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CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONS

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Social systems can exist only because human behavior is not random, but to some extent predictable. For each prediction of behavior we try to take both the person and the situation into account. We assume that each person carries a certain amount of mental programming that is stable over time and causes that person to display more or less the same behavior in similar situations. Our prediction is never completely sure; but the more accurately we know a person's mental programming and the more accurately we know the situation, the more sure our prediction will be.

It is possible that our mental programs are physically determined by states of our brain cells. We cannot directly observe mental programs; what we can observe is only behavior, words or deeds. When we observe behavior, we infer from it the presence of stable mental programs. This type of inference is not unique to the social sciences; it exists, for example, in physics as well, where the intangible concept of "forces" is inferred from its manifestations in the movement of objects. (1) Like "forces" in physics, "mental programs" are intangibles, and the terms we use in social science to describe them are

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constructs. A construct is "not directly accessible to observation but inferable from verbal statements and other behaviors and useful in predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and nonverbal behavior" (Levitin, 1973. P. 492). Constructs do not "exist" in an absolute sense: we define them into existence, as Christian Morgenstern did to his Nasobem. (2)

What we actually do when we try to understand social systems is use models. Models are lower-level systems that we can better understand and that we substitute for what we cannot understand. We simplify because we have no other choice. It is in this simplification that our subjectivity enters the process. What it means for the use of constructs is that the definition of constructs in social science reflects not only its object but also the specific mental programming of the scholar who makes or borrows the particular constructs. Therefore, no single definition of a construct in social science is likely to do justice to its complexity (Williams, 1968. P. 283).

A cursory inventory in social science literature (anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology) of constructs dealing with human mental programs in some way or another yielded the following fifty terms:

aspirations	goals	motives	residues
attitudes	habits	myths	rules
beliefs	ideas	needs	satisfaction
cathexes	ideologies	norms	sentiments
culture	instinct	objectives	standards
derivations	intentions	obligations	stereotypes
desires	interests	opinions	temperament
dispositions	life styles	paradigms	traits
drives	models	perceptions	utilities
emotions	morale	personality	valences
ethics	morals	philosophies	values
ethos	mores	preferences	
expectancies	motivation	purposes	

No two of these terms are exactly synonymous, but many over-

lap to some extent. Several of the terms are used to mean different things in different subdisciplines and by different — or even the same — authors; and even if they are meant to refer to the same thing, definitions vary.

Among the fifty terms, some can be applied to the mental programs of individuals (e.g., personality); some apply only to collectivities (e.g., culture); and some, to both. In fact, every person's mental program is partly unique and partly shared with others. We can distinguish at least three levels of uniqueness in mental programs, as pictured in Figure 1.

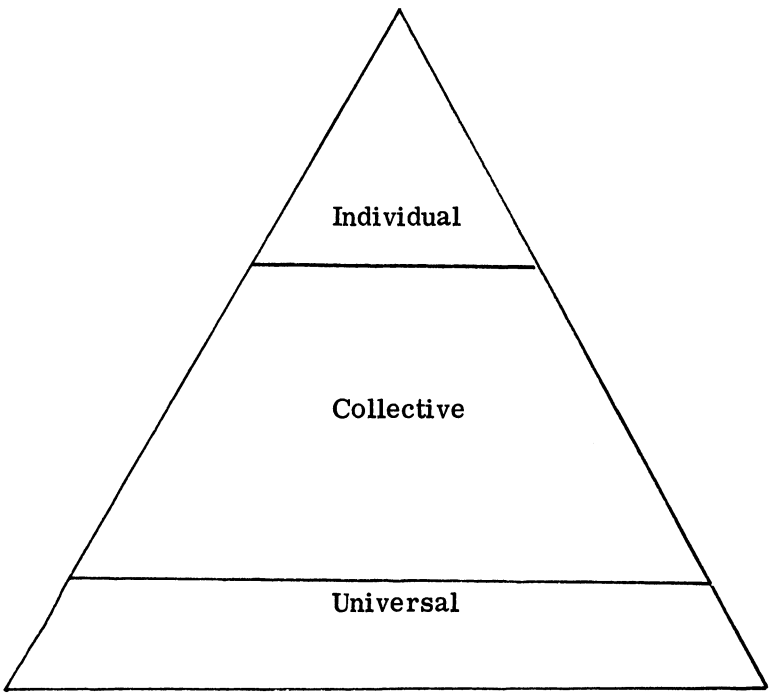

Figure 1. Three levels of uniqueness in human mental programming.

