a female member of the cabin staff announced: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I would just like to inform you that we have six cartons of milk left in the galley and if anyone is going home to an empty house or feels that they can make use of them, please make yourself known to the cabin staff in leaving the aircraft.' The response to hearing of this, by a member of British Airways cabin crew training, was shock. 'They're really not allowed to do that', she countered, with some consternation—despite emphasis in training on commitment to the customer. What was at issue was the extent to which improvisation around a specific role was possible or desirable, and the extent to which this behaviour indicates a deviation from a faithful reading of a prepared script. When organizations bring about cultural change through the scripting, rehearsing, and performing of roles, they cannot always guarantee the outcome that they might like to see. While the acquisition of a 'service ethic' has led to a conscious performance orientation and a belief in the importance of well-rehearsed actors, appropriate staging, and setting, and, in effect, a compelling illusion, they cannot define the degree of discretion over improvisation around the role.

Delaying and redundancy can also bring about change in culture and climate, producing an oppressive authoritarian climate that generates conformity (McKinley et al., 1995). Companies have targeted surviving managers with salary cuts, performance-related pay, stringent output targets, and early retirement. Collinson and Collinson (1997) have looked at the informal ways in which managers are assessed and monitored in an insurance company. The culture in this insurance company changed, so those managers worked longer hours. The CEO told managers that he did not expect them to be home 'in time to bath the baby' (Collinson and Collinson, 1997: 388). Individuals started to compete to see how late they could be there in the evenings. There was an unquestioning enthusiasm for working long hours at the weekend, as well as during the week, and for minimizing holiday time and sick leave. The women took less time off on maternity leave, so the informal culture dictated that if women in management were going to insist on having children, then they must do so with the minimum impact on the smooth running of management. A more ruthless, macho, aggressive, and coercive management style was used. Managers were encouraged to look confident, in control, and optimistic. And clocks were banned to encourage everyone to work hard and stop 'clock watching'.

Junior managers tried to resist this change in the culture. They could make it appear that they worked even longer hours and that they were always there at work. For example, they left jackets on chairs during the day and overnight, or left their car keys on the desk (either taking public transport home or using a spare set of keys). They left the lights and computer on in their office and, if actually seen going home, would have a large pile of work to take with them for the evening (even though they might not do it). Of course, it is possible to reject a macho aggressive culture: Marshall (1995) documents how many women managers have decided to move on, having experienced these pressures, and build a more balanced life between work and home.

When it comes to parenthood, workplace cultures affect fathers, as well as mothers, and their ability to meet both their home and work commitments. Some fathers report a tension between the demands of work and home, and feel under pressure not to take time off work if a child is ill. If a father works in a culture in which family commitments are acknowledged and accepted, this can make the task of balancing work and family life much easier (Hatten et al., 2002). While some fathers accept the 'long hours' culture as an inevitable part of their job, a change in culture could be invaluable for many to enable them to balance work and home life. If cultures could be developed in which it is the norm to work only for contracted hours, rather than extra hours, this would take pressure off working fathers (Hatten et al., 2002).

Culture and gender

Despite such assertions, organizations differ according to their gender regimes. They are both constrained by, and constitute, the practices that occur within them. Despite claims of gender neutrality, organizations are structured according to the symbolism of gender—that is, their culture is gendered (Gherardi, 1995). Organizational cultures express values and mark out places that belong to only one gender (Gherardi, 1994). People weave together the symbolic order of gender in an organizational culture as they construct their understanding of a shared world or of difference.

All cultures possess systems with which to signify sexual difference. Culture refers to the symbols, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour that are learned, produced, and created by people in an organization. This can include something as banal as appearance and the symbolic message that it transmits. Gherardi (1995: 13) asks: 'Have you ever met a woman manager with long hair worn loose to the waist?' She argues that a woman manager having loose long hair would be inappropriate—that is, she would be seen as having a 'sexiness' that clashes with the role of woman manager and the authority that this confers; it would be 'out of tune'.

Gherardi (1996) looked at women who are the first to enter a male culture—that is, at women pioneers in male occupations. She looked at the stories that these women told and realized that most of them shared the same plot: the outsider who enters an alien culture. These were women travellers in a male world. An organization's culture positions the male and female in reciprocal relation; the positioning acquired different meaning depending on whether the host culture was hostile or friendly. The female may, for example, find herself in a friendly culture in a position of the guest, while the men play host, extending a friendly and solicitous welcome, but maintaining a structure of their superior rights. An alternative might be a hostile culture, in which the female is in a position of marginality. Gherardi identifies six different types of organizational culture.

