Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis

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This paper examines the significance of the concept of culture for organizational analysis. The intersection of culture theory and organization theory is evident in five current research themes: comparative management, corporate culture, organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organization. Researchers pursue these themes for different purposes and their work is based on different assumptions about the nature of culture and organization. The task of evaluating the power and limitations of the concept of culture must be conducted within this assumptive context. This review demonstrates that the concept of culture takes organization analysis in several different and promising directions.•

The concept of culture has been linked increasingly with the study of organizations. With the recognition of the symbolic aspects of organized settings have come calls for a cultural perspective on organizations (Turner, 1971; Pondy and Mitroff, 1979; Pettigrew, 1979; Louis, 1980; Whorton and Worthley, 1981). Papers have appeared that treat management as symbolic activity (Peters, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981; Smircich and Morgan, 1982); while others have called attention to the power of organizational symbolism, legends, stories, myths, and ceremonies (Mitroff and Kilmann, 1976; Dandridge, 1979; Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce, 1980; Wilkins and Martin, 1980; Martin and Powers, 1983; Trice and Beyer, 1983). The idea that business organizations have a cultural quality was recognized recently by *Business Week* (1980) in the cover story, "Corporate Culture: The hard-to-change values that spell success or failure." There is even a "Corporate Cultures" section in *Fortune Magazine* (e.g., *Fortune Magazine,* March 22, 1982).

Culture may be an idea whose time has come; but what exactly does a "cultural perspective" on organizations mean? The culture concept has been borrowed from anthropology, where there is no consensus on its meaning. It should be no surprise that there is also variety in its application to organization studies. How then may we critically evaluate the significance of the concept of culture for the study of organization?

Such evaluation requires reflection on the ways the culture concept informs us about organization. What aspects of the phenomenon are illuminated or more explicitly revealed for examination? What aspects are less likely to be attended to because we link the terms organization and culture? This special issue as a whole is concerned with these questions.

This paper in particular traces the ways culture has been developed in organization studies: as a critical variable and as a root metaphor. The paper summarizes the research agendas that each of these perspectives entails. This review demonstrates that not only have organizational analysts held varying conceptions of culture, but that these different conceptions give rise to different research questions and interests. The differences in approach to the organization-culture relationship are derived from differences in the basic assumptions that researchers make about both "organization" and "culture." Thus, the task of evaluating the power and limitations of the concept of culture must be conducted within this assumptive context. Toward that end, this paper examines the assumptions that underlie the different ways the concept of culture has been

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used in organization studies. When the literature is regarded in this way, we see that the culture concept is highly suggestive and promising for many different ends that researchers pursue.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS AND METAPHORS

Several authors have addressed themselves to clarifying the range of assumptions that organization theorists bring to their subject (Ritzer, 1975; Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Van de Ven and Astley, 1981). In large measure, these authors agree that work in organization theory can be characterized by a range of assumptions about the ontological status of social reality — the objective-subjective question — and a range of assumptions about human nature — the determinist-voluntarist question. Researchers who maintain different positions on these questions approach the subject of organization in fundamentally different ways. Despite these basic differences, however, some have argued that *all* scientists create knowledge about the world through the drawing out of implications of different metaphoric insights for their subject of study (Pepper, 1942; Kaplan, 1964; Brown, 1977; Morgan, 1980). Others point out that the metaphoric process, seeing one thing in terms of another, is a fundamental aspect of human thought; it is how we come to know our world (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Perception and knowing are linked in an interpretive process that is metaphorically structured, allowing us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another (Koch and Deetz, 1981).

Throughout the development of administrative theory and practice, organization theorists and managers alike have used a variety of metaphors, or images, to bound, frame, and differentiate that category of experience referred to as (an) "organization." The metaphors of machine and organism have been used most frequently to facilitate understanding and communication about the complex phenomenon of organization (Pondy and Mitroff, 1979; Morgan, 1980; Koch and Deetz, 1981). For example, mechanical imagery undergirds the view of organizations as instruments for task accomplishment, consisting of multiple parts to be designed and meshed into fine-tuned efficiency. Such a conception of organizational experience can be found in one department head's desire to "have this department running smoothly like a well-oiled machine." Another widely elaborated conception is that of an organization as an organism. This notion underlies systems theory as applied to organizations (Trist and Bamforth, 1951; Burns and Stalker, 1961; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967), where organizations are conceived as struggling for survival within a changing environment. Organizations are studied in terms of the way they manage interdependencies and exchanges across system boundaries.

Although metaphors from the physical world — organism and machine — are historically dominant, other metaphors, that are social, have also been used to elaborate aspects of organization (Morgan, 1980). For instance, we know that organizations are "theaters" for performance of roles, dramas, and scripts (Goffman, 1959; Mangham and Overington, 1983) and that organizations are "political arenas" oriented around the pursuit and display of power (Crozier, 1964; Pfeffer, 1981). Each of these metaphoric images focuses attention in selective ways

and provides slightly different ways of knowing the phenomenon of organization (Morgan, 1980). The use of a particular metaphor is often not a conscious choice, nor made explicit, but can be inferred from the way the subject of organization is approached, by discerning the underlying assumptions that are made about the subject.

Recently Pinder and Bourgeois (1982) have cautioned organization scholars against the borrowing and unconsidered use of metaphors from other disciplines. Their concern is that, in so doing, organization scholars will be drawn far afield from that domain of experience they seek to know. To the extent that their argument can be read as a reminder for scholars to stay grounded in the experience of organization, it is well directed. To the extent that it seeks to discourage metaphorical thinking, it is misplaced. In fact, the term organization itself is a metaphor referring to the experience of collective coordination and orderliness. Meadows (1967: 82) has argued that organization theory is always rooted in the imagery of order and asserts that "the development of theories of organization is a history of the metaphor of orderliness."

