

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract

The contemporary study of organizational culture reflects mainline concerns of the organizational sociologist. Though anthropology and cognitive psychology have made significant contributions to this new field, the study of organizational culture may be seen as a return to some of the most basic concerns about the nature of organizations and the appropriate methods for analyzing them. We review current work on theory, empirical studies, and contributions—both theoretical and empirical—to the understanding of planned change of organizations. The contemporary study of organizational culture reflects several hotly contested concerns, among which are the following: Can culture be intentionally managed? Must culture be studied using the tools of the phenomenologist or the ethnographer, or does the use of multivariate statistics also have a place? Which social science paradigm is most appropriate for understanding organizational culture: phenomenology, symbolic interaction, semiotics, structural-functional anthropology, cognitive psychology?

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

During 1983 three major collections of articles on organizational culture appeared. Since 1979 no fewer than seven review articles have been published on aspects of this topic, and the outpouring of work shows no signs of abatement. Few readers would disagree that the study of organizational culture

has become one of the major domains of organizational research, and some might even argue that it has become the single most active arena, eclipsing studies of formal structure, of organization-environment research, and of bureaucracy.

What is perhaps most unusual about this development is that several books and articles by academics have been widely read by nonacademics, and a few have appeared on best-seller lists. At the same time, studies of organizational culture often compare western organizations to Japanese or other national organizations, thus bringing an unusual comparative international flavor to organizational research.

Indeed, some might observe that the rise of research on organizational culture came about because Japanese firms were during the late 1970s and the early 1980s widely considered to have superior operating characteristics, but the forms of organizational research dominant then emphasized formal structure and so failed to uncover any difference between Japanese and western firms. As a consequence, scholars began to examine the possibility that the different national cultures might have penetrated modern corporate forms, thus creating differences in organizational culture between, say, Nissan and General Motors. Several early studies gave credence to this approach, which led next to the possibility that even within a single national culture there might be local differences in the culture of firms, e.g. between Hewlett-Packard and ITT.

A casual inspection of the contemporary literature suggests that most of those who study organizational culture trace their intellectual roots to a few key anthropologists. Both the point of view and the method of the anthropologist might seem to have been heavily borrowed by the student of organization. It is undeniable that anthropological style and method have been a great, perhaps the single greatest, influence on these contemporary studies, but this new work owes a very major debt to the sociology of organizations as well.

We offer the view that the contemporary study of organizational culture may be best understood as a continuation of the main line of organizational sociology, which has always focused on the normative bases and the shared understandings that, through subtle and complex expression, regulate social life in organizations. Many younger scholars, trained to study those problems most easily subjected to multivariate statistical analysis, may have the impression that the study of organizational culture through participant observation is an aberration or a departure from the tradition of organizational sociology. Such a view does not withstand historical review.

As we trace the development of organizational sociology since Max Weber, we find a constant tension between those who prefer to study what is explicit about organizations and those who prefer what is implicit; a tension between those who emphasize the capacity of organizations to create order and rational-

ity versus those who are struck by the sometimes chaotic and nonrational features of organizational life. The study of organizational culture grows out of that tension and represents, we believe, but the most recent stage of the intellectual cycle.

The preparation for writing a review article mostly involves reading a large number of books and articles, many of them not yet published. In many domains of scholarship that can be a chore. To read in organizational culture is more nearly a pleasure, in large part because the contemporary study of organizational culture relies upon bringing to life the richness and the vitality of people living and working together. The equations and statistics are few, the attempts to capture an ineffable essence are many. These studies recall the excitement, the passion, and the drama of social life, which were and continue to be central to the reason for the study of organizations.

THE INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Heterogenous Intellectual Roots: A Citation Analysis

The contemporary study of organizational culture appears to amalgamate several points of view, rather than to constitute one branch of a single disciplinary family of scholarship. There is no single dominant point of view or method but rather a rich mixture of ideas and of approaches. We attempt to characterize the most important of these. Our review is limited to the study of formal economic organizations, primarily business firms.

During 1983, three collections of articles on organizational culture appeared: an anthology on *Organizational Symbolism* (Pondy et al 1983) and special issues of *Administrative Science Quarterly* (Vol. 28, No. 3) and of *Organizational Dynamics* (Vol. 12, No. 2). In all, these comprise 32 articles. A citation analysis reveals something of the diverse intellectual roots of this new field. Those sources cited six or more times are listed in Footnote 1.

These works, which provide the foundations of the field, are as heterogeneous as are most other aspects of the study of organizational culture. Of the seven most frequently cited works,¹ one was written by an anthropologist, three were authored or coauthored by sociologists, and three by management scholars (categorized by place of employment, rather than by training).

¹Most frequently cited works: C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973—ten citations; P. Berger, T. Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, 1966—seven citations; Burton Clark, *The Distinctive College: Antioch, Reed, and Swarthmore*, 1970—seven citations; Terrence Deal, A. Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures*, 1982—seven citations; William G. Ouchi, *Theory Z*, 1981—six citations; A. M. Pettigrew, "On Studying Organizational Culture," *Admin. Sci. Q.* 24:570–81, 1979—six citations; Karl Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, 1979—six citations.

In all, a total of 103 works are cited in the 32 articles. Eleven authors are cited for three or four separate works each. Of these eleven, ten hold appointments in graduate schools of management.

The Influence of Sociology on Studies of Organizational Culture

Many students of organizational culture would assert that their primary intellectual debt is to the anthropologist rather than to the sociologist. Most would also assert a debt to the social psychologist. Although this review will focus on the debt of organizational culture studies to sociology, we will begin with a brief review of the impact of anthropological tradition on this field, and end the section with the briefest of acknowledgments to social psychology as a coda.