The least unique but most basic is the universal level of mental programming, which is shared by all, or almost all, man-

kind. This is the biological "operating system" of the human body; but it includes a range of expressive behaviors, such as laughing and weeping, and associative and aggressive behaviors, which are also found to some extent in higher animals.

The collective level of mental programming is shared with some but not all other people; it is common to people belonging to a certain group or category, but different from the programming of people belonging to other groups or categories. The whole area of subjective human culture (called "subjective" to distinguish it from "objective" artifacts; see Triandis, 1972. P. 4) belongs to this level. It includes the language in which we express ourselves; the deference we show to our elders; the physical distance between ourselves and other people that we maintain in order to feel comfortable; and the way we eat, make love, and defecate.

The individual level of human programming is the truly unique part: no two people are programmed exactly alike, even if they are identical twins reared together. This is the level of individual personality; it provides for a wide range of alternative behaviors within the same collective culture.

Mental programs can be inherited — transferred in our genes — or they can be learned after our birth. From the three levels in Figure 1, the bottom, "universal" level is most likely entirely inherited: it is that part of our genetic information that is common to the entire human species. At the top, "individual" level, at least part of our programming must be inherited; it is difficult to explain otherwise the differences in capabilities and temperament among children reared in very similar environments. It is at the middle, collective, level that most or all of our mental programming is learned, which is already shown by the fact that we share it with people who went through the same learning process but do not have the same genes. The existence of the American people as a phenomenon is one of the clearest imaginable illustrations of the force of learning: with a multitude of genetic roots, it demonstrates a collective mental programming that is striking to the non-American. The transfer of collective mental programs is a social phenomenon, which,

according to Durkheim (1895. P. 107), we should try to explain socially and not reduce to something else, like race. Societies, organizations, and groups have ways of conserving and passing on mental programs from generation to generation, with an obstinacy that many people tend to underestimate. (3)

The learning and transferring of collective mental programs continues throughout our lives, but we learn most and most easily when we are very young: when our minds are still relatively empty, programs are most easily registered. Intelligence versus age curves usually show a very rapid development of intelligence in the early years, from two to about seven, with a slowing down after age nine (Bloom, 1964. P. 64). Adequate measures of personality development are harder to get at; but such characteristics as intellectual interest, dependency, and aggression seem to a considerable extent to be developed before age five (Bloom, 1964. P. 177). What applies to these individual characteristics should apply equally to learned collective characteristics: most of them are developed early in a person's life.

Values

Two key constructs are values and culture. Values are an attribute of both individuals and collectivities; culture presupposes a collectivity. I define a value as "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others." This is a simplified version of the more precise anthropological definition by Kluckhohn (1951b. P. 395): "A value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of actions." It is also in line with the definition of Rokeach (1968. Pp. 159–60): "To say that a person 'has a value' is to say that he has an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence." These definitions reserve the word "value" for mental programs that are relatively non-

specific: the same "value can be activated in a variety of situations." Rokeach thinks that an adult possesses "only several dozens of instrumental values and perhaps only a handful of terminal values" (Rokeach, 1968. P. 162). For mental programs that are more specific, Rokeach and others use the terms "attitudes" and "beliefs."

Because our values are programmed early in our lives, they are nonrational (although we may subjectively feel ours to be perfectly rational!). In fact, values determine our subjective definition of rationality. "Values are ends, not means, and their desirability is either nonconsciously taken for granted (a zero-order belief) or seen as a direct derivation from one's experience or from some external authority (a first-order belief)" (Bem, 1970. P. 16). Our values are mutually related and form value systems or hierarchies; but these systems need not be in a state of harmony: most people hold simultaneously several conflicting values, such as "freedom" and "equality." Our internal value conflicts are one of the sources of uncertainty in social systems: events in one sphere of life may activate latent values that suddenly affect our behavior in other spheres of life. A change in our perception of a situation may swing the balance in an internal value conflict, in particular, the extent to which we perceive a situation as "favorable" or "critical."