> Organization is a function of the problem of order and orderliness; similarly, conceptualizations of social organization have been a function of the conceptualizations of the problem of order and orderliness. Very early in human experience, order seems to have been a kind of inescapable and irretrievable empirical fact. The sun rises and sets; people are born and they die; the seasons come and go; and there is the procession of the stars. The spatial patterning and temporality of man's experience established an imagery of order, forming a backdrop to the drama of cosmos arising out of chaos. In the slow, incremental achievement of a substantial scientific stance with respect to the universe, there had been built into man's semiotic of experience and into his traditional pieties the unquestionable assumption that this is an orderly universe. (Meadows, 1967: 78)

Given the metaphorical nature of human knowledge, the suggestion that we in organization theory avoid metaphor misdirects our cautionary efforts. Rather than avoid metaphor, what we can aim for is critical examination of the ways in which our thinking is shaped and constrained by our choice of metaphors. This paper and this special issue are in line with that aim.

If, following Meadows, we see organization theory as dominated by the concern for the problem of social order, the current interest in the concept of culture is no surprise. In anthropology, culture is the foundational term through which the orderliness and patterning of much of our life experience is explained (Benedict, 1934). The same argument Meadows made about organization theory can be made about cultural anthropology. It, too, is inquiry into the phenomenon of social order. What we are seeing with the linking of culture and organization is the intersection of two sets of images of order: those associated with organization and those associated with culture.

The intersection of organization theory and culture theory is manifest in several "thematic" or content areas that are of interest to organization and management scholars, as shown in Figure 1. Different conceptions of organization and culture underlie research in these content areas: comparative management, corporate culture, organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organiza-

tion.[1] The variation in the ways the concept of culture is used by researchers interested in these different content areas can be traced directly to their different ways of conceiving "organization" and "culture." Their inquiry is guided by different metaphors and seeks different ends.

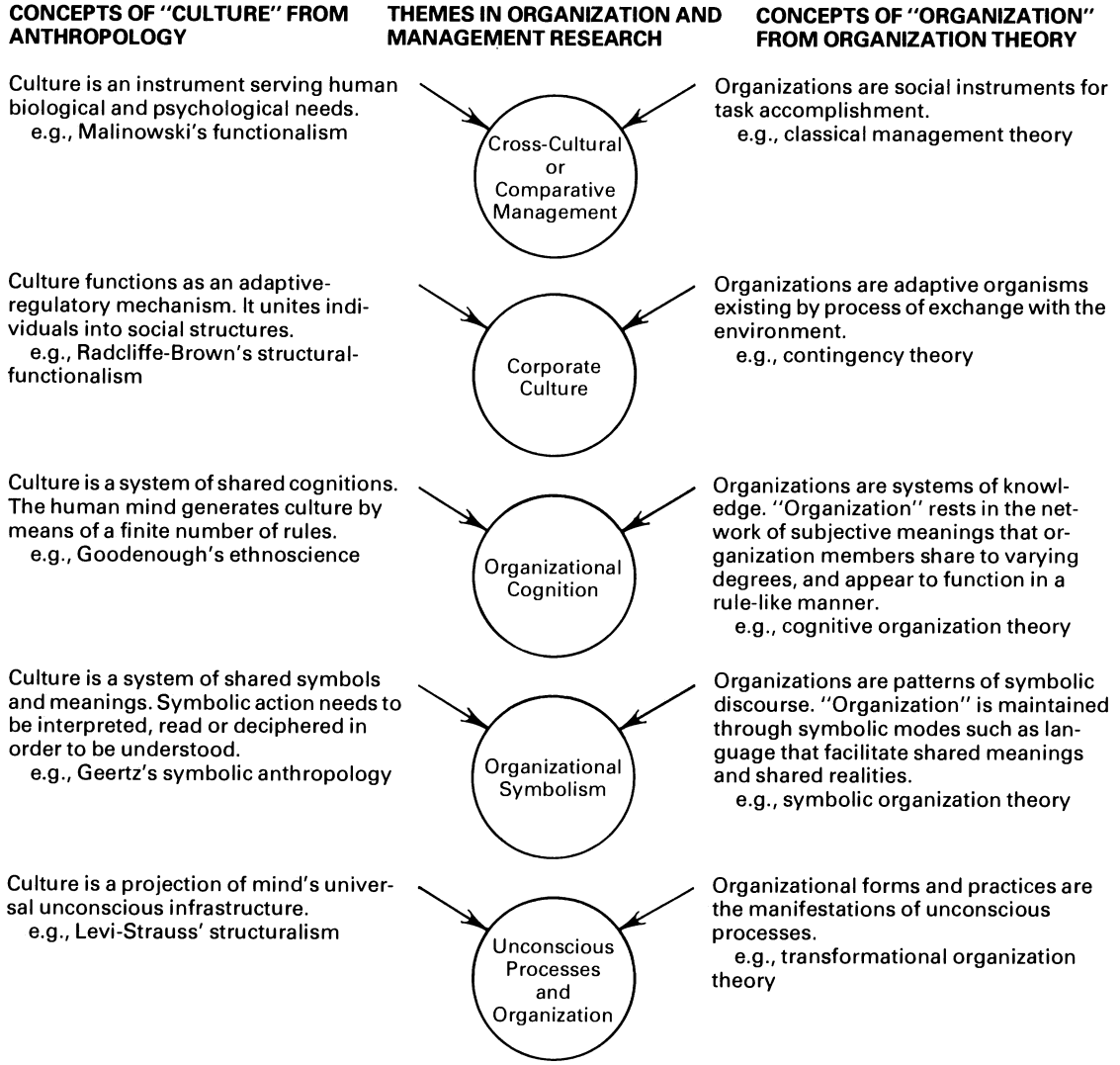

Figure 1. Intersections of culture theory and organization theory.