Using company materials to examine corporate culture, Mills (1995) looked at the images projected by British Airways in its newsletters over time. He was struck by the centrality of men and masculinities in the images. The company first consciously constructed an image of the 'heroic pilot'. Around 1919–29, air travel was associated with danger and adventure. To counter that perception and to win new passengers, the airlines used the image of the heroic First World War pilot. With changing times and the 'normalization' of flying, the emphasis shifted from safety to service, provided by the male pilot and steward (and, eventually, the stewardess). The male (and white) association of the pilot's image did not change over time; this reflected recruitment practices, and served to exclude and discourage female commercial pilots. British Airways did not recruit female flying crews until 1987—well after legislation against sex discrimination had been introduced. Images of women did, however, change over time. The first images—from around 1945—were of the hard-working wife and mother who stepped into the breach to do her part for the war effort. Later, a new image of the hard-working 'girl next door' appeared as female flight attendants were employed. Throughout the decade ending in the mid-1950s, there was an increasing focus on female bodily attractiveness and an eroticized female form.

Mills is able to show, through his research, that corporate images can sanction and encourage certain types of male/female behaviour and implicitly prohibit others. Corporate images can encourage the exclusion of women from positions of power, authority, and prestige. But from where does this come? Occupational segregation is a manifestation of the symbolic order of gender that opposes the male to the female (Gherardi, 1994). Occupational segregation expresses a coherence: women do women's tasks (for example, caring and cleaning); they occupy female jobs (for example, nursing, cleaning, and secretarial); they perpetuate the symbolic system of subordination and subservience. Occupational segregation protects women from male competition and men from competition from women. Recently, research has found that, in the British army, many of 'our boys' would like to keep

the girls out (Utley, 2003). Women are stereotyped as being gutsy types who would never be good enough to be 'real' soldiers. They are characterized as sexy, tomboyish, and a disruptive influence—attitudes that are to be found in policies and promotional literature. Women are seen as so different that they are incompatible with military life.

Boys, at a young age, feel that they have to identify with men, and so tend to reject any semblance of femininity and adhere instead to a rigid notion of masculinity. Because men's achievements and activities are more valued in our society, the rules of membership in the masculine 'club', and even people's notions of maleness, are more stereotypically framed and enforced than those relating to femaleness (Hort et al., 1990). Even schools help to form gendered identities, marking out 'correct' or 'appropriate' behaviour for males and females; they act as 'masculinity-making devices'. Teacher behaviour reinforces masculinity (Haywood, 1993). Having power and authority as a teacher means being a 'proper man', and keeping a class quiet usually involved discipline and force, including cuffing, shaking, and pushing; incompetence was seen as weakness—as 'womanly'.

But masculinity is not one-dimensional; rather, it has to be seen in the context of class, and sexual and ethnic relations—so, for example, there are white, working-class gays and Asian, middle-class heterosexuals. While the attributes of femininity are ingrained in the subordination relationship: 'caring'; 'compassionate'; 'willing to please others'; 'generous'; and 'sensitive', these are attributes that other marginalized or dependent groups of people also possess. Masculinity is negotiated, rejected, and accepted. The different masculinities will have differential access to power, practices of power, and differential effects (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996). Particular styles of masculinity will become dominant in certain situations; those in power will be able to define what is 'normal' or 'ordinary' male behaviour. For example, Willis (1977) found that the working-class 'lads' that he studied thought that doing mental work or having girls as friends was effeminate; manual work was the province of masculinity. Haywood (1993) studied a group of academic achievers who were labelled as having an underdeveloped masculinity and referred to as 'wankers'. The academic achievers, in turn, used terms such as 'cripple', 'cabbage', and 'spanner' to describe the inadequacy of other male pupils. Yet subversion at school and 'having a laff' was seen as preparation for a shop-floor job; activities seen conventionally as 'underachieving' or 'dropping out' are, in fact, a preparation for a life at work with few intrinsic satisfactions.