Values have both intensity and direction (Kluckhohn, 1951b. Pp. 413–14. He refers to "intensity" and "modality."). Mathematically, values have a size and a sign; they can be represented by arrows along a line. If we "hold" a value, this means that the issue involved has a certain relevance for us (intensity) and that we identify certain outcomes as "good" and others as "bad" (direction). For example, "the amount of money we have" may be highly relevant to us (intensity), and we may consider "more" as good and "less" as bad (direction); but someone else may differ from us with regard to this value in intensity, direction, or both. A person who takes the Christian Bible (St. Mark 10: 21–25) seriously could consider having money equally relevant, but with a reversed direction sign, "more" being bad, and "less" being good. For still another person, the entire

issue of having money may be less relevant. In some primitive societies, "witchcraft" is both relevant and good; in medieval Europe, it was relevant and bad; to most of us today, it is simply irrelevant.

We should further distinguish between values as the desired and values as the desirable: what people actually desire versus what they think ought to be desired. Although the two are, of course, not independent, they should not be equated. Equating them is a "positivistic fallacy" (Levitin, 1973. P. 497); in research it leads to confusion between reality and social desirability. In most psychological and sociological research literature, "social desirability" is treated as something undesirable for the researcher. The term is used in two ways: as a quality of certain measurement items, or as a personality construct of the respondents (Phillips and Clancy, 1972. P. 923). In both senses it usually represents "noise" in the measurement. In the study of values, however, asking for the desirable is perfectly respectable; it is part and parcel of the phenomenon studied. So in this case "social desirability" in our measurements is not undesirable; we just have to realize that we are dealing with two different kinds of values.

Avoiding the positivistic fallacy is especially important if we try to relate values to behavior. Responding to questionnaires or interviews is also a form of behavior, but I shall distinguish "words" (questionnaires, interviews, meetings, speeches) from "deeds" (nonverbal behavior). Values should never be equated with deeds, for the simple reason that behavior depends on both the person and the situation; but values as the desired are at least closer to deeds than values as the desirable. The desired–desirable distinction relates to several other distinctions, as illustrated in the accompanying table.

This table refers to norms of value; we can speak of norms as soon as we deal with a collectivity. In the case of the desired, the norm is statistical: it indicates the values actually held by the majority.(4) In the case of the desirable, the norm is absolute or deontological (pertaining to what is ethically right). The desired relates more to pragmatic issues, the desirable, to ideology.

The Distinction between the Desired and the Desirable and Associated Distinctions

Distinguishing characteristics	Nature of the value: The desired	Nature of the value: The desirable
Dimensions of the value	Intensity	Direction
Nature of corresponding norms of value	Statistical, phenomenological, pragmatic	Absolute, deontological, ideological
Corresponding behavior	Choice and differential effort allocation	Approval or disapproval*
Dominant outcome	Deeds and/or words	Words
Terms used in measuring instrument	Important, successful, attractive, preferred	Good, right, agree, ought, should
Affective meaning of these terms	Activity plus evaluation	Evaluation only
Person referred to in measuring instrument	Me, you	People in general

*The distinction between approval and choice, etc., is based on Kluckhohn (1951b. Pp. 404–405).

The association among the various rows in the table should be seen as probabilistic, not rigid; for example, we may approve with deeds rather than words, or what is desired may never become expressed in deeds. There remains a discrepancy between actual behavior (deeds) and the desired, but there is another discrepancy between the desired and the desirable. Norms for the desirable can be completely detached from behavior (Adler, 1956. P. 277). The tolerable size of the discrepancies may differ from person to person and from group to group, depending on both

personality and culture. In Catholicism, the practice of confessing can be seen as a device for coping with both discrepancies and thus making them tolerable. Ideological indoctrination will more easily affect the desirable than the desired; it is possible that it widens the gap between the two without changing the desired.

A related issue is whether there are absolute values at all or only relative ones. Anthropologists have tried to identify absolute values in the form of cultural universals from a phenomenological aspect (Bidney, 1962. P. 450). The systems philosopher Ervin Laszlo (1973) concludes that such cultural universals exist and argues from the deontological aspect that "good" in absolute terms is what contributes to the survival of the world system, and that error tolerance for the world has become so small that relativism is obsolete. His position, however, itself reflects a value choice. The problem is that man is at the same time the source of values and their instrument — a problem for which, as far as I know, systems theory has no solution. A comparative study of human values in any case presupposes in the student a certain amount of relativism, or at least tolerance of deviant values.

Culture

Culture has been defined in many ways. Kluckhohn (1951a. P. 86, note 5) quotes the following as a consensus of anthropological definitions: "Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values." Kroeber and Parsons (1958. P. 583) arrive at a cross-disciplinary definition of culture as "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior." Triandis (1972. P. 4) distinguishes "subjective" culture from its expression in "objec-

tive" artifacts and defines the former as "a cultural group's characteristic way of perceiving the man-made part of its environment." My personal definition is that culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture, in this sense, is a system of collectively held values.