The balance of the paper briefly summarizes five different programs of research that flow out of linking the terms culture and organization and examines their underlying assumptions and metaphors. In the first two, culture is either an independent or dependent, external or internal, organizational variable. In the final three, culture is not a variable at all, but is a root metaphor for conceptualizing organization. Each of these five represents a viable mode of inquiry. Considered together, they demonstrate that the promise of the concept of culture for the study of organization is varied and rich.

[1] These themes are representative of current research trends in the organization and management literature and exemplify the continued interest of organization theorists in the problem of order. Themes that would flow from a Marxist or radical structuralist orientation are not shown here. They are much less well developed within organization and management theory because their fundamental problematic concerns questions of dominance and radical change. In this volume, Riley's paper on structuration is suggestive of that line of research.

CULTURE AND COMPARATIVE MANAGEMENT: CULTURE AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

The field of comparative management is concerned with variation in managerial and employee practices and attitudes across countries (Haire, Ghiselli, and Porter, 1966). In comparative management studies, culture is considered to be a background factor (almost synonymous with country), an explanatory variable (Ajiferuke and Boddewyn, 1970) or a broad framework (Cummings and Schmidt, 1972) influencing the development and reinforcement of beliefs. The literature can be segmented into that with a macro focus, examining the relationship between culture and organization structure, and that with a micro focus, investigating the similarities and differences in attitudes of managers of different cultures (Everett, Stening, and Longton, 1982).

This literature is extensive and has been subjected to several major reviews and critiques (e.g., Roberts, 1970; Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982). A brief sampling of the research, however, illustrates the trends in the work. For example, Harbison and Myers (1959) were concerned with variation in leadership beliefs, from authoritarian to participatory in countries with differing degrees of industrialization; Inzerilli and Laurent (1979) examined the conceptions of organization structure held by French and American managers; and Sekaran (1981) measured differences in the cognitive structuring of organizationally relevant variables of U.S. and Indian bank employees.

These works share a conception of the organization-culture relationship that is portrayed schematically in Figure 2. Culture is treated as an independent variable; it is imported into the organization through the membership (e.g., Fayerweather, 1959; Slocum, 1971). Its presence is believed to be revealed in the patterns of attitudes and actions of individual organization members. In practice, however, with the exception of Everett, Stening, and Longton (1982), most comparative management research leaves the concept of culture undeveloped (Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982).

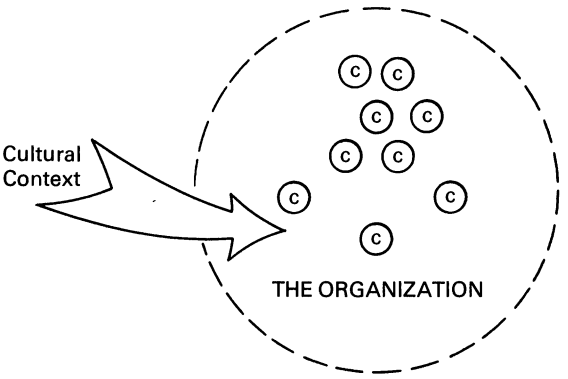

Figure 2. Culture and comparative management.

Characterized broadly, the research agenda deriving from this view is to chart the differences among cultures, locate clusters of similarities, and draw implications for organizational effectiveness. Some of the research may also have the less obvious intent of promoting particular values and ideologies (e.g., Harbison and Myers, 1959). The practical utility of such research

would be seen most immediately for multinational organizations, and yet, because of the recognition of global interdependence, this research can be of widespread interest. One need only note the popularity of *Theory Z* (Ouchi, 1981) and *The Art of Japanese Management* (Pasquale and Athos, 1981) for confirmation.

CORPORATE CULTURE: CULTURE AS AN INTERNAL VARIABLE

A second major way that culture and organization are linked is that used by researchers who recognize that organizations are themselves culture-producing phenomena (Louis, 1980; Siehl and Martin, 1981; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Tichy, 1982; Martin and Powers, 1983). Organizations are seen as social instruments that produce goods and services, and, as a by-product, they also produce distinctive cultural artifacts such as rituals, legends, and ceremonies. Although organizations are themselves embedded within a wider cultural context, the emphasis of researchers here is on socio-cultural qualities that develop within organizations. The degree to which researchers are concerned with linking these internal qualities to the wider cultural context varies greatly.

Research with this conception of culture is generally based on a systems theory framework. As such, it is concerned with articulating patterns of contingent relationships among collections of variables that appear to figure in organizational survival. Heretofore, typical variables considered in this research tradition were structure, size, technology, and leadership patterns (Woodward, 1965; Fiedler, 1967; Pugh and Hickson, 1976). Of late, more subjectivist variables, such as culture, have been introduced into the systems model, with the recognition that symbolic processes are occurring within organizations (Pfeffer, 1981; Meyer, 1981). Consistent with the systems theory framework, this research conceives of an organization as existing in a largely determinant relationship with its environment. The environment presents imperatives for behavior that managers may enact in their organizations through symbolic means (Pfeffer, 1981). The implication is that the symbolic or cultural dimension in some way contributes to the overall systemic balance and effectiveness of an organization. Several recent books argue that organizations with "strong" cultures are indeed apt to be more successful (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982).

Figure 3 illustrates schematically the relationship between organization and culture portrayed in this literature.