The Influence of Anthropology on Organizational Culture

Most of the currently "popular" work on organizational culture (Ouchi 1981; Pascale & Athos 1981; Deal & Kennedy 1982; Peters & Waterman 1982) as well as other work written for management audiences and management scholars (Dandridge et al 1980; Dyer 1982, 1984; Schein 1983a, 1983b; Martin & Siehl 1983; Wilkins 1983a, 1983b; and Wilkins & Ouchi 1983) draws upon the spirit if not the details of the functionalist tradition in anthropology. This influence can be further divided between two rather distinct forms of contemporary work.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and Malinowski (1961) represent a school of thought in anthropology that encourages the scholar to consider a group or society as a whole and to see how its practices, beliefs, and other cultural elements function to maintain social structure. Although organizational scholars rarely cite these sources, their work describes such cultural elements as employment practices, corporate ceremonies, and company legends in structural-functional terms. Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown might be appalled by the explicitly promanagement and change-oriented bias of many contemporary scholars, but the impact of their organic, whole view of the structure and functioning of social systems on the contemporary study of organizational culture is undeniable.

Benedict (1934) and Mead (e.g. 1949) also represent an interest in groups or societies as a whole but tend to describe society as a large complex personality. This "configurationist" position suggests that a culture "selects" from a virtually infinite array of behavioral possibilities a limited set that may be interpreted as a particular configuration of related patterns. For example, Benedict (1934) described the Apollonian discomfort with excess and orgy and the Dionysian encouragement of psychic and emotional excess (see Sanday 1979) as opposing patterns found in many cultures. Some contemporary work on culture describes patterns of assumptions within organizations (Dyer 1982) in this tradition.

A second school of thought in anthropology is perhaps best represented by Clifford Geertz (1973), the most frequently cited of any scholar in the foregoing citation analysis. Along with other contemporary anthropologists such as Goodenough and Lévi-Strauss, Geertz emphasized the importance of discovering the "native's point of view." This approach has been called "semiotic" for its focus on language and symbols as the principal tools for apprehending the native's perspective.

Geertz (1973:24) suggests that "the whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them." Accomplishing this purpose, according to Geertz, requires that the anthropologist be immersed in the complex clusterings of symbols people use to confer meaning upon their world. Anthropology is thus not a matter of precise method but requires instead that the anthropologist engage in an intellectual effort that is "an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, 'thick description' " (pp. 5-6).

By contrast, Goodenough (1971) and others have developed an approach labeled "ethnoscience," "componential analysis," or "cognitive anthropology." While their aim is similar to that expressed by Geertz they differ considerably in method. Culture for ethnoscientists is the system of standards or rules for perceiving, believing, and acting that one needs to know in order to operate in a manner acceptable to the members of the culture. Anthropologists in this tradition have been strongly influenced by linguists (e.g. Chomsky 1972). They have in mind that just as a learned, and usually implicit, grammar helps people generate acceptable sentences, so cultural rules and categories and principles help people to generate acceptable behavior. Cultural description, according to Goodenough and others in this tradition, requires the discovery and writing out of systematic rules or algorithms that members of the culture implicitly use to generate acceptable behavior.

While most scholars currently working in the area of organizational culture refer to Geertz to suggest the need for "thick description," it appears that those who engage in empirical work instead use some variant of the methods suggested by Goodenough. Perhaps this is because the methods suggested by Geertz require a great deal of artistic ability and intuition while Goodenough's methods are more systematic and thus easier to learn. Sanday (1979) notes a similar tendency among practicing anthropologists to quote and admire Geertz but to follow the methods of Goodenough. Contemporary organizational scholars who have been influenced by the semiotic school include Pondy (1978), Smircich (1983), Gregory (1983), Barley (1983a), Evered (1983), Van Maanen (1979), and Frost & Morgan (1983).

The elements that comprise a culture to an anthropologist, such as language, ritual, and social structure, develop over decades or centuries. These cultural

elements represent specific solutions to what often are universal problems or needs of social life and of survival, and in this sense culture is to the anthropologist both a dependent variable (shaped by a unique time and place) and an independent variable (shaping the beliefs and behavior of individuals). As we shall see, the contemporary student of organizational culture often takes the organization not as a natural solution to deep and universal forces but rather as a rational instrument designed by top management to shape the behavior of employees in purposive ways (Lammers 1981). The study of organizational culture typically takes culture as the independent variable, rarely attending to the environmental forces that have shaped the culture of, say, IBM or Sony and instead concentrating on a description of those critical elements of the firm's culture and on the patterns of employee behavior that they guide. Despite these differences, the study of organizational culture owes a great debt for point of view and method to anthropologists.

THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIOLOGY ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The influence of sociology on the study of organizational culture has been broad and direct. As a consequence, it is difficult to characterize a few main streams of effect. The several streams of work that have been most influential—the study of myth and ritual, symbolic interaction, ethnomethodology, and the study of organizations as institutions—are so interrelated that we have chosen to recount their effects in the form of an interpretive history rather than as separate schools of thought.

This historical approach leads us to conclude that the contemporary study of organizational culture is perhaps best understood as only the latest turn in the struggle between explicit and rational views of organization on the one hand and implicit, nonrational views on the other. This tension has long been a central feature in the sociology of organizations, and we can expect that the approach of organizational culture will have its day and then recede in importance, to rise yet again in modified form.

The Explicit Versus the Implicit Features of Organization

Perhaps the most pervasive effect has been Durkheim's emphasis on the importance of myth and ritual as the counterpoint to the study of social structure. Durkheim asserts that concrete symbols, such as myths, are necessary for solidarity because “. . . the clan is too complex a reality to be represented clearly in all its complex unity” (1961:220, from French). This suggestion that simple, symbolic representations of a complex social reality are fundamental to collective life has had a pervasive effect on the study of organizational culture. Durkheim suggested that this symbolic structure can be

apprehended through the study of those myths and rituals that lie on the surface of social life and that provide clues to the deeper strains and forces. This method has also become a central feature of the study of organizational culture. Finally, Durkheim (1893), like Weber (1968) and Toennies (1957), drew a distinction between the explicit and the implicit features of social life and regarded the study of both as essential. This dual interest in the objective and the subjective features of organizational life has consistently been a central theme in the sociology of organizations and has become central to the study of organizational culture.

