Organizational culture

According to British sociologist Chris Jenks, the concept of culture originally referred to the cultivation of crops, but sometime during the nineteenth century social scientists extended the idea to include the cultivation of human beings.[1] Following this trajectory, anthropologists and sociologists contributed much to the study of culture, and their work both extended the modern perspective and introduced the symbolic perspective to organization theory.

In 1871 British social anthropologist E. B. Tylor provided one of the earliest and most influential definitions of culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.'[2] At the time, anthropology was focused on explaining how humans differ from other animal species, and culture served as an initial answer. Fascinated by Charles Darwin's highly popular theory of evolution, they reasoned that, if humans develop along some sort of evolutionary continuum, as Darwin showed for other animal species, then studying the evolution of human culture should reveal new information about the human species.

The idea that human cultures evolve along an evolutionary continuum was supported by the reports of travelers to distant lands who had encountered people untouched by modern civilization. It was believed that studying these 'primitive' cultures would bring insight into human evolution. Anthropologists set off to study various tribes of native people for extended periods of time, learning to speak their languages and documenting their daily lives in hopes of learning what advanced cultures might have looked like in earlier periods of their evolution.

As evidence from anthropological studies mounted over the course of several decades, the idea that so-called primitive cultures were inferior to advanced cultures became increasingly difficult to sustain. The colonialism that had accompanied the anthropologists precipitated one of the earliest moves within social science toward critical postmodernism via the critique of colonialism; but long before postmodernism invaded anthropology, the differences between cultures produced an important refinement in the definition of culture—the study of culture had become the study of cultures, not the one but the many.

This shifting of attention from the similarities all humans share to their cultural differences led American cultural anthropologist Melville Herskowitz in 1948 to alter Tylor's early definition of culture to: 'the total body of belief, behavior, knowledge, sanctions, values, and goals *that make up the way of life of a people*.'[3] Conceptualizing culture as 'the way of life of a people' opened the door to defining organizational culture as the way of life within an organization.

This chapter begins with definitions of organizational culture and issues such as levels of analysis, subcultural silos, and cultural strength. There follows a history describing how organizational culture arrived within the symbolic and modern perspectives of organization theory pretty much at the same time but in very different ways. The tensions between the modernists' highly normative theories proposing to explain how culture can be managed, and symbolic efforts to understand symbolism and cultural change, fed postmodern critiques of culture as a concept and reflections on the dangers of theory and theorizing.

Definitions: culture, subculture, silos, and cultural strength

The most widely used definitions of organizational culture appear in Table 6.1. You will probably notice that all of these definitions refer to something held in common among group members, variously described as some combination of shared meanings, beliefs, assumptions, understandings, norms, values, and knowledge.

The concept of sharing invoked by most definitions of organizational culture suggests widespread agreement or consensus among cultural members, but on closer examination you can see that the practice of sharing reveals the importance of maintaining differences. Think of sharing a meal with your friends or family—you may prepare the meal together in the same kitchen using common ingredients and cooking tools, yet each of you eats a different portion of the food prepared and enjoys the experience in your own way.

Cultures allow for similarity and agreement on some matters, but they also rely upon differences. They need to accommodate disagreement without making it impossible to maintain collective identity. In other words, cultures place diverse humans within a shared framework of belonging, which they express through a multitude of artifacts and symbols, only a key few of which do they all acknowledge.[4] And even when a symbol *is* widely shared it will most likely carry multiple and conflicting meanings.

In this sense, you might consider culture a distributed phenomenon. Culture is distributed among the people who hold the values, beliefs, meanings, expectations, and so on, of which culture is constituted. In turn, the value and significance attributed to the distinctive contributions of group members as they interact constructs culture and creates the coherence needed to form and maintain a collective identity.

The definitions given in Table 6.1 all apply equally well to organizations and to organizational subcultures. According to American organizational ethnographers John Van Maanen and Stephen Barley, a **subculture** is a subset of an organization's members that identifies itself as a distinct group within the organization based either on similarity or familiarity.[5] Subcultures based on similarity arise from shared professional, gendered, racial, ethnic, occupational, regional, or national identities. Subcultures based on familiarity develop when employees interact frequently, as they often do when they share space and equipment such as particular areas within a factory or office building, a canteen, copy machine, and water cooler.

Another way to look at subcultures, suggested by American organizational researchers Caren Siehl and Joanne Martin, is to define them by the ways in which they relate to each other.[6] Because of the way power is distributed in most organizations, top management

Table 6.1 Selected definitions of organizational culture

Elliott Jaques (1952: 251)	'The culture of the factory is its customary and traditional way of thinking and doing of things, which is shared to a greater or lesser degree by all its members, and which new members must learn, and at least partially accept, in order to be accepted into service in the firm.'
Andrew Pettigrew (1979: 574)	'Culture is a system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms, categories, and images interprets a people's own situation to themselves.'
Meryl Reis Louis (1983: 39)	'Organizations [are] culture-bearing milieux, that is, [they are] distinctive social units possessed of a set of common understandings for organizing action (e.g., what we're doing together in this particular group, appropriate ways of doing in and among members of the group) and languages and other symbolic vehicles for expressing common understandings.'
Edgar Schein (1985: 6)	'The pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems.'
John Van Maanen (1988: 3)	'Culture refers to the knowledge members of a given group are thought to more or less share; knowledge of the sort that is said to inform, embed, shape, and account for the routine and not-so-routine activities of the members of the culture . . . A culture is expressed (or constituted) only through the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a fieldworker . . . Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible only through its representation.'
Harrison Trice and Janice Beyer (1993: 2)	'Cultures are collective phenomena that embody people's responses to the uncertainties and chaos that are inevitable in human experience. These responses fall into two major categories. The first is the substance of a culture—shared, emotionally charged belief systems that we call ideologies. The second is cultural forms—observable entities, including actions, through which members of a culture express, affirm, and communicate the substance of their culture to one another.'

typically creates the dominant subculture, which many refer to as the **corporate culture**, even though it might be more accurate to call it the corporate subculture. Siehl and Martin characterized the possible relationships between corporate and other subcultures as **enhancing**, when a subculture enthusiastically supports the corporate culture's values, beliefs, norms, and expectations; **orthogonal** when it maintains independence from the influence of the dominant subculture, but not in ways that create conflict; and

counterculture, when a subculture actively and overtly challenges the values, beliefs, norms, and expectations of the dominant subculture.

As an example of counterculture, Siehl and Martin cited John De Lorean who in the 1960s headed up a division of General Motors that refused to play by the company's rules yet was tolerated because it was profitable and brought an edge to GM's otherwise conservative line of cars. De Lorean was so admired by other executives at GM that, before he left to start his own company, he was promoted to VP of all car and truck divisions and was considered a serious candidate for CEO. Countercultures and their leaders play important and often creative roles in the organizational cultures that they challenge, which is why they are tolerated, at least for a time, within their organizations.

Subcultures are neither good nor bad per se. Their value to the organization depends upon the influence they exercise. The De Lorean counterculture afforded GM much needed creativity. But subcultures can also undermine coordination and limit communication between parts of an organization, a problem given the metaphoric name **silos**, a term borrowed from agriculture where it refers to tall cylindrical, self-contained storage units used to preserve harvested corn. When applied to organizations the metaphor describes strong organizational subcultures whose self-containment makes collaboration between them difficult or impossible and can lead to unproductive conflict.

The concept of **strong culture** helps explain the problem of organizational silos. American researchers Jennifer Chatman and Sandra Cha defined strong culture in terms of two variables: agreement about what is valued and the intensity with which values are held within a culture.[7] Strong cultures are the product of high agreement combined with high intensity. Applying the concept to subcultures suggests that, when high intensity and agreement produce strong subcultures the strength of the subcultures undermines that of the overall organizational culture, leading to poor communication and lack of coordination; in other words, you get silos.

A history of organizational culture in organization theory

With the publication of his book *The Changing Culture of a Factory* in 1952, British sociologist Elliott Jaques became the first organization theorist to describe an organizational culture. Jaques justified including the culture concept in organization theory by noting that the focus on organizational structure had led researchers to ignore the human and emotional elements of organizational life. His work inspired organizational scholars like Barry Turner and Andrew Pettigrew in the United Kingdom, who were soon joined by Pasquale Gagliardi in Italy, Gareth Morgan and Peter Frost in Canada, and Lou Pondy and Linda Smircich in the United States, among others. Together these scholars made a persuasive case for studying organizational culture by focusing on the role symbolism plays in organizational life, and by doing so began forming a subculture within organization theory.

At first, no one in the mainstream of modern organization theory took much notice of organizational symbolism. Then, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, several books on corporate culture appeared on bestseller lists in the United States including William Ouchi's *Theory Z* and Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*, the most successful

of the lot, topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for months following its release and was even turned into a series of TV programs.

The popular appeal of books proposing culture as an explanation of superior organizational performance stunned and seduced much of the academic community, which, up until then, had never seen any of its concepts attract much popular attention. Academics interested in organizational culture read and studied these books, along with Edgar Schein's more academic but equally influential *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, which appeared around the same time.[8]

Much of the early work on organizational culture was normative in orientation. Culture was treated as something to be managed; a tool to enhance organizational effectiveness and competitiveness. For example, Peters and Waterman promoted the idea that strong cultures breed excellence, while Ouchi made the case for culture as a desirable alternative to both market mechanisms and bureaucracy for the control of organizations.[9] Meanwhile organizational culture researchers who adopted the symbolic perspective began expressing doubts about the ease with which organizational cultures might be manipulated to managerial ends.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a few small conferences on organizational symbolism were held in Europe and the United States. These gatherings attracted a curious mix of scholars from fields ranging from organization theory and sociology, to anthropology, psychoanalysis, and folklore. Their meetings often involved creating playful rituals filled with symbols that evoked their phenomena of interest right in their midst. A movement was soon underway, attracting lots of fresh recruits. Special issues of mainstream academic journals devoted to organizational culture appeared and the fledgling Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) soon dwarfed its parent organization the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS), one of Europe's prestigious academic associations. At the Academy of Management in the US, sessions on organizational culture began to multiply rapidly.

Many organizational culture researchers embraced qualitative methods that were descriptive rather than explanatory in purpose. Culture was difficult to define in operational terms that captured the nuances of meaning involved in understanding symbolism. Ethnography became the most common method used—a combination of participant observation and in-depth unstructured interviews. Symbolic researchers hoped that the reputation of ethnography in cultural anthropology and interpretive sociology would satisfy the demands for rigor coming from skeptics, but most modernists remained unconvinced, suspicious of ethnography's origins in the humanistic social sciences. Battle lines were drawn and a war ensued, fought primarily over the legitimacy of qualitative methods for conducting organizational research.[10]

The war was waged most publicly at conferences, though it also showed up in the editorial review processes of academic journals and in faculty discussions about who would and would not be granted tenure. Through presentations at conferences and papers submitted to journals, researchers adopting the symbolic perspective eventually forged a base of support as they created a strong counterculture within organization theory.

It was largely through research on organizational culture that the symbolic perspective became established. However, this does not mean that modernists gave up their claim to culture. On the contrary, some of the earliest and most long lasting organizational culture theories were rooted in the still dominant modern perspective.

The modernist perspective in organizational culture theory

Dutch organization theorist Geert Hofstede explored national influences on organizational culture through differences he first observed in the international subsidiaries of IBM. His enormously influential work defining dimensions of difference between cultures around the world was complemented by work being done at the same time by American social psychologist Edgar Schein. Both of these theorists tapped the modern perspective, but while Hofstede remained faithful to modernist ambitions to measure and study cultural differences quantitatively, Schein's theory crossed over to inspire at least some symbolic organizational culture researchers. Meanwhile efforts to define variables and measure organizational culture continue, illustrated by the popular Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI).

National cultural influences on organizations

Organizational cultures have a two-way relationship with the environments in which they are found and from which they recruit their members. Employees who join an organization come pre-socialized to a certain extent by cultural institutions such as family, school, community, and religion. They carry aspects of national, regional, industrial, occupational, and professional cultures into the organization by melding their values and identities with those of the organization.[11] Meanwhile organizations influence the local, regional, and national cultures to which they contribute. For example, the many entrepreneurial computer companies that produced the regional culture of California's Silicon Valley in the 1970s, eventually reshaped organizational cultures everywhere through their technological innovations and the appeal of their youthful, nerdy, 24/7 organizational cultures.