Culture is usually defined as social or normative glue that holds an organization together (Siehl and Martin, 1981; Tichy, 1982). It expresses the values or social ideals and the beliefs that organization members come to share (Louis, 1980; Siehl and Martin, 1981). These values or patterns of belief are manifested by symbolic devices such as myths (Boje, Fedor, and Rowland, 1982), rituals (Deal and Kennedy, 1982), stories (Mitroff and Kilmann, 1976), legends (Wilkins and Martin, 1980), and specialized language (Andrews and Hirsch, 1983).

Some of the earliest references to the concept of culture as an internal organizational variable are found in the literature of Organization Development (Jacques, 1952; Harrison, 1972).

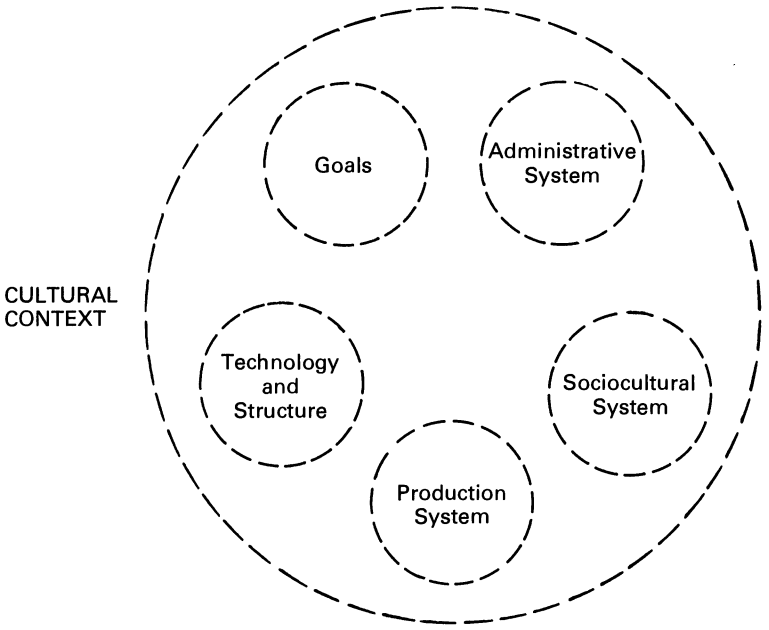

Figure 3. Culture and the systems theory framework.

Practitioners of OD are, for the most part, concerned with enhancing the adaptive mechanisms within organizations. OD interventions are often directed at the cultural subsystem to allow for the questioning of values and norms under which people operate (French and Bell, 1978). These activities then serve to make the culture more receptive to change, facilitating the realignment of the total organizational system into a more viable and satisfying configuration.

Recently, however, research efforts not explicitly concerned with planned change projects have focused on the normative and symbolic aspects of organizations. This stream of research acknowledges that subjective interpretive processes that may influence adaptability occur in organized settings, and it seeks to describe and predict the ways they are related to other outcomes such as turnover, absenteeism, and commitment. This research has investigated a variety of dimensions of organizational culture. For example, Schall (1981) studied the impact of the espoused corporate saga on the employees of a midwestern department store; Meyer (1981) revealed how managerial ideologies and organizational stories in hospitals served a structuring function; Kreps (1981) investigated folklore as a socializing tool; Martiń and Powers (1983) examined the symbolic power of information; and Pfeffer (1981) proposed that management be considered as symbolic action. These researchers, and others, argue that cultural artifacts, and even the art of management itself, are powerful symbolic means of communication. They can be used to build organizational commitment, convey a philosophy of management, rationalize and legitimate activity, motivate personnel, and facilitate socialization.

This is only a sampling of the research on the various dimensions of organizational culture. As the number of studies increases, however, there is some convergence among them. Culture, conceived as shared key values and beliefs, fulfills several important functions. First, it conveys a sense of identity

for organization members (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Second, it facilitates the generation of commitment to something larger than the self (Schall, 1981; Siehl and Martin, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Third, culture enhances social system stability (Louis, 1980; Kreps, 1981). And fourth, culture serves as a sense-making device that can guide and shape behavior (Louis, 1980; Meyer, 1981; Pfeffer, 1981; Siehl and Martin, 1981).

This line of research offers a tantalizing prospect — that organization culture may be another critical lever or key by which strategic managers can influence and direct the course of their organizations (Schwartz and Davis, 1981; Tichy, 1982). Given the less-then-hoped-for results from the wave of tools for strategic management that appeared in the sixties and seventies (Keichel, 1982), the idea of corporate culture is attracting an enthusiastic audience among those researchers and practitioners concerned with strategy formulation and implementation (*Business Week,* 1980; Quinn, 1980; Schwartz and Davis, 1981; Tichy, 1982; Salmans, 1983). The belief is that firms that have internal cultures supportive of their strategies are more likely to be successful. Research and popular books tend to emphasize that symbolic devices can be used to mobilize and channel the energies of organization members. The task awaiting individual managers is to find ways to use stories, legends, and other forms of symbolism in their unique situations, for their own particular ends (Peters, 1978). Managers will have plenty of assistance in this endeavor, because the marketing of "corporate culture" is already underway (Salmans, 1983).

Overall, the research agenda arising from the view that culture is an organizational variable is how to mold and shape internal culture in particular ways and how to change culture, consistent with managerial purposes.

Some, however, genuinely question whether organization culture is indeed manageable.[2] Much of the literature refers to *an* organization culture, appearing to lose sight of the great likelihood that there are multiple organization subcultures, or even countercultures, competing to define the nature of situations within organizational boundaries. The talk about corporate culture tends to be optimistic, even messianic, about top managers molding cultures to suit their strategic ends. The notion of "corporate culture" runs the risk of being as disappointing a managerial tool as the more technical and quantitative tools that were faddish in the 1970s. Those of a skeptical nature may also question the extent to which the term corporate culture refers to anything more than an ideology cultivated by management for the purpose of control and legitimation of activity.