A later school of sociology came to emphasize not only that the objective and the subjective features of social life are separable, but that the two sides may be disconnected from one another more often than was supposed, and even that commonly understood symbols may be manipulated for the purpose of deceiving a social partner. Thus Goffman (1959) found more meaning in what is implicit than in what is explicit in the presentation of self, and Garfinkel (1967) asserted that juries engage in sense-making of their decisions only after the fact and that this constitutes a form of social deception. Berger & Luckman (1966) offered a legitimating sociology of knowledge to which many students of organizational culture resort in emphasizing ethnographic method in a field that has in recent years been dominated by multivariate statistics.

This line of work was also characterized by a critical antiestablishment tone that sought to expose the taken-for-granted social reality that, it was argued, had been largely fostered by the ruling classes for their own benefit (Gouldner 1970). A remnant of that critical strain remains in the contemporary study of organizational culture, but it has found an inhospitable environment in schools of management.

Rational versus Nonrational Features of Organization

A brief historical review suggests that the current managerial view of organizational culture is only the latest in a series of pretenders vying for control of how organizations shall be understood. During the 1950s and the 1960s, organizational sociologists sought to explore the informal relations that regulate organizational life. However, they never strayed very far from ideas of bureaucratic administration. They sought to understand how informal relationships and beliefs modified the demands of the formal system or provided a means to cope with its pressures. Furthermore, their search was strongly motivated by an underlying belief that the fundamental contribution of large-scale economic organizations is to bring "rationality" to an otherwise overwhelmingly complex reality. This predisposition can be attributed to the emphasis by Weber (1968:223) on the rational properties of bureaucracy:

Experience tends universally to show that the purely bureaucratic type of administration . . . is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency

and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability . . . The choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration.

While the ethnomethodologists and symbolic interactionists of the 1950s and 1960s sought to emphasize the nonrational aspects of organizational life, the mainstream organizational sociologists tried instead to discover the rational basis of organizational life (thus choosing to ignore Weber's emphasis on the importance of charismatic leadership), and the next twenty years of scholarship reflected this tension. We shall describe that contest in some detail because it contains the central forces that today motivate the various approaches to the study of organizational culture.

In 1937 Gulick & Urwick published their *Papers on the Science of Administration* and established the school of "Administrative Rationality." Among the collected papers in that 1937 volume was one by Graicunas which pointed out that as the size of a small group increases, the number of possible interactions grows so rapidly that no manager could oversee more than five or six workers effectively. Thus was born the study of formal organizational structure and the attempt to discover the bases of organizational rationality.

In 1938 Chester Barnard published *The Functions of the Executive*. He emphasized the overwhelming ambiguity of organizational life and suggested that it is the role of the executive to provide the overarching point of view that brings meaning and order to corporate life. In 1939 Roethlisberger & Dickson published the Hawthorne Studies, in which they described the informal norms of workers that successfully frustrated the productivity goals of the management. Each of these themes—organizational rationality, formal structure, leadership under ambiguity, and informal organization versus formal purpose—was subsequently developed. For example, though he wrote of leadership in a slum, Whyte (1943) described how informal leadership always formed within a social group and influenced group behavior. However, the predisposition that dominated the field was to find that large, complex organizations can be made orderly, responsive to top management, and "rational" in serving the purposes of their owners. The problem was that, as anyone could see, no large organization was in fact so orderly. How could we believe that organizations can be rational?

The legitimation for combining a belief in organizational rationality with the empirical observation of organizational nonrationality was offered by Herbert Simon in 1945. Simon argued that human behavior that appears contrary to organizational goals is in fact quite rational if one takes into account the imperfect and limited information-processing ability of human beings, who cannot understand all of the far-flung organizational consequences of their current actions. With this idea of "bounded rationality," Simon provided the

basis for the coupling of the rational and the nonrational views of organizations. With that, the study of organizations exploded. It grew in part because large public and commercial organizations proliferated rapidly in the west during the twentieth century, and it grew because Simon had supplied the last necessary piece of a paradigm within which most features of organizational life could be understood.

For the next twenty years (roughly 1945–1965), the main line of research juxtaposed the objective against the subjective, the formal purpose against the informal purpose, the explicit against the implicit in organizational life. The principal method of inquiry was the case study written from the point of view of the social scientist rather than of the native and interpreted to demonstrate why apparently irrational behavior was, in fact, rational or in concert with the goals of the owners and managers of the organization under the circumstances. The method was crystallized by Homans (1950), who interpreted the Hawthorne Studies to great effect. It was employed by Selznick (1949), Trist & Bamforth (1951), by Gouldner (1954), Blau (1955), Lipset, Trow & Coleman (1956), and by Crozier (1964). It must be said that these studies remain among the most informative, penetrating, and lively of all organizational literature.

The tension between rational and nonrational views of organization continued, but the rational view steadily gained the upper hand. Observing that executives, managers, technicians, and workers seem not to share a common purpose, Parsons (1956) offered a mainline theoretical rationale to explain why this was perfectly consistent with prevailing norms of rationality. Udy (1962), on the other hand, maintained that there must always be a tension between the rational goals of economic organizations and the nonrational goals of their social milieu and that this prevents organizations from ever attaining full rationality. Blau & Scott (1962) took perhaps the most trenchant position of all and produced a book that defined the field for more than a decade; it established the interpretation of a formal organization as a purposive aggregation of individuals who exert common effort towards a shared and explicitly recognized goal. In hindsight, it appears that the dominance of this view may have been but one expression of the major shift then taking place in the culture of US social science towards explicit, quantitative, computer-aided analysis.

The Period of Comparative Multivariate Analysis

In 1944 the first computer, Mark I, was developed, and in 1946 the first commercial prototype, ENIAC, was introduced. By the late 1960s, 20,000 computers were in use worldwide (Ouchi 1984). This development had a great impact on the metaphor with which social scientists thought about organizations. For the first time, organizations were construed as information-processing systems rather than as status systems or systems of domination or of ritual.