How jobs are sex-typed (see Chapter 5) is one feature of organizational culture. Research by Prokos and Padavic (2002) has looked at how masculinity is created and maintained in the US police force. Male police officers equate women with feminine moral virtue, the domestic realm, social service, formal rules, administration, cleanliness, and emotions; men are equated with guns, crime fighting, a combative personality, fights, weapons, and a desire to work in high-crime areas. Many male police officers strongly believe that women are incapable of being good police officers. Male police officers cling to the image of police officers as crime fighters and downplay the femininely labelled aspects of the job, such as paperwork. Prokos and Padavic found that women in police training were treated as outsiders by means, for example, of eliminating them from classroom examples. Gendered language was pervasive, so the male pronoun, and words such as 'gentlemen' and 'guys', were used to refer to students or police officers. Women police officers were not shown how to search men, although men were shown how to search men and women. In this culture, men learned to disparage women by verbally denigrating and objectifying them, as typified by the comment: 'There oughtta be a law against bitches.'

Sharpe (1998) described similarly masculine culture in the UK police force very vividly (see also Fielding, 1994; Brown, 1998). Sharpe found that the 'cop culture' covered a multitude of sins. She could classify much of the behaviour within specific locations, as follows.

- 'Van culture' consisted largely of lavatorial humour, and farting and belching competitions.
- 'Patrol culture' included making critical and judgemental assessments of individuals—invariably ordinary members of the public going about their daily business—coloured by racist and sexist remarks.

- In the 'office culture', male and female officers would be picked out for their appearance and their sexual appetite.
- 'Custody room culture' was mostly officer-dependent.
- 'Pub culture' was a combination of van, patrol, and office culture, but heavily dominated by talk of the latest sexual conquests, sporting triumphs, and personal alcoholic consumption levels. As a researcher, Sharpe (1998) reports that she was obliged to visit licensed premises with the vice squad and drink copious amounts of alcohol; failure to keep up with them was viewed with disdain and deep suspicion.

The topics of interest to the male officers were rugby, cricket, golf, horse racing, beer, cars, and women (in that order). Women were categorized and judged by their sexual habits and activity. Sharpe (1998: 15) says: 'To a policeman, sex was rather like a crime return—the more they could claim for, the better it looked to friends and colleagues.' The easiest target for gossip was the woman police officer. Official complaints about the behaviour of male officers were not common; sexism was seen simply as part of the culture. Policewomen had to 'tough it out' or go under. In a similar way, in order to be assimilated into the dominant (male) group, certain groups of women in the professions and in politics have adopted strategies that include using deeper voices, swearing and using taboo language, adopting a more assertive style in groups, and addressing themselves in public to traditionally male topics—that is, business, politics, and economics (see Coates, 1993).

But sometimes, the 'rules' change: there was, for example, a time when there were no full-time postwomen. They were not recruited in urban areas, because they were thought not to be able physically to carry the normal load; in rural areas, they were employed when no man could be obtained to perform the work (Grint, 1995: 198).

Culture, gender, and hierarchy

In order to gain insight into the working of an organization, it is necessary to look at where the power and reputation in an organization or industry are held; frequently, men will be found in those areas and there will be few, if any, women. Despite the fact that nearly half of all undergraduates are women, for example, their representation at the senior levels of academia remains low (Ward, 2001). Latest figures reveal only small increases in the numbers of women working as professors, senior lecturers, and researchers: women make up, for example, only 16.5 per cent of professorial staff in higher education (HESA, 2007).

An interesting example of how culture operates in subtle ways is to be found in the unwritten rule that males dominate conversation in organizations. Men command a dominating role within conversation and gain for themselves a disproportionate amount of floor space or speaking time. Zimmerman and West (1975) found—in a study of thirty-one two-party conversations between a man and a woman—that virtually all of the interruptions and overlaps in speaking were made by the male speakers. This, they say, leads to disproportionate female silence within male–female interaction that does not occur in same-sex conversation, so men deny equal status to women as conversational partners.

Some have tried to suggest (for example, O'Barr and Atkins, 1980) that this is because males, on average, hold higher-status positions than women do. Woods (1993) put this idea to the test by examining gender and occupational status, and their relative influence on patterns of speaking time in a work setting. She found that gender tended to exert the greater influence on speaking time: while speakers in high occupational positions spent more time holding the floor than their subordinates, nevertheless, even when women held high-status occupational positions, male subordinates still dominated by, for example, interrupting more and giving less assent to women.