Despite these questions, the idea of corporate culture arouses a great deal of interest among academics and practitioners. Perhaps because it is such a common-sense term, we all "know" what it means without much explanation (precisely why organization scholars should be cautious in using it). For academics, culture provides a conceptual bridge between micro and macro levels of analysis, as well as a bridge between organizational behavior and strategic management interests. For practitioners, it provides a less rationalistic way of under-

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A public discussion of the question "Can organization culture be managed?" took place at a well-attended session of the Academy of Management national meetings in August 1982. Panelists were: Joanne Martin, William Starbuck, Noel Tichy, Caren Siehl, Craig Lundberg, and Peter Frost.

standing their organizational worlds, one closer to their lived experience.

CULTURE AS A VARIABLE: A COMPARISON

Although the themes of comparative management and corporate culture are distinct, they are in fact quite compatible with one another. They are both consistent with what has been called the functionalist paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), the system-structural view (Van de Ven and Astley, 1981), and the social factist paradigm (Ritzer, 1975). They are both derived from similar basic assumptions about the nature of the social world, of organizations, and of human nature.

Both assume that the social world expresses itself in terms of general and contingent relationships among its more stable and clear-cut elements, referred to as "variables" (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Both approaches share the conception of organizations as organisms, existing within an environment that presents imperatives for behavior. In the first case, "culture" is part of the environment and is seen as a determining or imprinting force. In the second case, organizational culture is seen as a result of human enactment. In both approaches organizations and cultures are to be known through the study of patterns of relationships across and within boundaries. The desired outcomes of research into these patterns are statements of contingent relationships that will have applicability for those trying to manage organizations. Underlying the interests in comparative management and corporate culture is the search for predictable means for organizational control and improved means for organization management. Because both of these research approaches have these basic purposes, the issue of causality is of critical importance.

CULTURE AS A ROOT METAPHOR FOR CONCEPTUALIZING ORGANIZATION

The previous two ways the terms culture and organization are linked in the literature are consistent with the image of an organization as an organism. There are, of course, many other ways of conceiving of organizations, for example, as theaters (Goffman, 1959), texts (Ricoeur, 1971), and psychic prisons (Morgan, 1980).

Some theorists advance the view that organizations be understood *as* cultures. They leave behind the view that a culture is something an organization *has,* in favor of the view that a culture is something an organization *is* (Smircich, 1981). The use of culture as a root metaphor is quite different from drawing analogies between organizations and machines and organizations and organisms. It represents a shift from comparison with physical objects to comparison with another social phenomenon, an undertaking with greater room for ambiguity because of culture's nonconcrete status. Culture as a root metaphor for organizations goes beyond the instrumental view of organizations derived from the machine metaphor and beyond the adaptive view derived from the organismic metaphor. Culture as a root metaphor promotes a view of organizations as expressive forms, manifestations of human consciousness. Organizations are understood and analyzed not mainly in economic or material terms, but in terms of their expressive,

ideational, and symbolic aspects. Characterized very broadly, the research agenda stemming from this perspective is to explore the phenomenon of organization as subjective experience and to investigate the patterns that make organized action possible.

The concept of culture as developed in anthropology serves as an epistemological device in much the same way as the organismic metaphor serves as a basis for the development of the systems theory perspective on organizations. As noted before, however, within anthropology, culture is conceptualized in diverse ways. When organization theorists develop a cultural analogy, they tend to elaborate a view of culture drawn from cognitive anthropology, symbolic anthropology, or, to a much lesser extent, structural anthropology and psychodynamic theories. In cognitive anthropology, culture consists of shared knowledge (Goodenough, 1971; Agar, 1982). In symbolic anthropology, culture is a system of shared meaning (Hallowell, 1955; Geertz, 1973). And according to structural anthropology and psychodynamics, culture is a manifestation and expression of the mind's unconscious operation (Rossi and O'Higgins, 1980).

These different conceptualizations of culture, drawn from modern anthropology, form the foundations for very different modes of organizational analysis. The research work stemming from these foundations will be considered below.

A Cognitive Perspective

According to the branch of cognitive anthropology referred to as ethnoscience (Goodenough, 1971), culture is a system of shared cognitions or a system of knowledge and beliefs (Rossi and O'Higgins, 1980). A culture is seen as "a unique system for perceiving and organizing material phenomena, things, events, behavior and emotions" (Goodenough, quoted in Rossi and O'Higgins, 1980: 63). Culture is generated by the human mind "by means of a finite number of rules or means of an unconscious logic" (Rossi and O'Higgins, 1980: 63–64). The task of the anthropologist who follows this perspective is to determine what the rules are, to find out how the members of a culture see and describe their world. In the field of communication studies, this same emphasis on understanding social interaction is pursued under the name of "rules theory" (Pearce, 1979; Shimanoff, 1980).

The work of Harris and Cronen (1979) is an excellent example of how the rules-theory perspective may be used for analyzing and evaluating organizations. They consider an organization as analogous to a culture, a particular structure of knowledge for knowing and acting. They propose that an organization culture may be represented as a "master contract" that includes the organization's self-image, as well as constitutive and regulative rules that organize beliefs and actions in light of the image. They assume that the master contract has developed out of ongoing interpersonal interaction and that it provides the context for further interaction. Their methodology examines the master contract/self-image and the degree of consensus on its constructs, assesses co-orientation (the extent to which members perceive others' construction of the organizational image accurately, so that they know how their behavior "counts" with others), and measures coordination (the extent to which mem-

bers can organize the knowledge of the abstract image and constitutive rules into regulative rules that will be functional guides for cooperative action).