Computers also had a great impact on the methodology of organizational research. In 1955 Terrien & Mills followed up the logical implications of Graicunas's (1937) article on the span of control. They found that the administrative ratio in school districts was positively related to number of employees and thus conjectured that this relationship would severely limit the maximum feasible size of such organizations. Anderson & Warkov (1961) found that organizational complexity mediates this size-administrative ratio relationship, and at that point a "true science" of organization was off and running. For the first time, students of organization not only could adopt norms of rationality, they could subject their hypothesis to the sort of protorational test using the computer that had previously been accessible only to physical scientists. Subsequent studies by Hage & Aiken (1967), by Hall et al (1967), Blau (1968), Blau & Schoenherr (1971), and a host of other organizational sociologists explored every subtlety of the paradigm. Particularly notable were the studies by the Aston Group in England: Pugh et al (1969), Hinings & Lee (1971), and a steady stream of similar work, most of which involved the application of factor analysis to the study of organization. All of this research on the structure of formal organizations was done in the name of Max Weber, all of it represented attempts to represent operationally the elements of bureaucratic administration that Weber had described, but in the end it was an effort dominated by a methodology and by a computer rather than by a point of view.

The September 1974 issue of *Administrative Science Quarterly* included a letter to the editor from Cornelius Lammers, a Dutch sociologist playing the role of friendly uncle. Lammers visited 18 US campuses, talked to faculties of 16 sociology departments and of 12 schools of management, and tabulated the responses of 20 leading scholars (including Aiken, Aldrich, Blau, Evan, Laumann, Selznick) to questions concerning the state of their field. The research trend mentioned most often as being strong at the time was "comparative studies of organizational structure." The trend most often evaluated as being "bad" was "comparative studies of organizational structure" (Lammers 1974:423). What had seemed a few years earlier to be the continuation of the mainstream of organizational sociology turned out instead to be an epiphenomenon, driven as much by the new computer technology as by any underlying conceptual force.

While this development in organizational sociology was dominating the attention of many sociologists, the principal heirs of Herbert Simon's (1945) work were following a path that had a similar history but a quite different ending. March & Simon (1958) attempted to place the study of organization within an explicitly rational metaphor, adopting a propositional form modeled on the hierarchy of operating systems and application systems of computer software. They developed the view that organizations economize on the bounded rationality of human beings, thus producing what, in the end, is a system in

which goals and behavior are connected in a manner that is quite rational. Cyert & March (1963) took the computer metaphor to its logical if austere conclusion, while Thompson (1967) attempted a formal theory of organizational rationality. Although this approach seemed for a while to have the kind of promise that had been hoped for in the comparative study of organizational structure, it too subsided.

The period of the mid-1950s through the 1960s was marked not only by the dominance of the rational point of view in the study of organizations but also by a cleavage in method that clearly set apart organizational ethnographers from the multivariate statisticians of the Terrien & Mills (1955) school and from the applied mathematicians of the Simon (1945) school. The academic ethos of the time quite clearly granted the nod to those who were more quantitatively oriented, but the qualitative social scientists did not entirely disappear. In organizational sociology, the main line that had been represented in an earlier period by Selznick (1949) was carried forward in studies of construction firms by Stinchcombe (1959), of utopian communities by Kanter (1968), of "skid row" communities by Spradley (1970), and of colleges by Clark (1970). All of these chose as their subject something other than large public or private organizations. They were substantively as well as paradigmatically on the fringes of organizational sociology, but they preserved a link to Durkheim's (1961) tradition while the Weberian (1968) point of view temporarily took center stage. This small but hardy family of scholarship was later to become a focal point for the development of organizational culture studies.

Also during this period, the method of ethnography and the point of view of symbolic interaction developed within the sociology of occupations. The work of Becker & Carper (1956), of Gouldner (1957), of Roy (1960), Janowitz (1960), and of Gertzl (1961) had barely penetrated the organizational sociology of the period, but it too was to become a central feature of the later study of organizational culture. Consider next how this intellectual setting gave rise to the contemporary study of organizational culture.

Anomaly Leads to Evolution

Every scholar in the field may legitimately point to a book or article that he or she favors as the beginning of the study of organizational culture as we now see it. The beginnings, however, came not in the putting forward of a new scheme but rather in the form of several stirrings, none of which seemed at the time to be consequential for organizational sociology.

It was the resistance of school systems to bureaucratic interpretation that provided the major anomaly and brought an end to the study of formal organizational structure. Cohen, March & Olsen (1972) found that even the idea of bounded rationality failed to capture the weakly rational properties of school systems; these authors describe them instead as "organized anarchies".

Dornbusch & Scott (1975) had a similar befuddling experience in applying the bureaucratic study to school districts and delayed the publication of their book for several years while they attempted to make sense out of the experience. Weick (1976) could describe them best as "loosely coupled systems", and Meyer & Rowan (1977) saw in their formal structure nothing more than myth and ceremony, detached from the "real" activities of teachers and of students. Becker & Gordon (1966) attempted to apply the paradigm, by then well developed, of comparative organizational structure to the analysis of hospitals but found that it did not effectively capture their essence.

Another significant anomaly at this time occurred as organizational sociologists attempted to apply the size-complexity-administrative ratio model to business organizations in Japan. Abegglen (1958), Dore (1973), McMillan et al (1973), Tracy & Azumi (1976), Marsh & Mannari (1976), and Cole (1979) found that some stable results replicated in Japan, while others did not. Lincoln et al (1978), in a study of Japanese-owned businesses in the United States employing expatriate Japanese and Japanese-Americans, found little difference in structure related to the ratio of Japanese ethnics to whites, but the authors were quite clearly frustrated at their inability to capture statistically what they experienced as a major organizational difference: "We cannot describe adequately how different is the atmosphere in an organization where 50 to 80% of the personnel have Japanese origins, where Japanese is widely spoken and certain Japanese interpersonal customs are observed, from one employing few or no Japanese or Japanese-Americans" (1978:834).