Sometimes an organizational culture clashes with the culture of a place where it locates. The controversial opening in 1992 of a new Disneyland theme park in France illustrates the difficulties organizations may face when operating in cultural settings that are unfamiliar to them. Before construction of the park even got underway, Euro Disney was criticized as an assault on French culture. It was seen as a symbol of the American way of life that French critics feared would Americanize their children. Then, as French employees were recruited and trained, labor unions protested against Disney's strict dress code claiming that it undermined French individualism. They accused Disney of indoctrinating cast members, pointing to the company's rules regarding smiling and appearing to be sincere all day.

Eventually Disney adapted the Paris theme park somewhat to accommodate French culture. For instance, female employees were allowed to wear bright red lipstick to work and wine was served in Euro Disney's many restaurants. Remarkably, given the influence of critical opinion, the theme park was renamed Disneyland Paris in 1994. Clearly Disneyland Paris, operating within France, brought French values and employment practices into the larger company.

Although the Disneyland example clearly shows the effects of national culture on an organization, later developments in the story show just how interwoven an organizational culture and its environment can become. When Disneyland Paris threatened bankruptcy in 2005, instead of rejoicing at the failure of this widely resisted American icon, the French government offered the American company a substantial loan to keep Disneyland Paris open in order to avoid the loss of 35,000 French jobs. With acceptance of its dependence on

Disneyland, the park became a part of France in a way that allows Disneyland Paris a deeper connection to French culture than the one the French initially feared.

Hofstede's approach to organizational culture is derivative of the idea that organizations are subcultures of larger cultural systems. In the late 1970s Hofstede studied the influence of national cultures on IBM.[12] At the time of the study IBM operated in seventy countries, the forty largest of which Hofstede used for his study. IBM's annual employee surveys conducted from 1967 through 1973 provided Hofstede with his data.

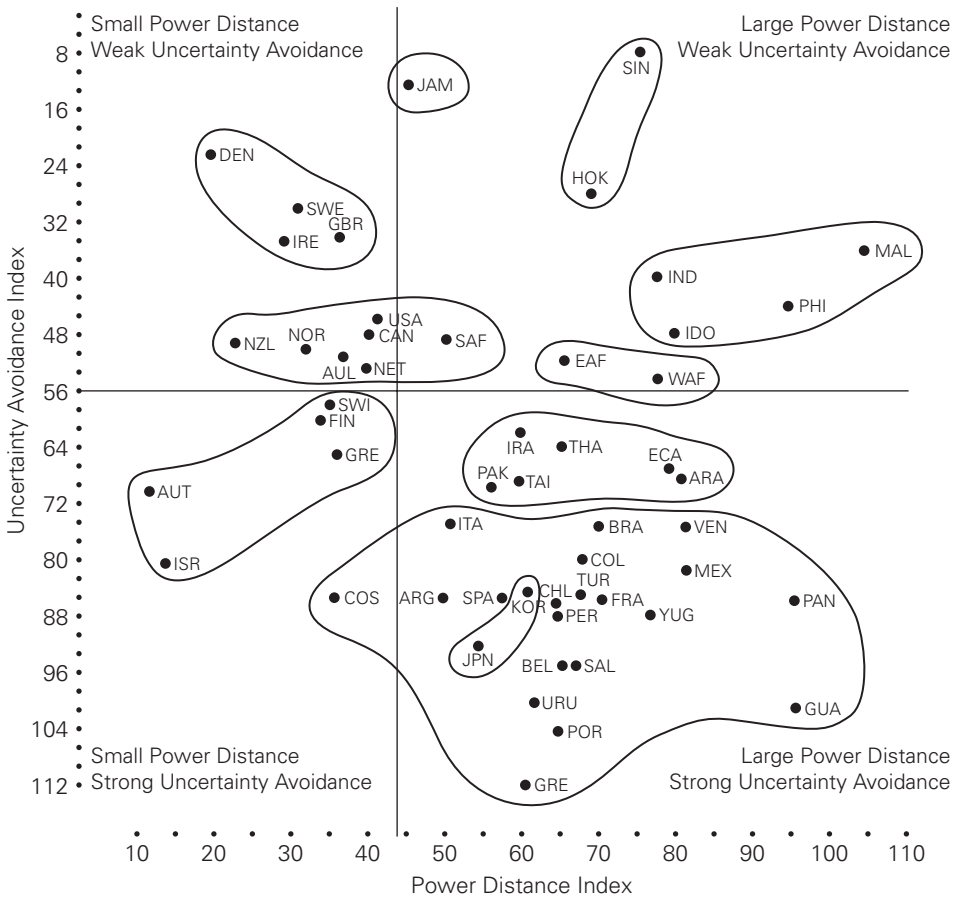
Using IBM data, Hofstede constructed measures of work-related values that he then compared across countries. Further analysis revealed four dimensions of national cultural difference operating within IBM's organizational culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2). The findings supporting these dimensions have been replicated in populations of commercial airline pilots, civil service managers, and consumers. A fifth dimension of long- versus short-term orientation was revealed by Hofstede's research on Asian cultures.[13]

Power distance refers to the extent to which the members of a culture are willing to accept an unequal distribution of power, wealth, and prestige. Hofstede's data showed that low power distance characterized countries like Denmark where inequalities of status are difficult to accept. For instance the Danish Jante Law (*Janteloven*) proclaims that no individual should have more than, or stand out in any noticeable way from, other Danes. When Danes try to put themselves forward as more prestigious or powerful than others they are quickly reminded that they are no better than anyone else.

Organizations from high power distance cultures, such as Brazil, Singapore, and the Arabic countries, rely heavily on hierarchy. Their unequal distributions of authority are accompanied by a lack of upward mobility. When organizations from higher power distance cultures attempt to impose their authority structures on subsidiaries from lower power distance cultures like Denmark, difficulties generally follow. Similarly Danish managers face problems when they try to use egalitarian leadership practices to control international subsidiaries in countries noted for high power distance. Such cultural mismatches, according to Hofstede, result from different cultural norms and expectations.

In high power distance cultures subordinates expect to be told what to do; for them hierarchy is an existential inequality. In low power distance cultures, hierarchy is considered an inequality of roles created for convenience rather than reflecting essential differences between people, thus subordinates in low power distance cultures expect to be consulted by their superiors. As a consequence of these contradictory expectations, for example, the ideal boss in a low power distance culture is a resourceful democrat, whereas in a high power distance culture the best boss is likely to be a benevolent autocrat.

Uncertainty avoidance can be defined as the degree to which members of a culture avoid taking risks. Hofstede argued that different societies have different levels of tolerance for uncertainty and that these differences show up in a variety of ways. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, for example, people are more accepting of innovative ideas, differences of opinion, and eccentric or deviant behavior, whereas in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance these things are resisted or even legislated against. Rules, regulations, and control are more acceptable in high than in low uncertainty avoidance cultures and Hofstede claimed that organizations in these cultures have more formalization and standardization, whereas organizations in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance dislike rules and resist formalization and standardization.



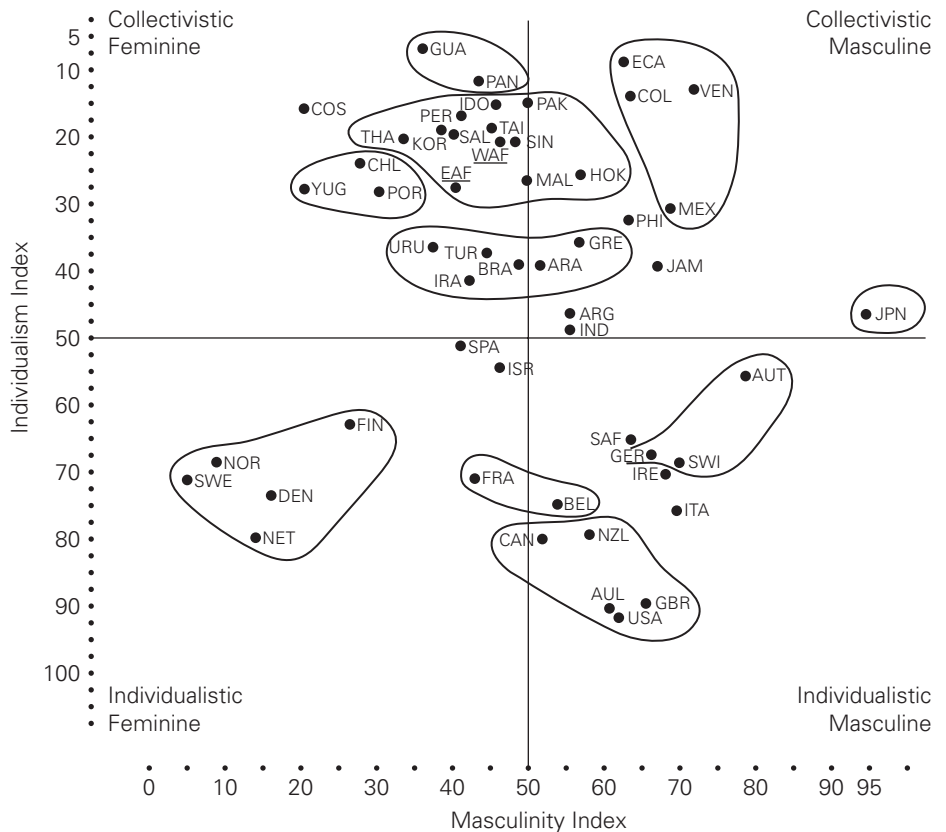
Key

ARG	Argentina	FIN	Finland	ISR	Israel	PAN	Panama	THA	Thailand
AUL	Australia	FRA	France	ITA	Italy	PER	Peru	TUR	Turkey
AUT	Austria	GBR	Great Britain	JAM	Jamaica	PHI	Philippines	URU	Uruguay
BEL	Belgium	GER	Germany (West)	JPN	Japan	POR	Portugal	USA	United States
BRA	Brazil	GRE	Greece	KOR	Korea (S)	SAF	South Africa	VEN	Venezuela
CAN	Canada	GUA	Guatemala	MAL	Malaysia	SAL	Salvador	YUG	Yugoslavia
CHL	Chile	HOK	Hong Kong	MEX	Mexico	SIN	Singapore		
COL	Colombia	IDO	Indonesia	NET	Netherlands	SPA	Spain		
COS	Costa Rica	IND	India	NOR	Norway	SWE	Sweden		
DEN	Denmark	IRA	Iran	NZL	New Zealand	SWI	Switzerland		
ECA	Ecuador	IRE	Ireland	PAK	Pakistan	TAI	Taiwan		

Figure 6.1 Position of countries on Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance and power distance dimensions

Source: Hofstede (2001: 152). Reprinted by kind permission of Geert Hofstede.

In his original study Hofstede found that uncertainty avoidance was highest in the IBM employees from Greece, Portugal, and Japan, while it was lowest in those from Singapore, Hong Kong, and Sweden. You can contrast this with the results of a later study (see Figure 6.2) in which Greece, Portugal, and Guatemala topped the list, while Singapore, Jamaica, and Denmark anchored the low end of the scale. Using Hofstede's insights about uncertainty avoidance you can perhaps better understand the Greek people's resistance to change and



Key

ARG	Argentina	FIN	Finland	ISR	Israel	PAN	Panama	THA	Thailand
AUL	Australia	FRA	France	ITA	Italy	PER	Peru	TUR	Turkey
AUT	Austria	GBR	Great Britain	JAM	Jamaica	PHI	Philippines	URU	Uruguay
BEL	Belgium	GER	Germany (West)	JPN	Japan	POR	Portugal	USA	United States
BRA	Brazil	GRE	Greece	KOR	Korea (S)	SAF	South Africa	VEN	Venezuela
CAN	Canada	GUA	Guatemala	MAL	Malaysia	SAL	Salvador	YUG	Yugoslavia
CHL	Chile	HOK	Hong Kong	MEX	Mexico	SIN	Singapore		
COL	Colombia	IDO	Indonesia	NET	Netherlands	SPA	Spain		
COS	Costa Rica	IND	India	NOR	Norway	SWE	Sweden		
DEN	Denmark	IRA	Iran	NZL	New Zealand	SWI	Switzerland		
ECA	Ecuador	IRE	Ireland	PAK	Pakistan	TAI	Taiwan		

Figure 6.2 Position of countries on Hofstede's individualism and masculinity dimensions

Source: Hofstede (2001: 294). Reprinted by kind permission of Geert Hofstede.

the uncertainty it brings appeared in their responses to European Union calls for reform during the Greek debt crisis of 2010–12.