Harris and Cronen (1979) analyzed an academic department and reported significant differences between what members thought their coworkers would perceive as the actual and the ideal states of the organization and what members said was the ideal state. They revealed widespread misconceptions; for, in fact, individuals believed their organization was at its ideal state, but many did not realize their colleagues also believed so. We can only speculate about the energy drain that results from such misconceptions. Harris and Cronen did not say whether they fedback their analyses to the members of the organization for their validation or reaction. However, Harris and Cronen did offer an approach for generating knowledge that a group may use to alter its own functioning.

A cognitive perspective is increasingly being applied to the study of organizations (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Bougon, Weick, and Binkhorst, 1977; Harris and Cronen, 1979; Weick, 1979a, 1979b; Litterer and Young, 1981; Wacker, 1981; Ritti, 1982; Shrivastava and Mitroff, 1982; Bougon, 1983). These researchers may or may not use the term culture in their work. Their cognitive emphasis leads them to view organizations as networks of subjective meanings or shared frames of reference that organization members share to varying degrees and which, to an external observer, appear to function in a rule-like, or grammar-like manner. Some of these research efforts document how organization members conceive of themselves as a collectivity. They are also often diagnostic, in that they assess the extent to which there is a shared basis for action or grounds for conflict.

For example, Argyris and Schon (1978) referred to organizations as "cognitive enterprises." Their diagnostic methodology was a case-building approach in which organization members wrote scenarios that revealed the theories-in-use that guide their interaction. Argyris and Schon reported using their intervention strategy in different organization settings to generate maps that display the ways assumptions, beliefs, and norms trap people in counterproductive cycles of behavior.

Along similar lines, Wacker (1981) has proposed another methodology for assessing collective cognitive infrastructure based on the constructs organization members use to make sense of aspects of their organizational worlds. His method is adapted from Kelly's Repertory Grid, an instrument designed to elicit key elements in an individual's world and to chart the ways they are different from one another. Wacker suggested that the grid can be used for diagnosis and intervention.

Schall is developing a comprehensive strategy for discerning the normative communication rules in corporate settings.[3] Her work is explicitly interventionist. She engages organization members in cycles of data collection, interpretation, and reflection about how they enact their organizational realities. Schall suggests that uncovering the taken-for-granted rules that guide action could help organizations with employee selection, employee orientation, business strategizing, and change.

The understanding of organizations as cultures — structures of knowledge, cognitive enterprises, or master contracts — is

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strikingly similar to the notion of paradigm as it is applied in scientific communities. In other words, paradigms and cultures both refer to world views, organized patterns of thought with accompanying understanding of what constitutes adequate knowledge and legitimate activity (Benedict, 1934; Kuhn, 1962). Some theorists are finding the conceptualization of organizations as paradigms useful for thinking about the processes of strategic management and organization change (Sheldon, 1980; Litterer and Young, 1981; Pfeffer, 1981; Shrivastava and Mitroff, 1982; Smircich, 1983c).

For example, in their consulting work, Litterer and Young (1981) treat organizations as ideational systems. They identify three ideational patterns or paradigms — the entrepreneurial, the scientific, and the humanistic — which they suggest are common in American organizations. Their intervention approach is concerned with developing "managerial reflective skills," the ability of managers to examine, critique, and change their social ideational system, in a sense, to change paradigms.

The cognitive orientation to culture and organization is unified by these theorists' attention to the epistemological basis of social action, as well as by their search for a "grammar" to explain its patterning (e.g., Ritti, 1982; Shrivastava and Mitroff, 1982). A common underlying assumption of this work is that thought is linked to action. The major practical consequence of conceiving of organizations as socially sustained cognitive enterprises is the emphasis on mind and thought. Organization members are seen as thinking as well as behaving. This is hardly a startling view, and yet much organization research ignores the place of the human mind (Pondy and Boje, 1975). Viewing organizations as knowledge systems opens up new avenues for understanding the phenomenon of organized activity. Research questions take the form: What are the structures of knowledge in operation here? What are the "rules" or "scripts" that guide action? These questions are of practical concern to those who seek to understand, diagnose, and alter the way an organization is working.

A Symbolic Perspective

Anthropologists such as Hallowell (1955) and Geertz (1973) treat societies, or cultures, as systems of shared symbols and meanings. They see the anthropologist's task as interpreting the "themes" of culture — those postulates or understandings, declared or implicit, tacitly approved or openly prompted, that orient and stimulate social activity (Opler, 1945: 198). In order to explain the thematic systems of meaning underlying activity, anthropologists show the ways symbols are linked in meaningful relationship and demonstrate how they are related to the activities of the people in a setting.

When this symbolic perspective is applied to organizational analysis, an organization, like a culture, is conceived as a pattern of symbolic discourse. It thus needs interpreting (Manning, 1979), "reading" (Turner, 1983), or "deciphering" (Van Maanen, 1973), in order to be understood. To interpret an organization, a researcher focuses first on the way experience becomes meaningful for those in a setting. This is done by regard for the figure-ground relationships they maintain through their processes of attention, naming, and other patterns of action. The researcher may use several kinds of evidence to piece together

a multifaceted and complex picture of the various kinds of symbol systems and their associated meanings. The researcher is also concerned with articulating the recurrent themes that represent the patterns in symbolic discourse and that specify the links among values, beliefs, and action in a setting. The themes, expressed in various symbolic modes, represent the heart of a symbolic analysis of an organization as culture (Smircich, 1983b).