Culture, gender, and computing

The culture of computing is seen by many as a male domain: while there is no inherent gender bias in the computer itself, the computer culture is not equally neutral (Turtle, 1988). Early studies of the computing culture suggested that males heavily dominate the adult world of computing; it is transmitted to children by males (Kiesler et al., 1985). The culture values technical, rather than interpersonal, skills, hardware over software, and engineering over business backgrounds (Turtle, 1984; 1988). In addition, there is a legacy in the computer culture of images of competition, sport, and violence—and some computer operating systems still use terms such as ‘killing’ and ‘aborting’ programs. Women are said to look at computers and see more than machines; they see the culture that has grown up around computing. They see, for example, a culture associated with dedicated and expert hackers, the heroes of the larger culture who take pride in being ‘nerds’ (their term), who have no social rules other than the mutual tolerance and respect for radical individualism, manipulation, and mastery of the computer. Women then ask whether they belong to this culture.

Some, including Turtle (1988), argue that women are expressing a computer reticence—that is, a desire to stay away from computing, because it is a personal and cultural symbol of what a woman is not. But both men and women hold stereotypes about computer professionals. Computing is seen as a ‘man’s job’ both in computer classes, in popular computer magazines, and by students. It is perceived as a job for the antisocial—that is, those low in social ease and frequency of social interaction (Wilson, 1997; 2003). Computer work is seen by women as a field for men and antisocial people (Newton, 1991; Shade, 1993). It is also argued that females feel that taking too much interest in technology threatens their image of themselves as women (Lage, 1991).

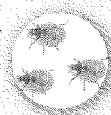
Whatever the reason, females make up only about 19 per cent of students studying computer science in US universities; as a result, the number of female computer professionals is low. The new and rapidly expanding information technology occupations should be providing opportunities for women, but women are under-represented in IT jobs (Panteli et al., 1997).

Culture and race

Minority groups currently comprise 11.8 per cent of the UK population (CRE, 2007). Despite this, the culture of most organizations is not only male, but it is also white. Managers involved in the recruitment process reinforce this by having a hierarchy of criteria for acceptability (Jenkins, 1985; 1988). The primary criteria involve appearance, manner, attitude, and maturity. Secondary criteria relate to ‘gut feeling’, employment history, experience, the ability to fit in, age, speech style, literacy, and marital status. Tertiary criteria include references and English-language competence. Minority workers are less likely to fit the stereotypical ‘married with two kids and a mortgage’ pattern that recruiters seem to prefer; their accent may be regarded by white recruiters as ‘inferior’ and they may be seen as less likely to fit in (Grint, 1998: 251).

Racism is not difficult to demonstrate. For example, the BBC’s Radio Five Live sent out dummy CVs to a wide range of companies in response to recruitment advertisements. For each vacancy, six applications were sent: one male and one female for each of three groups—that is, white European, Asian Muslim, and black African. All of the fictitious applicants achieved the same standards in terms of qualifications and experience, but applications were written and presented differently to increase their authenticity to recruiters. While 23 per cent of the white candidates were invited for interview, only 13 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively, were successful from the black African and Asian

Muslim candidates (BBC Press Office, 12 July 2004). A similar experiment was conducted in the USA, in which white-sounding names such as 'Greg' and 'Anne' were used to compare with black-sounding applicants, such as 'Ebony' and 'Rasheed'. It was found that 'white' applicants received one response for every ten CVs, but that 'black' applicants with equal credentials received one response per fifteen (BBC News, 15 January 2003).



EXAMPLE Workplace culture and racism

A report by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC, 2007) shows that the main reason why Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and black Caribbean women in the UK who want to work find it so difficult to fulfil their potential is workplace culture. For example, staff from ethnic minorities are repeatedly questioned about fasting, clothing, eating habits, and religious beliefs. Uniforms or dress codes rigidly impose Western fashions or do not allow women to wear trousers. And they are obliged to participate on out-of-work activities that make them feel uncomfortable: for example, going to the pub.

Several of the UK's leading corporations are, however, beginning to recognize the need to assemble a diverse staff team and have sought to devise recruitment strategies that reach out and attract qualified ethnic minority candidates. This, they realize, will help them to establish credibility and expertise to help to access increasingly diverse consumer markets.

Other aspects of culture

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There are many approaches to culture. One might be to look at the moral order—that is, the ordering of expectations and moral imperatives in a work situation. A strand of the Chicago school in sociology (see Watson, 1987) suggested that we look at how an individual copes with, or adapts to, problems faced at work in maintaining his or her identity. Students were encouraged to look at the 'dirty' or deviant jobs in order to see factors of general relevance to work experience that might not be noticed in more conventional kinds of work, in which they might be taken for granted. We saw in an earlier chapter how, for example, prostitutes stress the extent to which they control their clients in order to maintain self-respect. This may also be happening when garage mechanics insist that they tell you what is wrong with your car and resent it if you diagnose the fault when they are the 'experts'.