Individualism versus collectivism involves the degree to which individuals in a culture are expected to act independently of others in their society. In highly individualistic cultures, individual rights are paramount. You will find evidence of individualism versus collectivism in the ways in which people live together (e.g., alone, in shifting partnerships, tribes, or nuclear families) and in their religious beliefs (e.g., whether or not an individual can have a personal relationship with the supernatural).

Hofstede pointed out that in cultures such as the United States individualism is seen as a source of wellbeing, whereas in Chinese or Mexican cultures it is seen as undesirable and alienating. This orientation toward individualism or collectivism has implications for the sorts of relationships preferred within different cultures. Relationships between members of individualistic cultures are loose and individuals are expected to take care of themselves. By contrast, in collectivist cultures, cohesive groups (e.g., extended families) give individuals their sense of identity and belonging, demanding considerable loyalty in return.

Individualism versus collectivism helps to explain why those from collectivist cultures find the highly adverse reactions among many US citizens to calls for universal health insurance so unfathomable. On the other hand, the progress made toward providing more social services may indicate a shift in the US toward a more collectivist culture. Related to this distinction, Hofstede claimed that, in individualistic cultures like the US, tasks take precedence over relationships, whereas relationships prevail over tasks in organizations from collectivist cultures, like those of Asia.

You can imagine the sort of difficulties created when an organization from an individualistic culture imposes its task-focused control systems on an acquisition located in a collectivist culture. The acquirer may well be legitimately puzzled in ways captured by the question: 'Why don't they just do what they are told?' By the same token, when an organization from a collectivist culture acquires a company in an individualistic culture, you will likely hear frustrated cries from the acquired along the lines: 'Why don't they just tell us what they want us to do?'

Hofstede's **masculine versus feminine** designations for culture refers to the degree of separation between gender roles in a society. For example, in highly masculine cultures such as Japan, Austria, and Venezuela, men are expected to be more assertive and women more nurturing. In Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands, cultures that score high on the feminine dimension, gender differences are less pronounced. The highly masculine cultures in Hofstede's studies tended to place emphasis on work goals having to do with career advancement and earnings, and their members celebrated assertiveness, decisiveness, and self-promotion, while members of organizations in feminine cultures were likely to ridicule assertiveness and to undersell themselves.

The feminine cultures in Hofstede's studies favored work goals concerning interpersonal relationships, service, and preserving the physical environment, their members valued quality of life and intuition. Not surprisingly Hofstede found that women held more professional and technical jobs and were treated more equally in highly feminine cultures than in cultures high on the masculinity scale. You have to wonder, in light of recent changes in the gender roles of many countries, if there is not a shift to the feminine side underway globally, seen in the rise of service sector economies and spreading concerns about sustainability and social justice.

Long-term versus short-term orientation describes cultural differences in predilections for thrift and perseverance as well as respect for tradition. According to Hofstede countries that score highly on long-term orientation believe that hard work will lead to long-term rewards. In these countries it will also likely take longer to develop new business, particularly for foreigners.[14] Organizations from cultures characterized by a short-term orientation face fewer challenges to change.

The importance of Hofstede's research is not only that it identified specific, measurable, national cultural differences but also that it revealed organizational culture to be a mechanism

through which societal cultures influence organizations. The national cultural traits identified by Hofstede can be seen as part of the web of meaning that provides context for organizational culture and the recent addition of the fifth dimension of long-term versus short-term orientation suggests there are potentially even more ways to define national cultural influence. Nonetheless, Hofstede's dimensions wrap a context around organizational level theories of culture such as that presented by American social psychologist Edgar Schein.

Schein's theory of organizational culture

According to Schein, a set of basic assumptions forms the core of a culture (see Figure 6.3). This core manifests as values and behavioral norms that cultural members recognize, respond to, and maintain as they use them to make choices and take action. Culturally guided choices and actions produce the artifacts of a culture, including among many other things the products organizations manufacture and the services they provide.

Basic assumptions represent what members of a culture believe about their reality; however, since they are typically taken for granted, you rarely find cultural members who can state their culture's basic assumptions. Try to imagine what a fish thinks about water and you get an idea of the limited awareness most people have of their basic assumptions. But even lying beneath ordinary awareness, basic assumptions and beliefs penetrate every part of cultural life and color all forms of human experience. As Schein put it, basic assumptions influence what members of a culture perceive, think, and feel.

Their unquestioned yet pervasive character is why it is likely that you will only become alive to cultural differences when you live for an extended period in a foreign culture. When your assumptions lead you to engage in inappropriate behavior or to misinterpret someone else's behavior, the workings of your native culture become more obvious to you. Because you are using the wrong assumptions to explain what is going on in the foreign culture, your experiences of surprise will encourage you to observe more attentively and ask questions. If your investigation renders you able to release yourself from your native cultural assumptions and try on those of your host culture, you will slowly become able to explain the differences and this will lead you, not only to function more effectively in the culture you are visiting, but to understand your native culture more deeply. Even though it may still be difficult to put

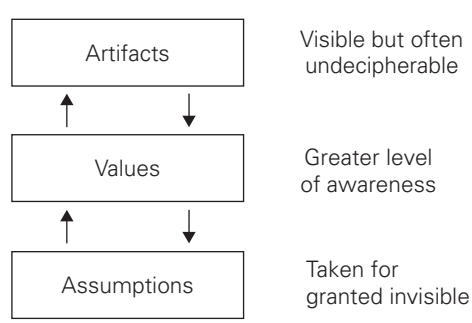


Figure 6.3 Schein: Three levels of culture

Source: Adapted from Organizational Culture and Leadership (p. 14) by E. H. Schein. Copyright 1985 Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, San Francisco. All rights reserved.

anybody's cultural assumptions into words, you will nonetheless become savvy about culture and better at moving gracefully between cultures.

According to Schein, a culture's assumptions pervade the next level of culture—values. **Values** are the social principles, goals, and standards that cultural members believe have intrinsic worth. They define what the members of a culture care about most and are revealed by their priorities. Because they also guide cultural members in their assessments of right and wrong, a culture's values are sometimes equated with its morality or ethical code.

Although values are more accessible to consciousness than basic assumptions they are not always top of mind. Nonetheless, cultural members are able to recognize their values fairly easily and when someone challenges their culture in some fundamental way, such as breaking with convention, they often become quite upset. When organizational values are challenged, that challenge most often comes from marginal members of the organization such as newcomers, artists, or revolutionaries—or from outsiders like a new CEO hired by a board of directors to shake things up. For example, in the 1960s, being marginal and challenging mainstream cultural values was a part of the youth counterculture, or the 'hippie' subculture as it was known in the US (see Figure 6.4).

A great deal of research conducted from within the modern perspective has been devoted to specifying the values various organizational cultures hold (e.g., for customers, employees, socially or environmentally responsible behavior). However, according to Schein, the important issue is the influence cultural assumptions and values, taken as a whole, have on perceptions, behavior, and emotional states. One significant influence that cultural values exercise on organizational members takes place through defining norms and expectations for behavior.

Figure 6.4 Challenges to cultural values most often come from marginal members of the culture such as newcomers, revolutionaries, or outsiders

Norms are the unwritten rules and common body of knowledge that allow members of a culture to know what is expected of them in a wide variety of situations, including how to coordinate their behavior with that of others in acts of organizing. Norms communicate expectations regarding many types of social behavior such as talking in movie theaters, cutting in line, and standing at football games. Organizational norms communicate important information, for example, when you should inform your boss of potential problems, what sort of clothing you should wear to work, and when it is appropriate to display emotion.

While in some organizations these matters are spelled out by formal rules and regulations (a point of overlap between culture and social structure), in most they are left unstated and communicated informally via the normative pressures of culture, such as the disapproving looks used in some cultures, or in others by looking away. The contrast between a look of disapproval and looking away indicates just one of many differences that combine to make each culture an expression of its constellation of assumptions, values, norms, and expectations.

While values specify what is important to the members of a culture, norms establish what sorts of behavior to expect from oneself and others. In short, values define what is valued, while norms make clear what it takes to be considered normal or abnormal. The link between values and norms is that the behaviors that norms sanction (either through rewards or punishments) can be traced to outcomes that are valued. For example, norms about not talking in movie theaters or cutting in line might be traced to a cultural value for courtesy to others. Norms about wearing business suits and not displaying any emotion while at work might indicate a value for self-discipline. Beware, however, that even though values underpin norms, any given norm can be ambiguous relative to underlying values. For example, a norm for wearing suits at work could indicate a value for self-discipline or for fashion consciousness. The ambiguity of interpretation extends to artifacts.

According to Schein's theory, members of a culture hold values and conform to cultural norms because their culture's underlying assumptions and beliefs nurture and support these norms and values. The norms and values, in turn, encourage activities that produce cultural artifacts. **Artifacts** are manifestations or expressions of the same cultural core that produces and maintains the values and norms; however, their greater distance from the core can make it even more difficult to interpret their cultural significance unambiguously.

A few years ago a sign displayed in the foyer of a new neighborhood cinema that I visited in the United States informed patrons that, in contrast to other cinemas they may have frequented, talking during the screening of a film was permitted in this establishment. The cinema attracted a clientele that liked to express their reactions to movies vocally, and thus they violated the then dominant American cultural norm of silence during movies. The sign—an artifact produced by the organization—named an otherwise unspoken dominant cultural norm and, by doing so, drew a symbolic boundary around this counterculture that encouraged those who entered to acknowledge and accept the countercultural norm. I imagine that the sign was the product of more than one angry misunderstanding that erupted among patrons of the establishment who did not realize they had entered a counterculture.

Artifacts like the cinema sign are unusually tangible indicators of cultural norms, values, and assumptions; you normally need to study many artifacts before you will recognize the cultural patterns that reveal the deeper layers of culture. Most cultures do not post conspicuous signs to orient newcomers like the cinema did! To gain access to the deeper levels of

a culture you must train yourself to observe artifacts and how members use them. Categories of artifacts to include in your observations consist of objects, verbal expressions, and activities. Table 6.2 shows several examples of each.

A good exercise to try involves thinking of an organizational culture you know and listing as many of each artifact type that come to mind. Use the scheme in Table 6.2 to jog your memory for any artifacts you have overlooked. If possible visit the organization. You will find your heightened sensitivity to culture will cause you to see many more artifacts than you are able to remember off the top of your head. This experience should convince you of the hidden power of culture operating beneath ordinary awareness in your daily life.

Once you have a few dozen artifacts, start sifting through them for patterns that suggest values and maybe even an assumption or two. But beware of a common tendency to impose your own cultural values on those of the group you wish to study. Learning to separate your values from those of the culture you want to understand will take time. It will help if, as you proceed with your analysis, you talk to cultural members and allow them to challenge your emergent understanding until gradually you gain deeper insight. Working on forming your interpretations alongside members of the culture will expose you to the subjective richness of cultural knowledge.

One way you will know you are making headway in a cultural analysis is when your data surprise you. Surprise indicates that you are getting beneath the surface of cultural artifacts by learning how the locals understand their world in ways that differ from your own. You will

Table 6.2 Artifacts of organizational culture

Category	Examples
Objects	Art/design/logo Architecture/décor/furnishings Dress/appearance/costume/uniform Products/equipment/tools Displays of posters/photos/memorabilia/cartoons Signage
Verbal expressions	Jargon/names/nicknames Explanations/theories Stories/myths/legends and their heroes and villains Superstitions/rumors Humor/jokes Metaphors/proverbs/slogans Speeches/rhetoric/oratory
Activities	Ceremonies/rituals/rites of passage Meetings/retreats/parties Communication patterns Traditions/customs/social routines Gestures Play/recreation/games Rewards/punishments

Source: Based on Dandridge, Mitroff and Joyce (1980); Schultz (1995); Jones (1996).

learn to better appreciate your own culture as well as the one you are studying when you realize that previously unexamined aspects of your own culture create your surprise at another's interpretations of objects, behavior, or words.