The ground was thus prepared for a new approach to the study of organization. The paradigm of formal organizational structure had been found incapable of encompassing the anomalous forms of hospital and of school organization, nor could it effectively encompass the modern Japanese industrial firm, which had come to prominence in scholarship as well as in public affairs. The attitude among many organizational scholars was one of despair. If organizations are anarchies, if their social structure is a myth that is entirely disconnected from everyday behavior, then there is little that the mainline social scientist can bring to the study of them.

Groundwork for a solution came from the extensive sociology of careers and occupations. Kuhn (1970) observed that a socially constructed point of view strongly influences the behavior of scientists, and it tends to be consistent within professions and across organizations. Lodahl & Gordon (1972) demonstrated that this view was entirely compatible with mainline sociological tradition, and Imershein (1977) suggested that the idea of scientific paradigm might be applied to the organization rather than the profession as the unit of analysis, thus creating the idea of an organizational paradigm. Van Maanen & Schein (1978) described how the processes found in occupational socialization were also at work in organizations. Van Maanen (1973) reported on his year of

living with a police force, thus bringing the method and point of view of the ethnographer squarely into the mainstream of management literature. Pfeffer (1981) elaborated the idea of an organizational paradigm and fleshed out the possibilities of the study of management as symbolic action.

The study of organizational culture is rooted more deeply in sociology than in any other intellectual tradition. Critical both to sociology and to the study of organizational culture is the idea of an organization as a social phenomenon that has its own features which distinguish it from an environment on the one hand and from the individual desires and predispositions of its members on the other. Whereas the sociologist will typically emphasize the organization as a dependent variable with respect to macrosocial forces, it seems organizational culture has instead treated the organization as an independent variable almost exclusively, paying attention to the effect of organizational culture on employee participation and morale.

At the moment, the study of organizational culture is dominated by behavioral scientists working in the 600 schools of management in the US. These management schools now produce a good deal more organizational work than do departments of sociology, which surely must be a reversal of the situation of twenty years ago. The sheer growth in numbers of management schools is largely accountable for this difference, but there is a difference of intellectual domain as well. When sociologists became disenchanted with the multivariate studies of organizational structure in the 1970s, they simply took their intellectual curiosity and methodologies and migrated to the study of community structure, of occupational structure, of the structure of health care, and so on. Those who are employed in schools of management, however, are rather permanently committed to the study of business firms. As a result they maintained their focus on business organizations but sought new points of view and new techniques with which to revitalize the study of those specific institutions. In that transition was created the study of organizational culture. Perhaps it is through culture, rather than formal structure, that large firms can be bent to the will of their masters and rendered predictable, "rational."

It was a curious turnabout, to say the least, in which the study of informal organization as the opponent of organizational rationality was thus transformed into the study of organizational culture as the basis for organizational rationality.

We should mention at least briefly some developments in social psychology that have had an important bearing on the development of the study of organizational culture. Many organizational scholars have been influenced by the tradition in psychology of studying the disjuncture between expressed intention and observed behavior (e.g. Festinger 1957, Kelley 1977). Various developed as the study of cognitive dissonance, of persuasion, and of attribution, this tradition has consistently drawn attention to the nonrational features of

individual behavior. For example, cognitive psychologists have shown systematic biases in the way people assess causality and make decisions (Kahneman & Tversky 1979). People tend to use story or single-case information more than multiple observations to make judgments (Borgida & Nisbett 1977). They also engage in self-serving rationalizations of the past, attributing success to their own efforts and failure to external forces beyond their control (Weiner et al 1971). Apparently, organizations similarly attribute success to managerial skill and poor performance to a poor economy or other external forces (Staw et al 1982).

The import of these ideas for organizational scholars has been to bolster the view that decision making in organizations is not consistently rational. Goals are often discovered or created after the organizational activities they are supposed to direct (Weick 1979). Popular stories may have more influence on decisions and commitment than rules and statistics (Martin & Powers 1983).

A second significant line of social psychology for the study of organizational culture has been the study of organizational climate (Forehand and Gilmer 1964, Tagiuri 1968). Studies of climate have been sometimes indistinguishable from some current studies of organizational culture. The method of those studies, however, was that of survey research rather than of ethnography, and survey methods were under heavy attack within social psychology as lacking in the precision of experimental method. Two broad critiques of the climate studies appeared in one year (Hellriegel & Slocum 1974, James & Jones 1974) and effectively diminished the activity in that area of study. We shall also see that the use of survey methodology is seen by many current scholars of culture as being too much the product of the social scientist's rather than the participant's point of view and therefore inappropriate as a method for measuring culture. There are thus many scholars who are aghast that anyone would label climate studies as studies of culture even though some of the underlying ideas are the same.

A REVIEW OF CURRENT THEORY, EMPIRICAL RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

The historical review just concluded attempted to relate some older themes to the contemporary work, thus providing an ordering of the contemporary approaches. In this section, we offer a second and more complete attempt to bring order to this new work, making use of categories that occurred to us as we sifted through several score books, articles, and working papers.

We begin with current theoretical work on organizational culture. Then we consider current empirical work. Finally, we consider work on the planned change of organizational culture. The interested reader may also wish to pursue

other recent reviews by Burrell & Morgan (1979), Sanday (1979), Smircich (1983), Gregory (1983), Louis (1983), and Morgan et al (1983).

Theoretical Studies of Organizational Culture

The currently developing theory may be assigned in a rough way to the category of either macroanalytic or microanalytic approaches to culture in organizations. The macroanalytic theories have in common an attempt to understand the culture of a whole group or subgroup, the functions that culture performs in maintaining the group, or the conditions under which the group and its culture and subcultures develop. The microanalytic theories present culture as something that resides within each individual and can be understood through the cognitive processes of sense-making, learning, and causal attribution, or by probing the unconscious mind.