But the 'taken-for-granted' nature of organizational rules is often hard to uncover; it is only when the rules are broken or challenged in some way that we see what they are.

Conclusion

In the chapter, we have seen how some believe that culture can be managed or engineered—that is, that it can be manipulated to the benefit of the organization. The strength of an organization's culture has a direct relationship with, or impact on, performance and productivity. This, then, is the functionalist and unitarist approach. Critical views of management doubt the ideas that lie behind the claims and instead discuss how organizational culture can best be described, highlighting some more of the realities of organizational life. They would doubt, as does Parker (2000), that organizational culture can be managed in any planned way. Organizations are not unitary entities, but more likely made up of subcultures in which organizational identities are continually contested. Power and inequalities of, for example, gender and race clearly play their part in organizational culture.

KEY POINTS

- Culture is a concept used to describe a company, a rationale for people's behaviour, and many other features of organizational life.
- Culture can be witnessed or researched as observable facts, meanings, norms of behaviour, symbols, values, beliefs, structures, and underlying assumptions.
- While managers may wish to see culture as a variable, subject to their manipulation and control, and management consultants have been keen to sell the idea that culture can be made stronger and managed, critics have argued that culture cannot be managed. Others have accepted that it may be malleable—but argue that change can be unpredictable, and fraught with difficulties and ethical dilemmas.
- Hofstede has looked at relationships between national and organizational cultures. His work has been criticized mainly because of his presuppositions and methodology.
- While some management consultants may claim to be able to manage and change culture with positive outcomes, organizational researchers have focused on how best to describe culture (examining the occupational culture, the corporate image, the language, the symbolic order of gender or race, or the metaphors and myths to be found in the organization), or on the outcomes of culture or culture change.

CASE STUDY

A case of company culture

In the following description of one company's culture, Schein (1990: 112) argues that it is possible for a group to hold conflicting values that manifest themselves in inconsistent behaviour while having complete consensus on underlying assumptions.

The Action Company is a rapidly growing, high-technology manufacturing company. Its founder manages it: he began the company thirty years ago, and holds strong beliefs and values.

A visitor to the company would notice the open office layout, and the high degree of informality, frenetic activity, confrontation, conflict, and fighting in meetings. There is an obvious lack of status symbols, such as parking spaces for senior managers or executive dining rooms. There is a sense of high energy and emotional involvement, with people staying late in the office and expressing excitement about their work. The general view appears to be that hard work, innovation, and rapid solutions to problems are essential to this rapidly growing high-technology company. New employees are carefully screened. When an employee fails, he or she is assigned to another task, rather than fired or punished.

The company operates on several critical and coordinated assumptions, as follows.

1. Individuals are assumed to be the source of all innovation and productivity.
2. Truth can only be determined by pitting fully involved individuals against each other to debate ideas until only one idea survives. An idea will not be implemented unless everyone involved in its implementation has been convinced of the validity of the idea.
3. Every individual must think for themselves and will 'do the right thing'—even if that means disobeying the boss or violating a company policy.
4. What makes it possible for people to live in this high-conflict environment is the assumption that the company is one big family, the members of which will take care of one another and protect each other even if some make mistakes or have bad ideas.

The organization appears, then, to tolerate extremely high degrees of conflict without destroying or demotivating its employees.

(Source: adapted from Schein, 1990)

Questions

1. Is it your experience of organizations that ideas are only implemented if everyone is convinced of the validity of the idea?
2. If not, what is more usual in your experience?
3. Is this an attractive idea? What might be its disadvantages?

FURTHER READING

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Watson, T. (2002) *Organising and Managing Work*, Harlow: Pearson Chapter 7 of this book focuses on structure, culture, and control; Chapter 8, on choice and constraint in the shaping of structure and culture.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Goffman (1961) gives us a detailed account of life in asylums. What insight can we gain from this work to help us to understand the working and culture of organizations such as universities?
2. Hopfl (1995) draws an analogy between acting and customer service. Read her paper and critically assess the similarities.
3. What evidence is there to suggest that the culture within police forces is discriminatory? (See Fielding, 1994; Brown, 1998; Sharpe, 1998; you may also want to look at newspaper and BBC sources.)
4. There is an abundance of contradictions to be found in the culture of organizations. How does Aktouf (1996) describe the contradictions that he found, and what examples have you seen in your own experience?



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