The organizational culture inventory

Robert Cooke and J.C. Lafferty exemplify the quantification in organizational culture research associated with the modern perspective. These researchers developed the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) in the 1980s as a means to measure the extent to which an organizational culture is supported by each of twelve different behavioral norms.[15] Factor analysis of survey responses to a 120-question inventory provided by members of a variety of organizations revealed three types of organizational culture each supported by four norms. Constructive organizational cultures are distinguished by achievement, self-actualizing, humanistic-encouraging, and affiliative norms. Passive-defensive organizational cultures embrace approval, conventional, dependent, and avoidance norms. And aggressive-defensive organizational cultures are supported by oppositional, power, competitive, and perfectionistic norms.

Subsequent studies employing the OCI yielded significant correlations between the three culture types and various outcomes. For example, constructive cultures have been significantly and positively correlated with employee motivation and job satisfaction, teamwork, and the quality of customer service, whereas passive-defensive cultures appear negatively correlated with the same variables. Aggressive-defensive cultures yield few significant correlations with the same measures but show significantly positive correlations with stress levels and negative correlations with quality of work relations and customer service.[16]

Although modernist studies of culture such as those based on the OCI provide knowledge that is readily translatable into normative prescriptions for management, they are limited to studying dimensions of organizational culture that are predefined by the researcher and are common to numerous cultures. Modernist studies are therefore unlikely to present the surprises that occur when researchers encounter a new culture. This is where the symbolic perspective offers an advantage over the modern–symbolic researchers personally enter cultural territory to develop subjective knowledge about their phenomena of interest.

Symbolic organizational culture research

In the early 1960s, Anselm Strauss and his research team studied hospitals using participant observation methods and an analytical approach they developed called **grounded theory** because the theory was built from empirical observations.[17] In their hospital study they learned that staff and patients negotiated patient care regimens and in doing so mutually created and maintained a sense of order, which the researchers labeled **negotiated order**. They noted that, although the hospital's rules and hierarchies needed to be considered in explaining staff behavior, negotiated order better accounted for the way the hospital actually functioned.

While this research was going on, American cognitive sociologist Harold Garfinkel, employing **ethnomethodology**, developed interpretive epistemological foundations

for symbolic culture studies. His 1967 *Studies in Ethnomethodology* reported the results of interpretive field experiments carried out by his students, whom Garfinkel had instructed to challenge commonsense expectations about their everyday life, such as how to shop in a department store or eat a family dinner. He taught the students to first violate prevailing behavioral norms, for example, by negotiating the price of an item in a department store, and then observe and document what happened, including their own feelings and responses to the incident their unexpected behavior created.

You can try this out for yourself. Next time a friend reports going on a date or having a flat tire, pretend not to know what a date is or what it means to have a flat tire. Maintain your naivety throughout no matter how uncomfortable you become. Then document your feelings in the situation as well as what you observe of the others involved because your feelings of discomfort will uncover subtle subjective cultural expectations and how they influence you. Do not simply assume you know how this will work out—have the actual experience.

Garfinkel argued that engaging in unexpected behavior denies the taken-for-grantedness of shared understanding and catapults participants out of their everyday interpretive frameworks. The students who participated in his research reported the experiments caused confusion, discomfort, and occasional bouts of offence, yet although a great deal of nonsense was produced, the prevailing social order never collapsed entirely. Instead, participants renewed their efforts to reestablish or retain things-as-usual, for example, by saying: 'You are just kidding around, right?' or 'Come back when you are ready to behave normally!'

Based on his ethnomethodological experiments with students, Garfinkel concluded that whatever sense everyday social life makes, its sensibility is a social accomplishment, that is, people conspire to achieve and maintain the taken-for-grantedness of their social lives, even if they do so unwittingly. His concepts of negotiated order and social life-as-accomplishment echo those of enactment and social construction theory and thus complement the definition of culture as constructed by interacting individuals who, in interpreting what is going on around them, collectively create meaning. Seen from within the symbolic perspective, meaning produces culture even as it is the product of culturally informed behavior.

Organization theorists who adopt the symbolic perspective assume an interpretive epistemology, which means they focus on how organizational members make subjective meaning and the roles their subjectivity and meaning making play in socially constructing the workplace. They believe that meaning is dependent on context and, in the case of organizations, culture provides that context.

You have probably had the experience of having your words taken out of context, for example, when someone uses something you have said against you in an argument. Similarly, you may have heard politicians make this claim in defending themselves against criticism by the press or other politicians. This shows that the act of moving cultural symbols from one context to another changes their meaning. In cultural research **contextualizing** means studying artifacts and symbols in the situations and locations in which they naturally occur by observing organizational members using and speaking about them as they ordinarily do. Symbolic culture researchers want to experience the contextualizing effects of organizational culture as its members do, hence their reliance on participant observation and the methods of ethnography, ethnomethodology, and grounded theory.

Symbols, symbolism, and symbolic behavior

According to American sociologist Abner Cohen, **symbols** are 'objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions and impel men to action.'[18] Symbols denote or substitute for something, as when a corporate logo stands for a company. **Denotation** refers to a symbol's instrumental use as a signifier, for example, holding up a white flag to indicate surrender. But symbols also carry connotative meanings. **Connotation** refers to the expressive uses of a symbol, as when an American flag is waved or burned, or a corporate logo is transformed into a joke or criticism of the company it signifies. For example, the Canadian magazine *Adbusters* published an image featuring a saddled but riderless horse grazing near headstones in a colorless snow-covered cemetery. Beneath the image Philip Morris's familiar advertising slogan was appropriated to chillingly declare: 'Marlboro Country.'

Because symbols such as the Marlboro Cowboy can bear multiple connotations, they remain ambiguous, always open to new meaning being made with them, as *Adbusters* did by associating the Marlboro imagery with an absent and presumably dead cowboy. Symbolic researchers, therefore, place as much attention on the processes by which meaning is constructed as on the specific meanings that symbols carry. According to John Van Maanen: 'To study symbolism is to learn how the meanings on which people base actions are created, communicated, contested, and sometimes changed.'[19] To see how this works requires looking into the relationship between symbols and artifacts.

Any artifact can become a symbol, but not all artifacts do. According to Canadian organization theorists Gareth Morgan and Peter Frost and their American colleague Lou Pondy: 'Symbols are created and recreated whenever human beings vest elements of their world with a pattern of meaning and significance which extends beyond its intrinsic content.'[20] For instance, we can see that a national flag is a symbol by the responses given to it by members of the culture that it represents. It can be used symbolically at one moment (saluting it, flying it over your home, painting it on your face, burning it in protest) and not at the next (when the flag is tucked away in a drawer or you wash the paint from your face). As these examples show, what makes an artifact a symbol is its use to make or communicate meaning.

Notice that observing an artifact being used as a symbol does not necessarily equate to knowing the symbol's meaning. Discovering the meaning of a symbol involves interpreting it within the cultural context of its use. I remember being mildly alarmed by the number of Danish national flags I saw on display when I moved to Denmark in 1990. In the liberal US subculture in which I grew up such behavior would have indicated an uncomfortable level of nationalism. When I encountered Danish flags displayed not only outside public buildings, but inside homes and offices, and even on birthday cakes, I wondered what was going on. Yet my Danish friends seemed puzzled when I asked them about their 'flag waving' (a term widely used in my native culture but unfamiliar to them). They told me the Danish flag was a normal part of everyday life and would be a matter for comment for them only if it were absent. Thus my surprise tipped me off to one of many cultural differences between the US and Denmark.

Whereas artifacts may be the most accessible elements of culture because they appear as tangible objects, behaviors, or verbal expressions, you need to remember that artifacts lie furthest from the cultural core and can be easily misinterpreted by those who are culturally

naïve, such as you will be whenever you enter a new culture. If studying cultural meaning interests you then sensitize yourself to misunderstandings like my encounter with Danish flags, as these can lead to profound cultural insights. Having these insights generally requires questioning insiders about specific elements of observed culture that surprise you, as I did with my Danish friends. Understanding culture requires both observation and interviewing skills.

Also remember that, while tangible symbols-as-artifacts are often shared, the meanings they carry may, and usually do, differ among the members of a culture. The potential for multiple and even contradictory meanings is what makes symbolism and its cultural context both so rich and so difficult to control. For those who produce an artifact with a symbolic purpose in mind, a particular meaning may be clear, but once others adopt the artifact and thus engage in their own symbolization, they will express their meanings when they use it rather than adhering strictly to the originating intent. Consider the Mercedes logo. Intended by its maker to symbolize prestige, it has also been used to symbolize overindulgence or the injustice of being poor. While executives can exercise considerable control over the design and display of corporate artifacts, the symbolic meanings with which these artifacts become associated are far less easy to control.

American cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz's persuasive method of thick description led many organization theorists to the symbolic perspective. But, as some modern organization theorists might put it, he did so in the way the Pied Piper led the children of Hamlin—by being remarkably seductive.

Thick description

In the early 1980s, organization theorists enamored of Geertz's highly acclaimed book *The Interpretation of Cultures* carried symbolic cultural anthropology into the mainstream of organization theory. Those researchers disenchanted with positivist epistemology and quantitative methods used Geertz's success to legitimize their interests in organizational symbolism and culture, and his methodology to guide their research.

Geertz concisely and evocatively described the conceptual foundation of the symbolic approach and boldly differentiated it from positivism in an opening salvo stating: 'Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.'[21] This bold statement suggested that Weber, often claimed by modernists to be one of their own, could also be called upon to render support for the symbolic perspective.[22]

Thick description is a form of ethnography focused on symbolic human behavior observed in its context and described in enough detail to make the behavior and its cultural context meaningful for the reader.[23] Geertz credited British philosopher Gilbert Ryle with the term thick description, and Geertz borrowed Ryle's distinction between a wink and a twitch to explain the difference between **symbolic** and **non-symbolic behavior**. Both involve contractions of the eyelid, but a twitch is involuntary, while a wink means something (e.g., I like you or I acknowledge our conspiracy). To get at the difference requires digging beneath the surface of behavior to the inferences and implications made by those who give and receive winks versus those who merely twitch.

Culturally contextualized symbolic behavior requires thick description because the phenomenon itself is so rich. **Thick description** is all about digging beneath surfaces to discover

symbolic meaning in order to show culture at work, as Geertz's story of a Balinese cockfight so admirably demonstrates. One of the important aspects of Geertz's storytelling for organization theory is its revelation of the narrative underpinnings of not just ethnographic writing, but all forms of research reporting. No sooner had Geertz's ideas infiltrated organization theory then organizational researchers began studying organizational stories, storytelling, and narrative. Somewhat later they would apply thick description to themselves, examining academic theorizing and writing practices.

Organizational stories and storytelling

The simplest way of defining organizational narrative is as a story of real events with a plot and characters that reveal an organization's culture and distinctive practices by providing an experience of what they are like. Stories were an early interest for symbolic organization theorists like American social psychologist Joanne Martin and her students Martha Feldman, Sim Sitkin, and me because it was widely believed that stories were one way organizational cultures expressed their unique identities. In a 1983 article we reported on our analysis of stories collected from numerous corporate biographies.[24] Contrary to our expectations, **content analysis** showed that nearly all the stories in the biographies we read were variants of the same seven story themes:

What happens when a higher status person breaks a rule?
Is the big boss human?
Can a little person rise to the top?
What will get someone fired?
What happens when the organization asks someone to move?
How will the boss react to mistakes?
How will the organization deal with obstacles?

We called our article 'The Uniqueness Paradox in Organizational Stories' because our main finding indicated that stories claiming cultural uniqueness rested on non-unique story types.