MACROANALYTIC THEORIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE Most of these exhibit a functional logic reminiscent of the anthropologists Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. For example, in studying the rites and ceremonies of organizations Trice & Beyer (1984, see also Trice 1983) developed a typology of rites (rites of passage, of degradation, of renewal, of integration, etc) and suggested that these rites fulfill both manifest and latent social functions (e.g. to socialize, integrate, assign social identity). Wilkins (1983a) suggests that popularly told stories about founders and other key organizational actors in some organizations perform integrative and control functions by serving as persuasive and instructive exemplars of managerial paradigms.

A second group of studies has adopted the view that the study of organizational culture should be closely related to some aspects of institutional micro-economics. In this view, both the form and content of culture are interpreted as consequences of the needs of the firm for efficiency. Wilkins & Ouchi (1983) argue that a homogeneous corporate culture performs organizational control functions but that it will develop only under certain conditions (e.g. long and stable membership, interaction across functional/hierarchical boundaries, and an absence or discrediting of institutional alternatives). In a similar vein, Jones (1983) suggests that the content of an organizational culture results from the particular economic conditions (property rights structures, etc) in which organizational participants find themselves. He suggests three types of cultures that may result: production, bureaucratic, and professional. Barney (1984) extends these ideas to suggest that in some organizations culture can become a "firm-specific asset," which can produce "supernormal returns."

The study of occupational groups as cultural forms is now a lively and active field for both theory and empiricism. Van Maanen & Barley (1984) review an extensive occupational literature and assert that we are much more likely to find shared understandings and values among members of a same occupational

group than among the functionally differentiated and spatially dispersed members of an organization. Others who have raised this problem of subcultures or lack of shared organizational culture—though with differing suggestions for subunits and how to select them—include Louis (1983), Martin & Siehl (1983), Gregory (1983), and Wilkins (1983b).

By and large, these studies attempt to describe the purpose and function of patterns of belief, language, and symbol in organizations. They tend to present these elements of organizational culture as necessary to order and stability, and to regard them as resistant to explicit attempts at manipulation owing to their natural or evolutionary character. Rarely, however, do they attempt to explain the relationship between an organization's internal culture and its larger cultural or socioeconomic environment. At this moment, the diversity of approach seems to be vigorously wide.

MICROANALYTIC THEORIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE Attempts to develop theories of organizational culture from a psychological point of view are small in number and tend to be mid-range rather than grand abstractions. Existing works can be separated into two general categories—one for those that tend to use psychological notions of attribution or social learning and one for those that point to the unconscious or underlying assumptions that give meaning to the surface manifestations of culture.

In the first category, Pfeffer (1981) exemplifies the use of theories that emphasize the lack of coupling between attitudes and behavior. He suggests that organizational symbols are decoupled from actual outcomes, which are primarily mediated by environmentally determined, resource-dependency relationships. Schein (1983a) argues that culture is the sum of what individuals have learned of their organizational world, based on (a) the observed consequences of past action, and (b) the success or failure of attempts to cope with needs for anxiety avoidance. This learning ultimately yields a few commonly shared organizational beliefs. A similar approach is taken by Martin et al (1983), who present a typology of organizational stories that serve to resolve or express psychological tensions.

The second class of psychological theories suggests that culture is best understood by going beyond surface manifestations. Some follow Freudian or Jungian psychoanalytic approaches, while others subscribe to a more linguistic, "deep structure" approach (Chomsky 1972). Mitroff and his colleagues (see Mitroff 1983, Mitroff et al 1983, and Dandridge et al 1980) present a Jungian concern for archetypes or other meaning-structures to help them characterize deeper layers of meaning in organizational life. Walter (1983), following Lasch (1979), points out the neurotic aspects of organizational culture in a psychoanalytic vein. Pondy (1978, 1983), on the other hand, uses a linguistic approach to "uncover meaning." He sees leadership as a language game, the meaning of which can only be understood by getting at underlying

“grammar” or rules and standards in people’s minds from which they generate appropriate behavior.

It seems natural to seek the cognitive analogues of organizational belief, as some of this work does. What is more interesting, however, is that this line of work seeks explicitly to join the psychology of individual cognition with the organizational setting that provides much of the cognitive field. When studies of formal structure dominated organizational research, there were few obvious opportunities for developing the social psychology of organizations, and the distance between organizational sociologists and organizational psychologists grew. Through the study of organizational culture, that distance may be diminished.

Empirical Studies of Organizational Culture

The issues, problems, and methods of research on organizational culture have been discussed in several recent reviews (e.g. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24:4; Spradley 1979; Martin 1983; Van Maanen 1979; Louis 1984; Burrell & Morgan 1979). Each of the reviews presents a unique view of the field. Some argue that quantitative techniques have no place in empirical studies of culture, while others assert that multiple methods, both quantitative and qualitative, are necessary. The range of methodologies is broad, with much borrowing from linguistics, survey research, participant observation, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interaction.

We have divided the empirical work into categories that follow from the principal intellectual traditions described above. These are: (1) *holistic studies* in the tradition of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski; (2) *semiotic or language studies*, which follow Geertz and Goodenough; and (3) *quantitative studies*, which use surveys or experimental manipulation.

HOLISTIC STUDIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE The exemplar in this category is the work by Rohlen (1974), who presents an ethnographic description of his participant observation in a Japanese bank. More recent examples of ethnographic descriptions of organizations include Krieger’s portrait of a San Francisco rock music station (1979), Van Maanen’s (1973) description of the socialization of police recruits, Manning’s (1979) study of the world of detectives, Dyer’s (1982) description of a computer company, Wilkins’s (1983b) study of subcultures in an electronics company, the examination by Trice & Beyer (1985) of two social movement organizations routinizing the charisma of their founder, and Barley’s (1983b) study of the evolution in organizational roles accompanying the introduction of CAT scanning technology in two hospitals.

These studies vary greatly in their degree of overt analysis and of theorizing. For example, Krieger (1979) avoids theoretical interpretation while Trice & Beyer (1985) use their observations of contrasts between the two organizations

over a the 20-year period to generate a rough theory of routinization of charisma. While some of these studies employ quantitative methods such as content analysis (Martin et al 1984) or surveys (Barley 1983a), most rely upon field observation for periods of 6 months to 20 years (off and on). They tend to be rich and interesting descriptions of organizational life and provide a sharp contrast to the statistics typical of the structural view of organizations.