Examples of this mode of research are Manning's (1979) study of the world of detectives, Smircich's (1983a) account of the organizational world of the executive staff of an insurance company, and the studies of police by Pacanowsky and Anderson (1981) and Van Maanen (1973, 1977). More specifically, Van Maanen was concerned with how people decipher organizations so that they can behave appropriately. This interest led him to focus on the process through which neophytes, in this case, police academy graduates, learned the meaning system maintained by their occupational group.

The focus of this form of organizational analysis is on how individuals interpret and understand their experience and how these interpretations and understandings relate to action. With this orientation, the very concept of organization is problematic, for the researcher seeks to examine the basic processes by which groups of people come to share interpretations and meanings for experience that allow the possibility of organized activity. The research agenda here is to document the creation and maintenance of organization through symbolic action.

By having this focus of interest, symbolic organization theorists have much in common with organizational leaders. Theorist and practitioner alike are concerned with such practical matters as how to create and maintain a sense of organization, and how to achieve common interpretations of situations so that coordinated action is possible. Some research work derived from this perspective in fact, offers the view that leadership can best be understood as the management of meaning and the shaping of interpretations (Peters, 1978; Smircich and Morgan, 1982).

Structural and Psychodynamic Perspectives

Culture may also be regarded as the expression of unconscious psychological processes. This view of culture forms the foundation of the structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss. It is also present in the work of organization theorists who are developing psychodynamic approaches to organizational analysis (e.g., Gemmill, 1982; Mitroff, 1982; McSwain and White, 1982; Walter, 1982). From this point of view, organizational forms and practices are understood as projections of unconscious processes and are analyzed with reference to the dynamic interplay between out-of-awareness processes and their conscious manifestation.

The structuralism of Levi-Strauss has had little development in organization theory. It assumes that the human mind has built-in constraints by which it structures psychic and physical content. Since we are unaware of this set of constraints or structures, they can be labeled the "unconscious infrastructure" (Rossi, 1974: 16–18). Culture displays the workings of the unconscious infrastructure; it reveals the form of the unconscious. From this perspective, the purpose of the study

of culture is to reveal the hidden, universal dimensions of the human mind. The task of structural analysis is "to discover an order of relations that turns a set of bits, which have limited significance of their own, into an intelligible whole. This order may be termed 'the structure' " (Turner, 1977: 101).

According to Levi-Strauss, the 'structures' solve problems.

> The "structures" that Levi-Strauss discusses typically solve "problems," problems with symbols, ideas or categories, problems with the application of these symbols, ideas and categories in the social world, and problems with the implications of the applications. The problem that kinship structures "solve," according to Levi-Strauss, is the problem of assuming that women "circulate" intergenerationally through the society. The solutions are arrangements of kinship categories and rules. The patterns that concern Levi-Strauss are patterns in variations between these arrangements. (Turner, 1977: 117)

If this approach to culture were applied to the study of organizations we could ask, What problems are solved by such persistent patterns in organizational arrangement as hierarchy? What do the patterns of organization reveal about the human mind?

From this perspective most organizational analysis would be criticized for being too limited in scope. Organizational research tends to deal only with the surface level "bits" that are, in fact, elements of the conscious models shared by organization participants and analysts. For example, the "formal structure" of the organization can be seen as an indigenous theory — a set of norms or rules that participants and researchers use to explain behavior in certain contexts (Turner, 1977). Behavior is explained, rationalized, and legitimized in terms of the formal organization structure. But formal structure is a myth.

Consider the parallel with the structural anthropologist who studies a primitive society. He or she would not be content to understand the significance of the members' behavior solely in the terms by which they make it accountable to themselves, the "native-view" perspective. To do so is to rely too heavily on the conscious attitude (McSwain and White, 1982) and rationalism (Walter, 1982). Structuralism and the psychodynamic models separate the experience of the phenomena from the underlying reality that gives rise to particular forms of social arrangements (Rossi, 1974). Thus the organization analyst guided by a structuralist or psychodynamic perspective would need to penetrate beneath the surface level of appearance and experience to uncover the objective foundations of social arrangements.

As of yet there are few organization analysts who are pursuing this task. Turner is one who attempts to apply an explicitly Levi-Strauss-type analysis to complex organizations — in one case, to understanding differences between bureaucratic and industrial arrangements (1977) and, in another case, to diagnosing organizational conflicts (1983). Mitroff (1982) draws on Jung's work on archetypes, rather than on Levi-Strauss' structuralism, yet he too is concerned with discovering structural patterns that link the unconscious human mind with its overt manifestations in social arrangements. McSwain and White (1982), Gemmill (1982), and Walter (1982) aim to understand organizational practices in terms of the transformation of unconscious energy into a variety of forms, e.g., lying, cheating,

stealing, conflict, even the bureaucratic form. The organization theorists working from this psychodynamic perspective and contributing to the development of a transformational organization theory share a concern for reconstituting social science inquiry so that it embraces a more complex vision of human nature, one that integrates unconscious processes with the more obvious conscious processes (White and McSwain, 1983). Basic to this work is the belief in "the existence of a deep underlying structure built into the ordering capacities of the mind, and (the suggestion) that it is in these capacities in which the 'psychic unity of mankind' consists" (Turner, 1983).

CULTURE AS A ROOT METAPHOR: A COMPARISON

The cognitive, symbolic, structural, and psychodynamic perspectives on organization and culture have distinct foci of interest that lead scholars who hold these perspectives to ask different questions and to pursue their research programs in different ways. Some of this work is descriptive and documentary, some aims for social critique and reformation of social arrangements. Underlying these differences, however, is a mode of thought that sets these perspectives apart from those that treat culture as a variable. This mode of thought adopts the idea of culture as an epistemological device to frame the study of organization as social phenomenon. Although there may be different understandings of the specific nature of culture among cognitive, symbolic, structuralist, or psychodynamic theorists, by using culture as a root metaphor, they are all influenced to consider organization as a particular form of human expression. This is distinct from the views derived from the machine and organism metaphors, which encourage theorists to see organizations as purposeful instruments and adaptive mechanisms.