American folklorist Michael Owen Jones was quick to point out that taking a narrative approach to culture demands more than just collecting and analyzing the content of stories—it involves engaging with **storytelling**.[25] The cultural significance of stories lies as much in the teller's expressive artistry and the listeners' responses, as it does in the content of the story told, as Jones explained:

> During 'narrating' . . . a speaker communicates not only through linguistic channels (words) but also through paralinguistic and kinesic ones (intonation, change in pitch, body language). Moreover, the speaker responds to listener feedback by digressing, explaining, repeating, emphasizing, elaborating, abbreviating, dramatizing, and so on . . . Participants in a narrating event infer multiple, even quite different meanings from the varied cues; much depends on their experiences, feelings, and concerns in the present circumstances (the situational context that makes this narrating a 'situated event'). Therefore, it is misleading to refer to 'a story' or 'the story' as if it has an independent existence. It is inadequate to document 'stories' as linguistic entities with no regard for other channels of communication that convey information and affect responses. And it is misguided to assume that the event has a single meaning for participants.[26]

The uniqueness paradox study and other story studies undertaken at the time were vulnerable to Jones's criticism. To overcome this limitation American organization theorist David Boje looked at storytelling in the everyday work life of an office supply company. Boje's study contributed the concept of the **storytelling organization** defined as a 'collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sense making and a means to supplanting individual memories with institutional memory.'[27] One of the surprises Boje's study revealed came from his description of **terse storytelling**, which occurs when participants share a common history by working together. Much like the joke about the prisoners who know each other's jokes so well they simply call out a number and everyone laughs, terse stories are abbreviated to such an extent that outsiders may not realize storytelling has taken place.

In another approach to storytelling, organizational researchers study the use of storytelling by leaders. American communication scholar Ellen O'Connor, for example, studied the start-up of a high tech research organization in Silicon Valley.[28] She spent the better part of a year immersed in daily organizational life, attending meetings and discussions, talking to organizational members, and reading their memos and emails. Based on her observations, O'Connor concluded that the success of the start-up had depended in part on the narrative competence of its founder, that is, his ability to weave together plot and character to create a coherent and persuasive story shared and acted upon by other organizational members. In addition O'Connor identified three different types of narratives used within the organization: personal narratives including the life history, dreams, and visions of the founder; generic narratives that created the company, for example, business plans and strategy; and situational narratives or histories of critical events that explain why things were done in certain ways within the organization.

O'Connor's observations about the narrative competence of entrepreneurs was corroborated by an interpretive study Monica Kostera, Andrzej Koźmiński, and I conducted using interviews with CEOs published in *Harvard Business Review*.[29] Whereas nearly all the CEOs in a sample of thirty interviews showed signs of narrative competence, the interviews of those who founded a company were constructed almost entirely of personal narrative. Like all the CEOs in the sample, the entrepreneurial founders relied heavily on the epic form of storytelling, but they demonstrated much greater skill using other story types and were more likely to blend different types together to form highly complex stories. The typology of story types we used traces back to Aristotle (see Table 6.3).

To illustrate our application of this Aristotelian approach, consider the comic-epic story told by Masayoshi Son, founder and CEO of Japan's Softbank:

> When I first started the company, I only had two part-time workers and a small office. I got two apple boxes, and I stood up on them in the morning as if I was giving a speech. In a loud voice, I said to my two workers, 'You guys have to listen to me, because I am the president of this company.' I said, 'In five years, I'm going to have $75 million in sales. In five years, I will be supplying 1,000 dealer outlets, and we'll be number one in PC software distribution.' And I said it very loudly.
>
> Those two guys opened their mouths. They stood up and opened wide their eyes and mouths, and they thought, this guy must be crazy. And they both quit.
>
> That was in 1981. About a year and a half later, we were supplying 200 dealer outlets. Now we supply 15,000. In ten years, we've gone from two part-time employees doing software

Table 6.3 Aristotle's typology of stories

	Comic	Tragic	Epic	Romantic
Protagonist	Deserving victim, fool	Undeserving victim	Hero	Love object
Other characters	Trickster	Villain, helper	Rescue object, assistant, villain	Gift-giver, lover, injured or sick person
Plot focus	Misfortune or deserved chastisement	Undeserved misfortune, trauma	Achievement, noble victory, success	Love triumphant, love conquers misfortune
Predicament	Accident, mistake, coincidence, the unexpected or unpredictable	Crime, accident, insult, injury, loss, mistake, repetition, mis-recognition	Contest, challenge, trial, test, mission, quest, sacrifice	Gift, romantic fantasy, falling in love, reciprocation, recognition
Emotions	Mirth, aggression, scorn	Sorrow, pity, fear, anger, pathos	Pride, admiration, nostalgia	Love, care, kindness, generosity, gratitude
Function in business	Amusement	Catharsis	Inspiration	Compassion

Source: Hatch, Kostera and Kożmiński (2005), based on Gabriel (2000).

distribution and making about $12,000 to 570 employees doing software distribution, book and magazine publishing, telephone least cost routing, system integration, network computing, and CAD-CAM and making about $350 million.[30]

The comedic element of Son's story arises from this entrepreneur positioning himself as the deserving victim of the misfortune of losing his first two employees. To generate the epic effect, Son then repositions himself as heroically enduring the trials of starting up a company and achieving success. His initial mistake becomes but one early encounter in a much longer quest. According to Aristotle, this comic-epic story should provoke a combination of scorn and admiration in the listener that encourages amusement but also inspires. It also shows off the sophisticated storytelling of this successful entrepreneur as he makes skillful use of complex story forms.

Narrative and reflexivity in organization studies

Alasdair MacIntyre, a British moral philosopher, proposed narrative as a way of knowing, an epistemology, reasoning that all social life is narrated, as is evidenced, for example, by the existence of life stories.[31] MacIntyre claimed that our individual narratives give meaning to and construct our lives, yet, because we live within organizational, social, and historical contexts, our lives are intertwined with organizational, social, and historical narratives. In other words, in many respects, our story is part of the organizational and societal stories it contributes to.

Narrative is epistemic in that it is a way of knowing that includes knowing ourselves. Using narrative epistemology means believing that humans develop knowledge by listening and

telling stories to one another and to themselves. One implication of this epistemological assumption is that we can learn about organizations by studying the stories and accounts of organizational experience that organizational members tell. Thus MacIntyre placed a philosophical foundation under the organizational storytelling and narrating research tradition forming at the time.

Polish-born Swedish organization theorist Barbara Czarniawska took on the challenge MacIntryre laid down by proposing a theory of narrative identity formation based on the organizations she had studied in the Swedish public sector.[32] She compared the stories she heard about privatization and computerization to soap operas traced out in multiple intersecting plotlines involving numerous characters enacting a series of challenging adventures and interpersonal conflicts that continued without end even as the multiple storytellers used their stories to tell themselves and others who they were. According to Czarniawska, the complex plot lines and multiple characters of soap opera-like organizational narratives weave in and out of, always unfinished, organizational lives.

In addition to conceptualizing organizations as ongoing narratives, organizational culture researchers have used narrative epistemology to study theorizing as a narrative act. American organization theorist John Van Maanen was one of the first to use this reflexive approach. His book *Tales of the Field*, which distinguished realist, confessional, and impressionist tales, encouraged organizational researchers to examine their narrative practices and attend to the influence their narrative choices have on the stories they tell, namely their theories and the research reports they write.[33]

In an article that built on Van Maanen's work, I described how narrative theorists challenge the distinction between fiction and non-fiction such that, from the perspective of social science:

> research design involves creating the roles of subject and observer, establishing a context, and determining a sequence of actions and events. This suggests comparing the social scientist with an author of fiction who develops character, situation and plot. Furthermore, although research reports may demonstrate scientific achievement, the act of reporting is a narrative act.[34]

My study applied narrative theory developed by French literary theorist Gerard Genette who advanced the idea that narrative emerges from the conjunction of a story, its narrator, and an act of narration. Genette defined the relationship between the narrator and the story as perspective, while that between the narrator and the narrative act he called voice (see Figure 6.5). I translated narrative perspective and voice into the questions: 'Who sees?' and 'Who says?'

Perspective defines the position from which the narrator observes the phenomenon under investigation as either inside or outside its boundaries, the narrative equivalent of the distinction between subjective and objective ontological positioning. **Voice** depends upon whether or not the narrator appears as a character in the story told, which determines whether narrative reflexivity is admitted into the story.

Also following in Van Maanen's footsteps, Karen Golden-Biddle and Karen Locke analyzed the strategies authors of several well-regarded organizational ethnographies employed to make their accounts convincing.[35] Their **rhetorical analysis** revealed three dimensions the research reports they studied had in common – authenticity, plausibility, and criticality.

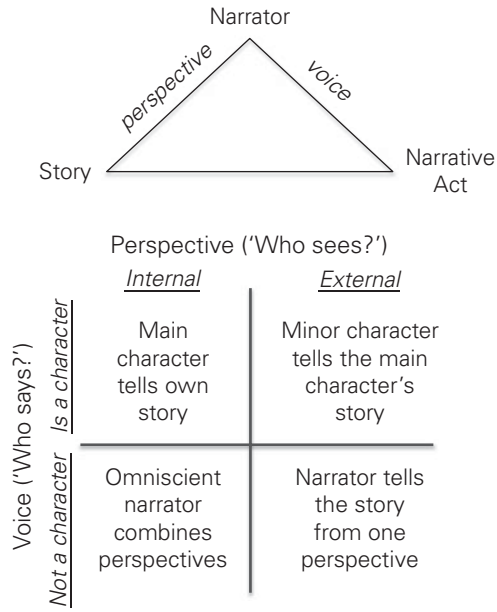


Figure 6.5 Basic elements of Genette's narrative theory and the relationships between them that constitute narrative position at the intersection of perspective and voice

Note that reflexivity is only possible for the narrator or researcher when she or he becomes a character in the story they tell.

Source: Based on Genette (1980: 186) who credits Brooks and Warren (1943: 589).

Golden-Biddle and Locke argued that **authenticity** convinces readers of the author's presence in the field and of their grasp of how those studied understood their world by offering details about everyday life, describing the relationship the author formed with informants and how data were extracted from them, and giving an account of their personal biases. They claimed that **plausibility** convinces readers of a study's contribution and importance by making unorthodox methods (how ethnography was viewed at the time) seem normal, by legitimating contestable assertions, and by building dramatic anticipation.

Criticality, the third of Golden-Biddle and Locke's criteria for convincing readers of the value of an ethnographic study, causes readers to probe their own previously unexamined assumptions or question the prevailing attitudes and beliefs of their field. While they found authenticity and plausibility necessary to convince readers to accept an ethnographic study, they found criticality the most promising for achieving wholesale acceptance of the symbolic approach within organization theory.

The theater metaphor: Dramaturgy and performativity

Erving Goffman, a Canadian sociologist, borrowed ideas from drama theory to explore how Shakespeare's saying 'All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players' applies to life in social organizations. Goffman believed that individuals shape themselves and their social realities through performances that are similar to how dramatists and actors compose and present stories on a stage in front of an audience.[36] Goffman developed his

dramaturgical approach while studying a mental hospital wherein he discovered that the social order of the hospital depended upon doctors, nurses, and patients all acting out roles for each other on an institutional stage.

American sociologist Michael Rosen used Goffman's dramaturgical approach to analyze a cultural ritual created by an American advertising agency. The annual ritual was known in the company as Breakfast at Spiro's, the name of the restaurant where it took place.[37] He described the symbols, dress, language, and pictures on display at the corporate breakfast he attended, and also how different groups and individuals manipulated these symbols to communicate meanings that reinforced their individual and organizational identities and enacted the organization's hierarchy.

For example, Rosen observed that different groups of employees dressed differently for the occasion—whereas clerical workers and creative people did not appear to be restricted by a dress code, employees looking for promotion and rewards wore suits of a particular type. Speeches were made by senior executives (all wearing the right suits) and their remarks reinforced images of control and benevolence, as when the Chairman of the Board talked about how some employees' attitudes caused problems requiring changes in personnel, and then presented ten-year service awards to loyal employees. Rosen claimed that, juxtaposed in this way, the awards symbolized conformity to company rules and reinforced the agency's hierarchical values. The same symbolism informed employees how to declare their membership in the firm's creative subculture by not dressing or behaving like those in charge.