One major subset of holistic studies relies on archival, historical, or other public documents rather than field observation to arrive at an understanding of a social group. One example is Clark's (1970) study of organizational "sagas" at Antioch, Reed, and Swarthmore colleges; he relied upon historical documents supplemented with interviews to recreate the past. Similarly, Dyer (1984) studied cultural evolution at "Brown Corporation" during the years 1922–1983 through a combination of interviews, public records (e.g. annual reports, minutes of stockholder meetings), internal reports (e.g. minutes from Board of Directors meetings, financial and personnel records) and industry reports.

Boje (1983) has used public histories combined with field observation to study changes in the folklore of the commercial printer since 1400. He finds that with recent rapid technological change the previously traditional and longstanding culture has been virtually destroyed. Kanter (1968) and Martin & Siehl (1983) relied upon secondary histories or other books as their primary sources. While the potential limitations and biases associated with such sources are obvious, the use of public and historical documents has encouraged a longitudinal perspective that is otherwise almost impossible to obtain. While these holistic studies embody the spirit of Radcliffe-Brown and of Malinowski, they employ an amalgam of methods both old and new to study the modern business firm and are thus quite distinct from any earlier body of work.

SEMIOTIC STUDIES (FOCUS ON LANGUAGE AND SYMBOLISM) The ethnoscience approach mentioned earlier is exhibited clearly in recent studies by Gregory (1983) and Barley (1983a). Gregory interviewed 75 professionals from several companies and studied several companies in depth in Silicon Valley. Her analysis of the language of these professionals suggested several taxonomies that enable the natives to make sense of their multifaceted and rapidly changing industry. Barley (1983a) studied the language of funeral directors to understand the implicit categories and taxonomies they use to make sense of their work. He spent some time observing a funeral home and then conducted several in-depth interviews, which were transcribed and later used for the linguistic analysis.

Other studies have focused on language but without the overtly ethnoscience approach. Pondy (1983) used ethnographic accounts of Communist China and of an African tribe (the Nuer) to illustrate the role of metaphor in helping participants in a culture to use the past to understand the uncertain or complex future. Huff (1983) examined public documents in a graduate school of man-

agement to show how the language of different subgroups was first couched in terms preferred by a new dean but then changed as the groups became increasingly independent. Pondy & Huff (1983a) have also traced the decline of one frame of reference used by policy makers and the rise of another by following the language used in public documents and recorded interviews over a several year period. They have documented (Pondy & Huff 1983b) the use of rhetoric by an administrator to prepare the way for a goal of computer literacy in public schools.

These semiotic studies appear to have been quite directly influenced by the tradition in anthropology. They typically require painstaking effort both in the collection of transcripts and in analysis, and they sometimes resemble exercises in methodology as much as anything else. As the techniques become more widely disseminated, however, the approach seems likely to expand rapidly.

QUANTITATIVE STUDIES Some studies of culture seem to be very much like the previous studies of organizational climate as we noted earlier. For example, Ouchi & Johnson (1978) employed questionnaires to characterize the differences in the cultures of companies "A" and "Z" (see also Ouchi 1983). O'Reilly (1983) distributed questionnaires in seven high technology companies in Silicon Valley to test the association between the presence of a "strong culture" and employee identification with the firm. He found general support. Bowditch et al (1983) used a standard climate survey with an original culture survey to study the effect on culture and climate of the merger of two banks. Friedman (1983) reports on the use of content analysis of projective measures to reveal subcultures in one particular firm. He is careful to note that the procedure requires qualitative observation and data collection to assist in the interpretation of results. Beck & Moore (1983, 1984) report studies that use a variety of projective measures in order to illuminate the relationship between broader social norms and the firm-specific culture of Canadian banks.

Meyer (1982) used both questionnaires and content analysis of stories collected through open-ended interviews to examine the creation of shared ideologies. Finally, Zucker (1977) subjected the theme of institutionalization to laboratory experimentation, and Martin & Powers (1983) report the use of experimental manipulation to demonstrate that facts embedded in organizational stories are more vivid and persuasive than are quantitative summaries.

SUMMARY: EMPIRICAL STUDIES The empirical studies of organizational culture involve a combination of the technology of the organizational social scientist with the interests of the cultural anthropologist. Since the organizational scholars of management schools have highly developed skills in the multivariate analysis of survey and experimental data, it is not surprising that they approach the study of organizational culture with these techniques. However, most of these studies also employ to varying degrees the techniques

of participant observation, which have long been absent from organizational research. An ethnographer might assert with some justification that this new line of work is nothing but a mongrelization of the study of culture, and perhaps in the end the studies of this sort will be evaluated as having been a fad. At the moment, we can only observe what appears to be new "hybrid energy" flowing from the confluence of several established methodologies with a variety of approaches to the idea of organizational culture. This confluence is producing a quite novel form of organizational scholarship.

Work on Planned Change Related to Organizational Culture

The prescriptive work in this area can be conveniently divided into two general categories: (a) case descriptions of planned change efforts; and (b) advice to executives. Both are natural developments in the milieu of a school of management.

CASE DESCRIPTIONS Although management scholars may seek to find useful prescriptions that can guide managers, their inquiry is nonetheless guided by more traditional rules of science, and their predisposition towards claims of simple organizational change is one of skepticism. The descriptions of efforts to change culture are not encouraging to those who believe culture can be a tool for management control. For example, Van de Ven (1983b) documents, with pre- and post-interview and survey data, the failure of a charismatic black minister to integrate into a single organizational culture several semiautonomous entities. Bowditch et al (1983) describe how the attempted cultural merger of two banks resulted instead in the domination of one culture by the other. Trice & Beyer (1985) point out that the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous was able to institutionalize his organization through a set of quite unique circumstances, which another similar organization was unable to duplicate. These studies might properly be regarded as a subset of holistic studies of organizational culture, particularly because they are few in number. However, these studies have typically found that organizational cultures are not easily altered in intentional ways, and they have often turned to an examination of environmental factors to explain this result. Studies of change are thus typically more inclined to see organizational culture as a dependent variable than are the other approaches, and they are of particular interest for that reason.