The mode of thought that underlies culture as a root metaphor gives the social world much less concrete status. The social world is not assumed to have an objective, independent existence that imposes itself on human beings. Instead, the social or organizational world exists only as a pattern of symbolic relationships and meanings sustained through the continued processes of human interaction. Social action is considered possible because of consensually determined meanings for experience that, to an external observer, may have the appearance of an independent rule-like existence.

The focus of attention of researchers here is also on language, symbols, myths, stories, and rituals, as in the culture-as-variable perspective discussed earlier. However, here these are not taken as cultural artifacts, but instead as generative processes that yield and shape meanings and that are fundamental to the very existence of organization. When culture is a root metaphor, the researcher's attention shifts from concerns about what do organizations accomplish and how may they accomplish it more efficiently, to how is organization accomplished and what does it mean to be organized?

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATION

In 1979, Pondy and Mitroff advocated that organization theory move "beyond open system models of organization" to a "cultural model" — a model that would be concerned with the

higher mental functions of human behavior, such as language and the creation of meaning. Pondy and Mitroff were suggesting that the culture metaphor replace the open systems metaphor as an analytical framework in organization studies. Much of the research summarized in this paper and in this special issue stands as evidence that there is a trend in that direction. It is also apparent that the open systems analogy continues to be a dominant mode of thought in organization studies, but that now the idea of culture has been incorporated and given prominence as an internal variable as well as an environmental variable. Thus, not all of the research work mentioning culture refers to culture as a root metaphor.

Instead, we see that a variety of research agendas flow out of the linkage of different conceptions of culture and organization. These differences are highlighted in the five thematic areas of research representing various intersections of concepts of culture and organization. The insights that emerge from linking the two concepts are a function of the basic conceptions of culture and organization that the researcher brings to the inquiry situation. Thus the significance of culture for organization studies can only be considered against the broader backdrop of basic assumptions and purposes. When we question whether or not "a cultural framework" is a useful one, we need to ask more precisely, "Useful for whom and for what purpose?"

By considering together all the research efforts stemming from the linking of culture and organization, the differences in interests and purposes pursued by organization scholars are emphasized. Some researchers give high priority to the principles of prediction, generalizability, causality, and control; while others are concerned by what appear to them to be more fundamental issues of meaning and the processes by which organizational life is possible. Comparative management scholars seek to chart patterns of beliefs and attitudes, as well as managerial practices across countries. Those who research dimensions of corporate culture seek to delineate the ways these dimensions are interrelated and how they influence critical organizational processes and outcomes. Underlying both these areas of inquiry is the desire for statements of contingent relationships that will have applicability for those managing organizations. Cognitive organization theorists, on the other hand, consider organizations as systems of thought. Their interest is in charting the understandings or rules by which organization members achieve coordinated action in order to diagnose and intervene in organized settings. Symbolic organization theorists are concerned with interpreting or deciphering the patterns of symbolic action that create and maintain a sense of organization. They recognize that symbolic modes, such as language, facilitate shared realities, yet these realities are fleeting, always open to reinterpretation and renegotiation. Thus, for them, the very concept of organization is problematic. Organization theorists influenced by structural anthropology or psychodynamics seek to understand the ways in which organization forms and practices manifest unconscious processes. Their aim is to penetrate the surface level of appearance to uncover the workings of unconscious mind. The latter three research interests share a more subjective orientation to the study of organization. They have a common concern for studying the interactional dynamics that bring about organization.

This paper has intended to clarify the differences in the ways the concepts of culture and organization have been linked, to illustrate the accompanying research agendas and to bring to the surface the underlying assumptions and purposes contained in those agendas. Despite the very real differences in research interest and purpose represented here, whether one treats culture as a background factor, an organizational variable, or as metaphor for conceptualizing organization, the idea of culture focuses attention on the expressive, nonrational qualities of the experience of organization. It legitimates attention to the subjective, interpretive aspects of organizational life.

A cultural analysis moves us in the direction of questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, raising issues of context and meaning, and bringing to the surface underlying values. The rational model of organization analysis is largely silent on these matters (Denhardt, 1981). Although organization scholars have already conducted much research on the values of individual managers, they have devoted much less energy to questioning the values embedded within modern corporate society and to examining the context in which corporate society is meaningful. A cultural mode of analysis encourages us to recognize that both the practice of organizational inquiry and the practice of corporate management are cultural forms, products of a particular sociohistorical context and embodying particular value commitments. In our present day these values are efficiency, orderliness, and even organization itself. Denhardt in *In the Shadow of Organization* (1981) noted that organization and administration studies tend to take as their task improving organizational efficiency rather than questioning the "ethic of organization" that has come to dominate modern life. Complex organization as a cultural form has enabled us to provide universal education, to eliminate deadly diseases such as polio and smallpox, and to explore outer space. Complex organization as a cultural form also facilitates environmental destruction and the possibility of nuclear annihilation. A cultural framework for analysis encourages us to see that an important role for both those who study and manage organizations is not to celebrate organization as a value, but to question the ends it serves.

Because we are of our own culture, it is difficult for us, researchers and managers alike, to both live in our cultural context and to question it. It is difficult to engage in contextual, reflexive management and research, with the requirement of examination and critique of one's own assumptions and values. It is difficult; but that is what a cultural framework for management and research urges us to do.

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