As Rosen's study illustrates, **dramaturgy** is concerned with the theatrical elements of a performance such as acting, costumes, staging, masks, props, and scenery. It builds on a metaphor connecting aspects of the theater with organizing. For example, both acting and organizing depend upon specifying roles for actors to play, and both troupes of actors and businesses are called companies. Performance features prominently in the discourses of theater and organization alike, as in references to the performance of an actor, a play, or an organization, all of which are assessed through processes of critical review.

Similarities between theatrical and organizational performance caused some dramaturgically inclined organizational researchers to adopt the notion of **performativity** introduced by British linguist John L. Austin in his book *How to Do Things with Words*. As opposed to using words simply to convey information, Austin defined performatives as words which, when uttered, perform an action (e.g., 'I thee wed,' 'You're fired!').[38] Performativity moved dramaturgical studies of organizations toward the postmodern perspective.

Starting as a student of the theater metaphor but quickly moving into the realm of performativity, British organization theorist Heather Höpfl, a former theatrical stage manager in the UK, pointed out many similarities between the subjective experience of actors performing their craft and the world of work. Her studies examining dramaturgical and performative aspects of customer service in airline crews and employment agencies showed that when customer service employees embody corporate values, they leave a part of themselves aside, just as dramatic actors do.[39] On this basis Höpfl formulated a critique of organizational practices and procedures governing customer experience performances and thereby adopting the critical postmodern perspective.

Höpfl argued that the costs of role performance, for dramatic and corporate actors alike, must be measured in terms of the hypocrisy, degradation, stress, and emotional burnout that performing demands. Quoting the radical eighteenth-century French philosopher Denis

Diderot she provocatively compared an actor to a prostitute, saying that the actor is like 'the whore who feels nothing for the man she is with, but lets herself go in his arms anyway as a demonstration of her professional competence.'[40]

According to Höpfl: 'Diderot's actor is an instrument or an empty vessel, capable of playing any or all characters precisely because his/her own character is eradicated and sensibilities obliterated in the pursuit of professional craft.' She considered the implications for those who manage organizations for whom 'the achievement of a flexible and well-rehearsed work force which can move easily between a variety of roles with skill is considered to be a desirable accomplishment.'[41] It is this attitude on the part of management, she claimed, that both exploits and masks the actor's pain.

To demonstrate that performing in the theatrical sense is a familiar aspect of many service jobs, and to give an example of the pain customer service inflicts on organizational performers, Höpfl described a group of airline employees she observed in the act of overplaying their roles.

> In 1998, on a scheduled flight from Warsaw to Heathrow, I witnessed an extraordinary performance by the cabin crew that resembled a sixth-form review. The cabin crew donned the duty free articles they were selling and one of the male cabin crew members pushed his trolley up the aisle in an ostentatiously camp manner, wearing a silk headscarf and Rayban sunglasses, with a small teddy bear mascot waving from his breast pocket. The female member of the crew who accompanied him gestured and pointed like a magician's assistant. I have never seen anything like it in many years of flying. Another cabin crew member announced that this was the floorshow and the passengers broke into spontaneous and sustained applause. At the end of the performance, the crew took their bows. I was struck by the inevitable logic of the performance requirement of the organization which takes performance to this extreme. Without doubt, these crewmembers were acting beyond the call of their roles. This example provides an insight into what occurs to a lesser degree in everyday organizational performance in a less immediate and obvious way. Its significance lies in what is revealed by the extreme variant. This has much in common with the notion of the theatre of the absurd in which the production of the action is made transparent in its performance.[42]

Höpfl's last point about performance rendering the production of action transparent is what is meant by the term performativity as it is used in the postmodern perspective.

Postmodernism and organizational culture

Postmodern organization theorists rely heavily on a different metaphor than that of the theater—the text. For them, texts are ongoing interpretive performances of meaning and everything, including an organization, is a text. They borrow most of their ideas about organizations as texts from post-structural literary theory, a rich source of postmodern concepts and theory.

Bulgarian-born French linguist Julia Kristeva introduced a theory of intertextuality that has been particularly influential on those applying the metaphor of the text to organizations.[43] **Intertextuality** derives from the assumption that no text exists in isolation. All texts are interwoven with other texts to which they refer (e.g., by quotation, allusion, description,

inscription) and that provide some of their meaning. Thus, the question of the original meaning of a text as intended by its author is nonsense because discourses produce and are produced by many interwoven texts whose multiple authors and readers continuously (re)read and (re)write them.

Applying intertextuality to organizations transforms organizational culture, identity, symbols, actions, and actors into texts that create one another via mutual ongoing referencing.[44] In this regard Czarniawska's empirical descriptions of organizational soap operas in the Swedish public sector is an application of Kristeva's theory. However, while Czarniawska's organizational soap operas offer a non-linear, open-ended version of storytelling, the narratives she described are still mutually coherent enough to be understood. Full-blown postmodernism undermines such holistic aspirations and celebrates instead the fragmentation of meaning and coherence.

Culture as fragmentation

Some culture researchers focus on the ways in which organizational cultures are inconsistent, ambiguous, and in a constant state of flux. In this view alliances or coalitions never stabilize into subcultures and certainly not into an integrated culture because discourse and its focal issues are always changing. In this spirit American organizational researchers Debra Meyerson and Joanne Martin provided an image of organizational culture as **fragmentation** to offset what they regarded as overly consensual views of organizational culture they categorized as **unity** (to indicate a unifying set of values and beliefs) and **differentiation** (i.e., subcultural).[45] As Martin put it:

> when two cultural members agree (or disagree) on a particular interpretation of, say, a ritual, this is likely to be a temporary and issue-specific congruence (or incongruence). It may well not reflect agreement or disagreement on other issues, at other times. Subcultures, then, are reconceptualized as fleeting, issue-specific coalitions that may or may not have a similar configuration in the future. This is not simply a failure to achieve subcultural consensus in a particular context; from the Fragmentation perspective this is the most consensus possible in any context.[46]

While fragmentation studies have much in common with postmodernism, Martin claimed that postmodern cultural studies often go beyond fragmentation to assert that reality (and therefore culture) is an illusion.[47] In spite of her disagreement with postmodernists over whether culture is an illusion, Martin agreed that organizational culture is just one more way for those in power to mask their manipulation and control of others. She followed critical postmodern organizational culture researchers into textual deconstruction, using this technique to show the power relations hidden by a culture's unspoken understandings.

Deconstructing organizational culture

Some critical postmodern organizational theorists challenge Grand Narrative in organizations and organization theory by criticizing the ideological function of modernist narratives and stories, including modernist theory and modernist writing styles. One of these, American

communication scholar Dennis Mumby, suggested that organizational narratives lead to a systematic distortion of organizational culture because they reproduce and maintain particular meanings that support existing relationships of dependence and domination.[48]

Deconstruction exposes the ideological nature of organizational stories by showing how they privilege particular groups and exclude others. For example, Martin deconstructed a story told by the CEO of a multinational corporation. The CEO's story told about a young woman who arranged her Caesarean section so that she could be virtually present at the launch of a new product she had been instrumental in developing by using a closed circuit television the company provided for the purpose.[49]

Martin argued that the primary beneficiary of the act reported by the CEO was not the woman but the company because the woman's involvement in the launch event enhanced the company's productivity rather than the wellbeing of her child. Martin further suggested that what the CEO referred to as the company's culture of concern actually controlled and supported gender discrimination by blurring the boundary between public and private life, thus enabling the organization to appropriate some of the time the woman otherwise would have devoted to her new family member.

Other interpretations of the story told by the CEO are possible, of course. For example, the woman in the story might claim to have seen herself giving birth to two progeny at the same time—one her child and the other the new product—hence she may have welcomed having access to both events from her hospital room. A more critical reading might counter that this version gives evidence of the mother's false consciousness, and round and round we could go; however, the content of interpretations such as these is not the main point.

Deconstructive readings such as Martin's reveal the possibilities of dominance and other forms of power (such as the woman's creative power to give birth *and* to help develop a new product) without the necessity to settle the matter of which interpretation wins. It is the unending struggle for domination through the control of meaning that critical postmodernists seek to reveal. The point of deconstruction is to sensitize you to this ongoing power struggle, which, according to postmodernists, is where organizing takes place.

Deconstruction can also reveal the illusions created by hollow and ambiguous identity claims, rituals, and other meaningless organizational symbols. Recall how Michael Rosen's study of Breakfast at Spiro's revealed this organizational ritual as involving acts of imitation (e.g., parroting desired feelings rather than having those feelings) that seduced members into conformity with management ideology. Another deconstructionist, Australian sociologist Douglas Ezzy, suggested that organizational cultures claiming to value trust and family are contradicted by rewards for individual achievement rather than cooperation, and by layoffs during hard times.[50] He argues that workers who trust and invest themselves in an organizational culture that controls and then abandons them have fallen prey to illusion.

Similarly, in interviewing members of the Engineering Division of a US electronics company, Israeli organizational ethnographer Gideon Kunda noticed that workers complained it was difficult to maintain a boundary between what they described as their organizational and their true selves.[51] His informants described working long hours developing innovative technologies in a culture of fun that, ironically, they themselves produced at the expense of their personal lives. He noted that many of them suffered burn-out showing that organizational culture represses and controls workers who believe in its illusions.

Culture and change: A return to the normative

What managers most often want to know about their organization's culture is how to change it. Regardless of the perspective adopted, all organization culture researchers acknowledge that top managers are powerful members of an organization's culture. And, because power grants them a disproportionate share of attention, their behavior becomes a role model for others, their words are carefully attended, and their directives obeyed. But what is recommended to managers on the basis of culture theory differs markedly according to the perspective adopted.

Symbolic organization theorists believe the opportunity to influence other members of the organization does not necessarily guarantee that the words and actions of executives will be interpreted as intended or that they will have the intended effects. They accuse modernists who represent culture as a management tool of being unrealistic about the potential to control the interpretations and behavior of employees, who are the ones most directly engaged with the organization's culture and thus most able to change it or to resist change. Critical postmodernists go further than their symbolic colleagues in resisting the modernist culture-as-tool view; they cut to the quick by challenging the ethics of managerial control.

Modern perspective: Culture as control

Modernists claim that if culture shapes behavior via norms and values, then it should be possible to manage the culture of an organization in such a way that desired behavior is more or less guaranteed. They believe cultural control comes, for example, through recruiting and hiring practices aimed at finding value-compatible employees, socialization, and training that inculcates employees with organizationally preferred norms and values, and rewards that reinforce conformity to management demands.[52]

American organization theorist William Ouchi introduced one of the strongest notions of culture as control with his concept of clan control, part of a general typology of organizational control mechanisms that also included market and bureaucratic control.[53] The role of culture is clear in **clan control**, which depends upon the socialization of new organizational members such that they internalize cultural values, goals, expectations, and practices that will drive them to desired levels of performance. Ouchi noted that, once internalized, implicit understandings direct and coordinate employees' behavior and cause them to internally monitor their own behavior and that of others. In clan control, managers take charge of cultural norms and expectations and make certain that all organizational members accept and internalize them. Once established, culture then controls employees on behalf of the managers who control the culture. It should be a simple matter of redirection to change a culture whose management employs clan control.

Schein's theory also supports modernist normative ambitions to control culture but Schein presented a more sophisticated rendering of the management of culture change. Based on his theory of culture as assumptions, values, and artifacts, Schein claimed that organizational cultures only change when new values are introduced by the decree or example of top management. But Schein notes that only when the new values are absorbed into unconscious assumptions will the culture actually change, giving employees a controlling role as well.

Members of the culture must personally experience the benefits of proposed new values for cultural change to take hold.