ADVICE TO EXECUTIVES Much of the advice to executives seems quite distant from the detached tone of typical academic writing. This area seems to proceed directly from the popular success of descriptions of already successful corporate cultures (Ouchi 1981, Pascale & Athos 1981, Deal & Kennedy 1982, and Peters & Waterman 1982) to general recommendations about how to influence corporate culture. Most authors in this genre present the view that the culture of a successful company can be emulated, although with difficulty.

Some of the most popular advice to executives comes from consultants or business school professors who offer recommendations about how to influence attitudes, opinions, and beliefs. Peters (1978, 1980) suggests that executives can effectively signal changes in values by the way they spend their time, what they ask questions about, and what they include on their agenda. Sathe (1983) uses a social psychological model to suggest how managers can help participants interpret events and can use hiring and training to influence beliefs.

Other approaches in this area follow the lead of Selznick (1957). For example, Van de Ven (1983a) suggests that the primary role of executives should be to articulate and embody a mission and role for the organization. Ouchi & Price (1978) suggest that executives should articulate a philosophy of management that describes organizational goals.

Some are less sanguine about the possibility of changing an organizational culture but suggest that it is useful to have culture in mind because it delimits efforts at change. For example, Schwartz & Davis (1981) suggest that executives should consider the "cultural risk" of proposed new strategies. In their view, the organizational change implied by new business strategies should be compared to the cultural orientations of the organization in order to determine the degree of potential resistance.

Schein (1983a), as noted above, has forcefully argued that much of an organization's culture represents the ways people have learned to cope with anxiety. Thus attempts to change culture are tantamount to asking people to give up their social defenses. We should consider the ethics of such a course, according to Schein. We should also be aware that threats to such social defenses are only likely to meet with success when the culture is under considerable challenge.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The large commercial organization is a recent phenomenon, which developed only after the introduction of rail transport and telegraphy. It is therefore to be expected that scholars will continue for some time to try one intellectual template after another before finding one that adequately captures its essence. On the other hand, the business firm is just one special case of a much older class of large and complex social structures, and it is therefore to be expected that many inherited scholarly tools will be useful in studying it. This review suggests both that the study of large firms is in a period of experimentation and that it draws upon many insights that anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have developed in the study of other forms of social organization.

We have treated the contemporary study of organizational culture as a cultural phenomenon as much as a scholarly development. As a cultural phenomenon, this field exhibits two facets of particular interest. First is a struggle among academics over which of many points of view will dominate the

study of organizations, and second is the impact of multivariate statistics on the study of organizations.

Several points of view are now in active contention for dominance among students of organizational culture. One contest is over whether culture is a dependent or an independent variable. Among those who prefer to study organizational culture as a dependent variable, some take a natural-systems point of view and conclude that the culture of a firm is the natural outgrowth of its particular time and place and is not subject to human attempts at manipulation, while others assert that critical features of organizational culture may be systematically altered by a determined management. Those who view culture as an independent variable tend to ignore these possibilities and instead seek to explicate the variety of forms through which the subtle and implicit features of organization influence the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individual participants.

A second contest is over the appropriate methods of study. Some hold that the method of lengthy field observation must be employed, while others assert that the whole point of the contemporary study of organizational culture is to go beyond the method of the anthropologist by applying multivariate statistical analysis to these issues. Although rarely written in journal articles, it is often said by those who are statistically inclined that organizational culture has become the refuge of the untrained and the incompetent, who will degrade this new field if they are not rooted out.

This review has consistently taken a historical point of view in attempting to achieve perspective on the study of organizational culture, and it is with a historical perspective that our review will conclude. The study of organizations, like any field of study, grows only through a constant intellectual tension that yields thesis and antithesis. During the 1960s, the multivariate studies of complex organizations had just begun to invade a domain that had long been dominated by field studies. The sociology of prisons, armies, slums, and gold coasts had been rich with the participants' point of view. Those who first championed the "comparative" (that is, large-sample) point of view were passionate about the inherent superiority of intellectual rigor in their approach. The struggle often produced research that manifested elements of various approaches, research that raised scholarship to new heights.

During much of the 1970s, the struggle ceased. The multivariate approach dominated the leading journals, and those who preferred qualitative approaches established their own journals, meetings, and subculture. In the absence of conflict, there was a flowering of subbranches and of sub-subbranches dealing on the one hand with abstract representations of networks of interorganizational relations and on the other hand with Jungian archetypes of corporate personality. Neither, as of this moment, has amounted to much. It is difficult to resist the interpretation that conflict and confrontation are good for research and that

they are essential for good research. It is on these grounds that the contemporary study of organizational culture shows promise. This new field is rich with confrontation between those who feel that the statisticians continue to be too powerful and those who feel that the phenomenologists have sapped the scientific rigor of the field. Those who study occupational cultures argue passionately that any attempt to describe the culture of a firm with its many occupational subcultures is superficial, simpleminded, and cheap. The disputes are deeply felt and hotly contended, as are the more basic intellectual commitments on which they rest.

In a way, the study of organizational culture is a return. Much of the contemporary writing on organizational culture is accessible to the educated layman and is of interest even to the press. This was true of an earlier period of urban sociology, of industrial social psychology, and of cultural anthropology. There is in the field a return to a concern for the whole of the organization, an interest in knowing not only about that which can be captured in a standardized regression coefficient, but in knowing also what can be described only in a lengthy quotation that reveals the native's point of view. There is a return to a dual interest in description and in prescription, which typified the social sciences after World War II but which became unbalanced in a single-minded allegiance to description 20 years later. With the return to these earlier, perhaps more complete, approaches to organization come also the old tensions between points of view, tastes, and methods that do not make natural bedfellows. For the moment, at least, we can expect the study of organizational culture to be marked both by dissension and by creativity.

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