Normatively speaking, Schein believed the main organizational benefits of culture change come either through environmental adaptation or internal integration, and several modernist American researchers provided insight into how culture differentially serves adaptation and/or integration. Studying the performance effects of strong cultures in a population of over 200 corporations, John Kotter and James Heskett found that cultural strength was significantly related to organizational performance overall.[54] But when cultural values supported organizational adaptation to the environment, the relationship became even stronger. Culture significantly influenced organizational performance when it either helped the organization to anticipate or adapt to environmental change (positive effect) or interfered with its adaptation (negative effect). In other words, when cultures do not support adaptation, cultural strength can interfere with performance, but when culture and the need for adaptation are aligned, cultural strength boosts performance.

Absorbing culture into contingency theory Dan Denison proposed that an organization's strategy, culture, and environment need to be aligned if an organization is to achieve high performance.[55] Denison found that organizations operating in rapidly changing environments performed best if they valued either flexibility and change (Denison called this adaptability culture), or participation and high levels of organizational commitment (involvement culture). In stable environments, successful organizations possessed either a shared vision of the future (mission culture), or had strong values for tradition and conformity (consistency culture). Adaptability and mission cultures according to Denison's theory are externally focused, while involvement and consistency cultures focus internally. Denison's work supports Schein's normative statement about the two main benefits of culture being external adaptation and internal integration; however, Schein did not treat these as mutually exclusive, a puzzle that remains to be studied further.

Symbolic perspectives on change: Culture as strategy and identity

Those taking the symbolic perspective want to convince managers to observe, listen, and respond to what employees say and do as a means of engaging in the interpretive processes that form, maintain, and change culture. They believe managers are managed *by* cultural influences even while they are trying to manage their organizations from within one or more cultural contexts.

Normatively, the symbolic perspective warns managers that the biggest mistake they can make is to think that the corporate subculture they generate is equivalent to the organization's culture. To know the organization's culture and subcultures they must engage with employees. When corporate and organizational cultures differ, managers can fail to recognize the ways in which their efforts to change the organization work against rather than with collective understandings of organizational identity and norms for how things should be done.

Italian organization theorist Pasquale Gagliardi combined Schein's notion of culture as assumptions and values with the concepts of strategy and identity to forge his theory that an organization's primary strategy is to protect the organizational identity, which in turn is defined by its cultural assumptions and values (see Figure 6.6).

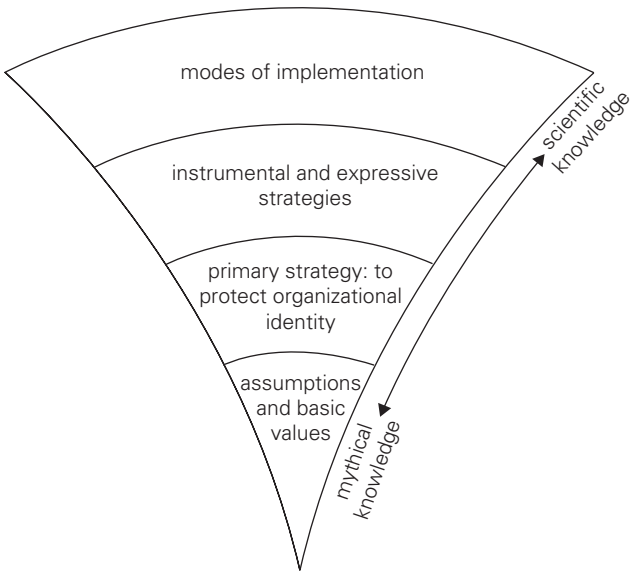


Figure 6.6 Gagliardi's fan model of culture in relation to strategy and identity
Source: Gagliardi (1986).

Gagliardi argued that organizations develop and implement a range of secondary strategies to serve the primary strategy of protecting their identity. These can be either instrumental or expressive. **Instrumental strategies** are operational in nature; they direct attention to the attainment of specific measurable objectives. **Expressive strategies** operate in the symbolic realm and protect the stability and coherence of shared meanings so that group members can maintain a collective self-concept and offer a recognizable identity to the outside world.

Secondary strategies can be *both* expressive and instrumental. For example, an advertising campaign can be designed to present the organizational identity to its external audiences (expressive) at the same time that it helps to sell the company's products (instrumental). Similarly a move to an open plan office may reflect a strategy to improve communication efficiency (instrumental) *and* to symbolize an increase in the importance of teamwork (expressive). According to Gagliardi, changes in behavior, technology, symbols, and structure occur through implementation of secondary strategies. The most effective strategies in his view are identity-laden expressions of organizational culture.

Based on his theory Gagliardi offered descriptions of three outcomes of cultural change efforts he observed in his consulting work with organizations. He described each cultural change outcome as the result of a different relationship between culture and strategy. When strategies align with existing organizational assumptions and values cultures do not really change, they only appear to do so by incorporating a new artifact or two. Deep change is avoided because in such **apparent change** the organization formulates and implements its secondary strategies from within the confines of its existing culture and identity.

When strategies are in conflict with assumptions and values, culture is either overthrown by being replaced or destroyed, or the strategy is resisted and never implemented. In either case, according to Gagliardi, no deep cultural change occurs. It may be obvious why cultural

resistance produces no change, but the case of revolutionary change requires explanation. In **revolutionary change**, a strategy is imposed, usually through the entry of outsiders who destroy most of the culture's symbols and bring new ones to take their place. This can occur, for example, when the organization is acquired by a firm with a significantly different culture, or when a beloved founder is replaced by someone who overturns the founder's philosophy. In these cases, Gagliardi argued, it is 'more correct to say that the old firm dies and that a new firm, which has little in common with the first, was born.'[56]

Cultural change only occurs when a strategy is different but not incompatible with existing assumptions and values. In this case the culture is extended by addition of the new assumptions and values introduced by the strategy, thus Gagliardi called it **incremental change** (see Figure 6.7). Borrowing from Schein's theory Gagliardi explained, if the new strategy meets with success, then the incremental change in values it brings about will be absorbed into the organization's set of assumptions.

Gagliardi advised that incremental changes of cultural values, assumptions, and identity are more likely to occur if they are supported by storytelling and mythmaking, two elements drawn from the symbolic perspective, as was his concept of expressive strategies. But Gagliardi only alluded to the symbolic and interpretive processes by which cultural change occurs. My own theory of the dynamics of organizational culture was an effort to move further in this direction.

The dynamics of organizational culture

Like Gagliardi's theory, my cultural dynamics model was built on Schein's theory of culture as assumptions, values, and artifacts. Cultural dynamics theory, however, focuses not on these elements per se, but on the organizing processes connecting them (see Figure 6.8).[57]

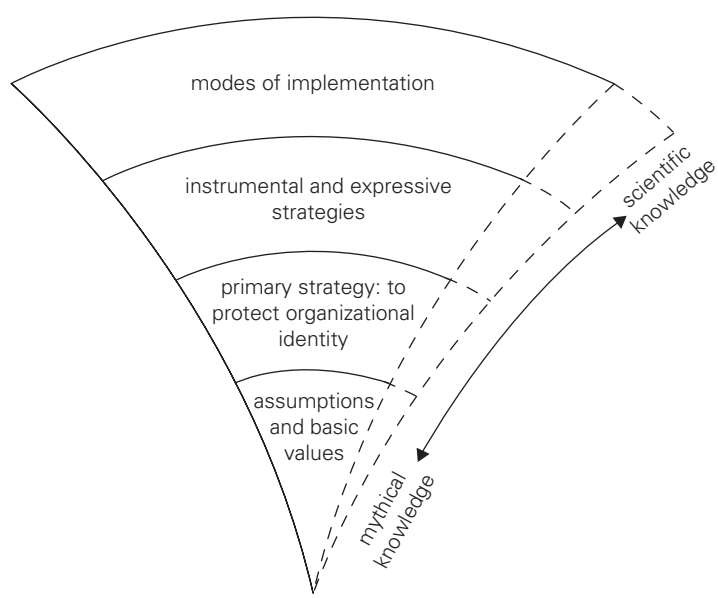


Figure 6.7 Gagliardi's fan model stretched to include new cultural assumptions and values

Source: Gagliardi (1986).

This idea arose from trying to understand the unnamed arrows linking assumptions with values, and values with artifacts in Schein's model. At one point I flipped Schein's diagram onto its side and split the two sets of arrows apart, making room to insert symbols opposite values (compare Schein's model in the center of Figure 6.8 to the cultural dynamics model that encircles it). Introducing symbols added the symbolic perspective of Schein's model, while naming the arrows emphasized the cultural processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation of interest to me.

In the upper left-hand quadrant of the cultural dynamics model, assumptions manifest as values that create expectations about the world and guide action. **Manifestation** can be illustrated by examining the assumption that humans are lazy:

> According to the cultural dynamics perspective, this assumption produces expectations of laziness, which lead to perceptions of lazy acts. These perceptions, in combination with other manifesting assumptions, color thoughts and feelings about these acts. For instance, in an organization that assumes that success depends upon sustained effort, laziness is likely to be considered in a negative light, and perceptions of laziness along with negative thoughts and feelings about it can easily develop into a value for controlling laziness. Meanwhile the laziness assumption also works to inhibit expectations of industrious acts (because humans are lazy, why would they act in this way?), and perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about these acts will be constrained. This inhibition suppresses a value for autonomy (because

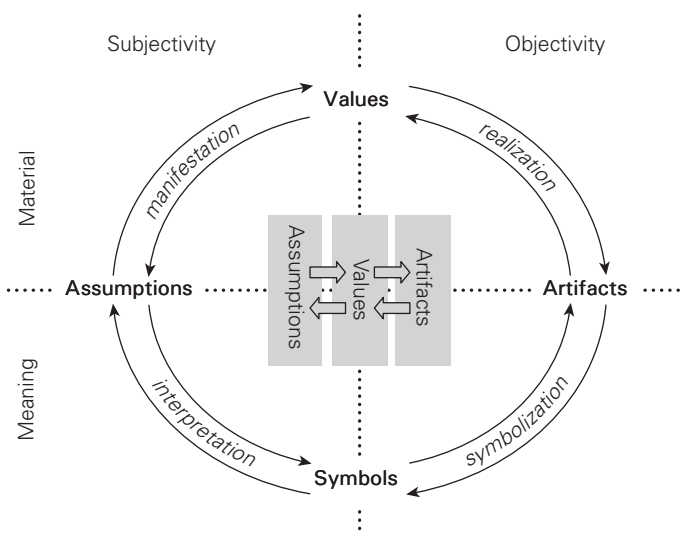


Figure 6.8 Hatch's cultural dynamics model

This model shows four interrelated processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation that continuously spin stable features of culture along with cultural change. The top half of the model shows how culture becomes material in artifacts produced by behavior inflected with and reflective of assumptions and values. In the bottom portion of the model cultural meaning making transforms artifacts into symbols that either support or challenge assumptions. The dotted line separating the right and left sides of the figure indicates that while artifacts appear in the domain of objectivity, assumptions seem to disappear into the subjective domain; symbols and values lie between these domains and share some of the properties of each.

Source: Hatch (1993). Permission granted by Academy of Management.

> giving lazy people autonomy will almost certainly lead to little or no effort being exerted), which further supports the value for control by eliminating a potentially competing force from the value set. That is, although autonomy would be compatible with an assumption that organizational success depends upon effort, the laziness assumption interferes with an effort/autonomy value set and supports an effort/control value set.[58]

Once culture influences action by manifesting values, value-based action produces cultural artifacts (e.g., objects, events, verbal statements, texts). The production of artifacts is referred to as the **realization** process because it is by this process that images grounded in assumptions and values are made real by being given tangible forms. To carry on with the laziness example:

> An assumption that the organization is filled with laggards contributes to a value for control that enhances the likelihood that certain social and material forms will appear. For instance, time clocks, daily productivity reports, performance reviews, and visually accessible offices are acceptable ideas in a culture that values controlling laziness. Proactive realization is the process by which manifest expectations are made tangible in activity. Thus, time clocks might be installed, daily activity reports requested and filed, performance assessed, and visually accessible offices built, all as partial means of realizing the expectation of 'how it should be' in an organization assumed to be filled with laggards.[59]

The top half of the cultural dynamics model shown in Figure 6.8 describes the manifestation and realization processes by which artifacts are created; the bottom half describes what happens once artifacts are made part of the organization's cultural inventory and become available for symbolization and interpretation. In the upper half of the model, assumptions and values shape activity such that artifacts are created and maintained, while in the lower half organizational members choose some (but not all) of the available artifacts and use them to symbolize their meanings to themselves and to communicate them with others.

The process by which symbols are fashioned from artifacts is called **symbolization**. For example, an organization's beautiful new open plan office building might be used by members of top management to communicate an image of the organization as participative and inclusive. Meanwhile, at lower levels in the hierarchy, time clocks, daily activity reports, and the behavior of managers tell employees that they are not trusted, leading them to feel resentment and experience exclusion. In this case the employees who attach their negative feelings to the artifacts of time clocks and activity reports produce symbols that counteract those of top management.

Through the selection and expressive uses of symbols to represent ideas and feelings, **interpretation** processes forge meaning and significance within everyday organizational life. As time moves on, the four processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation combine to influence what people assume and value about their culture from moment to moment and thereby produce, maintain, and change the artifacts and symbols that materialize its meaning.

Returning to the earlier example, the appearance of an obviously hardworking individual challenges the basic assumption of laziness bringing the possibility of new meaning into the culture. Of course it may happen that the symbol of the hardworking individual is simply

reinterpreted to fit into existing assumptions, for instance, by making an excuse for the aberration ('his twin daughters are ready for college and he really needs a promotion so he is kissing up to the boss'). In that instance, stability will win out over change. But change is also possible, and when it occurs it is by the mechanism of confrontation with symbols that do not fit the assumed reality. Suppose the same hardworking individual wins a $50,000,000 lottery and keeps on working. This additional information brings the assumption of laziness into question, and now people start to assert against the normal view that at least some workers have initiative. If this questioning leads people to distinguish lazy and hardworking individuals, perhaps a new employee selection process will take hold that eventually changes the employee base, organizational behavior, and the artifact pool that represents cultural symbolic resources for the future, and so on.

Notice how cultural processes work in two directions: for instance, interpretation uses assumptions to help determine the meaning of symbols, but allows symbols to either maintain or challenge existing assumptions. Maintenance of assumptions, which is tantamount to **cultural stability**, occurs when interpretations support what is already expected. But interpretations sometimes run counter to expectations. **Cultural change** comes when assumptions are symbolically challenged within the interpretation process and this starts a chain of effects extending back throughout the processes of the model. Forces for stability and change co-exist within cultural dynamics as described by the model, and are ongoing and interrelated.

Managers desiring to change an organization using cultural dynamics theory would need to take part in the processes described by the model. An attempt to intentionally introduce change usually begins with the processes of realization and symbolization when management introduces a new idea through language and other artifacts that are new to the culture (do not forget that physical objects and behavioral manifestations are also powerful communicators) which then may be symbolized and interpreted by those who will either carry the change forward or deny it any influence. If the symbols made by interpreting artifacts align with existing organizational assumptions and values, change should be relatively easy but not very deep, as Gagliardi predicted for apparent change.

However, change in line with existing assumptions and values may not be what management wants. Change then involves introducing less comfortable ideas into the organization and change agents must recognize that their control over the process diminishes as others confront the new artifacts and make their own interpretations, not only of these artifacts, but of the intent of the change agent. Symbolic significance will accrue throughout all of this meaning-making activity, contributed by many others than those who initiated the change.

Normatively speaking, cultural dynamics theory places the manager inside the processes that create, maintain, and change organizational culture. It suggests that much of the power attributed to leaders lies in their sensitivity to their own symbolic meaning within the cultural contexts in which it is produced and maintained by others. Leaders have tremendous influence within organizations, as modernists and postmodernists alike point out, but the symbolic perspective insists that a leader's ability to effectively mobilize this influence depends upon their knowledge of and relationship with the culture, and their respect for and responses to the interpretive acts of others.[60] In this way cultural dynamics combines modern and symbolic perspectives.

Postmodern perspective: A different normativity

Those adopting the symbolic perspective conceptualize culture as the context within which management is socially constructed as either effective or not, leaving room for the idea that enlightened management could yet exercise control over culture. Postmodernists want none of this and push beyond what they regard as the illusion of management control, enlightened or otherwise. Normatively inclined postmodernists promote the benefits of relinquishing managerial control in favor of encouraging individual creativity and freedom, and licensing workplace democracy. More often, however, they choose to deconstruct any theory of culture they encounter, regarding it as another Grand Narrative needing to be exposed for the abuses of power it hides.

As the field of organizational culture studies shifted in the direction suggested by the text metaphor for organizing, researching culture per se gradually disappeared from organization theory, replaced by taking a cultural perspective on just about every other phenomenon of interest to the field. This change, brought about by developments within postmodernism, amounts to full acceptance of the symbolic perspective in organization theory today at the same time that it renders it somewhat invisible.

Research focused explicitly on culture is not really gone, however, rather culture research has taken up residence in the academic field of marketing where those studying corporate branding have used it to make organizational inroads into their theorizing.[61] Needless to say, postmodern organization theorists have put up resistance to this disappearing act by focusing attention on the phenomenon of being branded, how employees can effectively resist this new form of domination, and hidden control over their organizational practices and cultural identities.[62]

Summary

An organization can be viewed as a culture in its own right, as a set of subcultures contained within the organization, or as subculture(s) operating within national culture(s). Examples of each of these levels of analysis were given in this chapter, but it is important to bear in mind the many ways these levels work together. For example, if you only pay attention to cultural forces at the environmental or societal level, and do not consider culture at the level of the organization, you will miss much of what makes an organization distinctive and differentiates it from other organizations—its organizational culture and identity. Likewise, if you only focus on the organizational culture and ignore its subcultures, you may miss the tensions and contradictions organizational members confront in trying to understand and manage their organizations.

Modernists follow those adopting the symbolic perspective in believing that assumptions and values influence behavior through their expression in norms and values and that culture is communicated through artifacts including stories, symbols, tradition, and customs. The difference between the two perspectives on organizational culture comes from the way their proponents define knowing and what counts as knowledge about culture. The symbolic perspective defines culture as a context for meaning making and interpretation in which cultural understanding permits you to know an organization and the various uses made of its physical, behavioral, and verbal symbols. The modern perspective, on the other hand, interprets knowledge about culture as a tool of management, and culture itself as a variable

to be manipulated to enhance the likelihood of achieving desired levels of organizational performance.

Postmodernists find numerous ways to challenge the notion that organizations have or are cultures. Some use postmodern literary theories like intertextuality to suggest that the idea of shared understanding is an illusion and, therefore, so is organizational culture. Others spend their research energy deconstructing organizational narratives to unmask the power struggles that they believe explain organizational life. Still others develop metaphoric forms of analysis based in literature and drama to describe the performativity of organizing and to extend the boundaries of organization theory beyond both the natural and the social sciences to embrace the humanities and the arts.

Normative interests in organization theory push culture theorists to advise managers on culture change. While Schein explains how changing values and artifacts induces change at the level of assumptions, Gagliardi and Hatch regard normative demands for tips on culture change as less easy to fulfill. Gagliardi describes real culture change at the level of deep assumptions as only possible via incremental additions of new values, and cautions that revolutionary change throws away existing culture while apparent change can fool you into thinking a change has occurred when it has not. Meanwhile Hatch's cultural dynamics theory explains cultural stability and change as intertwined outcomes of always ongoing processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation into which managers must embed themselves if they are to influence culture successfully. Postmodernists decry all efforts to manipulate employees and call instead for deconstructing culture along with managerial control, cultural or otherwise.

Key terms

- subculture
  - *enhancing*
  - *orthogonal*
  - *countercultural*
- corporate culture
- silos
- strong culture
- national cultural differences
  - *power distance*
  - *uncertainty avoidance*
  - *individualism vs. collectivism*
  - *masculine vs. feminine*
  - *long-term vs. short-term orientation*
- Schein's theory of culture
  - *basic assumptions*
  - *values*
  - *norms*
  - *artifacts*
- Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI)
- grounded theory
- negotiated order
- ethnomethodology
- contextualizing
- symbols
  - *denotation/instrumental meaning*
  - *connotation/expressive meaning*
  - *symbolic and non-symbolic behavior*
- thick description
- content analysis
- organizational stories

- *storytelling*
- *storytelling organization*
- *terse storytelling*
- *epic, comic, tragic, romantic stories*

narrative
- *narrative epistemology*
- *perspective and voice*

rhetorical analysis
- *authenticity*
- *plausibility*
- *criticality*

theater metaphor
- *dramaturgy*
- *performativity*

intertextuality

culture as unity, differentiation, fragmentation

deconstructive readings

clan control

Gagliardi's culture change theory
- *instrumental vs. expressive strategies*
- *apparent change*
- *revolutionary change*
- *incremental change*

Hatch's cultural dynamics theory
- *manifestation*
- *realization*
- *symbolization*
- *interpretation*
- *cultural stability and change*

Endnotes

1. Jenks (1993).
2. Tylor (1871/1958: 1).
3. Herskowitz (1948: 625).
4. Ortner (1973).
5. Van Maanen and Barley (1984).
6. Martin and Siehl (1983); Siehl and Martin (1984); see also De Lorean and Wright (1979).
7. Chatman and Cha (2003).
8. Schein (1984); see also Schein (1983, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2000).
9. Ouchi (1979); Peters and Waterman (1982).
10. Martin and Frost (1996); see also Hatch and Yanow (2003).
11. Phillips, Goodman, and Sackmann (1992).
12. Hofstede (1997, 2001).
13. Hofstede and Bond (1988).
14. Lurie and Riccucci (2003).
15. Cooke and Laferty (1987).
16. Cooke and Szumal (2000: 157–9).
17. Strauss et al. (1963, 1964).
18. Cohen (1976: 23).
19. Van Maanen (2005: 383).
20. Morgan, Frost, and Pondy (1983: 4–5).
21. Geertz (1973: 5).
22. Schroeder (1992).

23. Geertz (1973); see in particular the first chapter of 'Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture', 3–30.
24. Martin et al. (1983).
25. Jones (1996). A similar critique was raised by Boland and Tenkasi (1995).
26. Jones (1996: 7).
27. Boje (1991, 1995).
28. O'Connor (2000).
29. Hatch, Kostera, and Koźmiński (2005).
30. Webber (1992).
31. MacIntyre (1984: 205).
32. Czarniawska (1997).
33. Van Maanen (1988); see also Sandelands and Drazin (1989); Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993, 1997); Hatch (1996); Czarniawska (1999).
34. Hatch (1996: 360).
35. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993).
36. Goffman (1959) built his notion of dramaturgy on Burke's (1945) dramatism.
37. Rosen (1985).
38. Austin (1962).
39. Höpfl (2002: 262).
40. Diderot (1773) cited in Höpfl (2002: 255, 258).
41. Höpfl (2002: 262).
42. Höpfl (2002: 258–9).
43. Kristeva (1984).
44. Notice the similarity to Derrida's use of the term *différance* to explain the fluid meaning of words; by a similar logic, intertextuality explains the fluid meaning of texts.
45. Meyerson and Martin (1987); Martin (1992, 2002).
46. Martin (1992: 138).
47. For a postmodern take on culture, see Bauman (1973/1999) who describes culture doing a disappearing act in the mixing and matching of global societies. See also Schultz (1992) for commentary on the postmodern perspective and its image of culture as fragments seen in a broken mirror.
48. Mumby (1988).
49. Martin (1990).
50. Ezzy (2001).
51. Kunda (1996).
52. Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1986); O'Reilly (1989); O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991).
53. Ouchi (1979).
54. Kotter and Heskett (1992). Cultural strength was rated by financial analysts and managers of competing firms. An average cultural strength score was computed for each firm in the sample and correlated with indicators of organizational performance, including average yearly return on investment, changes in net income, and changes in the firm's market capitalization.
55. Denison (1990).
56. Gagliardi (1986: 125).
57. Hatch (1993, 2004). Hatch (2010) links the cultural dynamics model with the dynamics of organizational identity, building even further on Gagliardi's work.
58. Hatch (1993: 662).
59. Hatch (1993: 667).
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