Culture is to a human collectivity what personality is to an individual. Personality is defined by Guilford (1959) as the interactive aggregate of personal characteristics that influence an individual's response to the environment. Culture could be defined as the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment. Culture determines the identity of a human group in the same way that personality determines the identity of an individual. Moreover, the two interact; culture and personality is a classic term for psychological anthropology (Barnouw, 1973). Cultural traits can sometimes be measured by personality tests.

The word culture is most commonly reserved for societies (in the modern world we speak of "nations") or for ethnic or regional groups, but it can also be applied to other human collectivities or categories: an organization, a profession, a family. In this paper, to avoid confusion, I shall reserve the word culture for societies, and in other cases use subculture. The degree of cultural integration varies from one society to another, and may be especially low for some of the newer nations. Most subcultures within a nation, however, still share common traits that make their members recognizable to foreigners as belonging to their society.

There must be mechanisms in societies that permit the maintenance of stability in culture patterns across many generations. I suggest that such mechanisms operate as in Figure 2 (in which the terminology is taken partly from Berry, 1975, and elements can be recognized from the cybernetic hierarchy of Parsons, 1977. P. 10).

In the center is a system of societal norms, consisting of the value systems (the mental programs) shared by most of the population (Parsons would call this the cultural system). Their

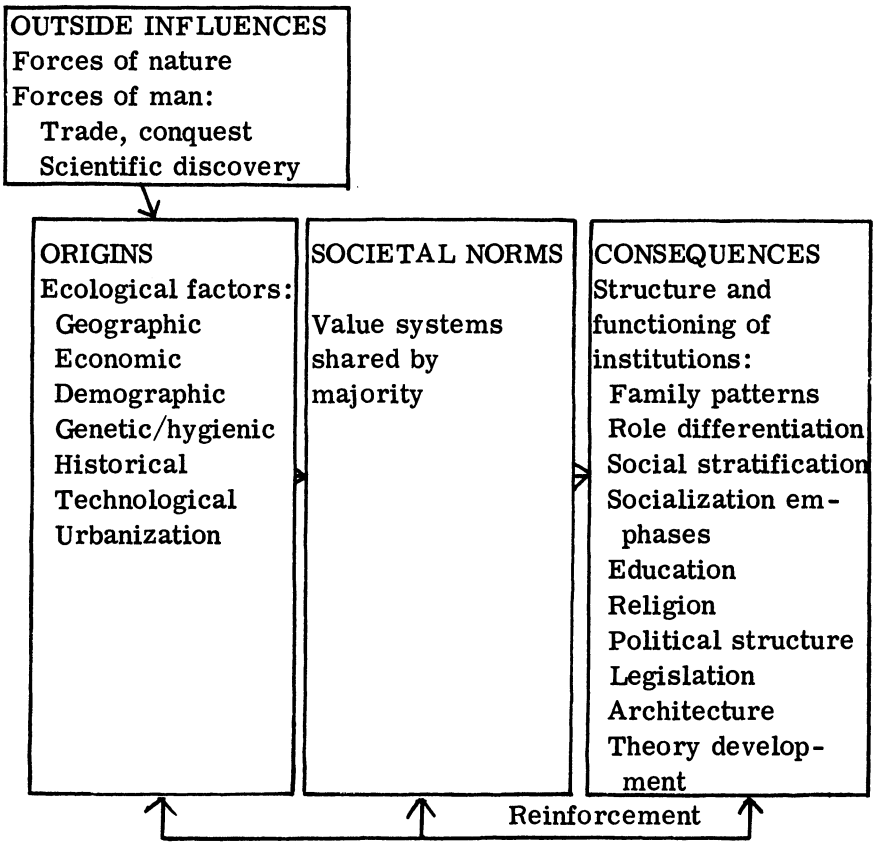

Figure 2. The stabilizing of culture patterns.

origins are a variety of ecological factors (in the sense of factors affecting the physical environment). The societal norms have led to the development and pattern maintenance of social institutions with a particular structure and way of functioning. These include the family, education systems, politics, and legislation. These institutions, once they have become facts, reinforce the societal norms and the ecological conditions that led to them. Institutions may be changed, but this does not necessarily affect the societal norms; and when these norms remain unchanged, the persistent influence of a majority value system patiently molds the new institutions until their structure and

functioning are again adapted to the societal norms. An example of this process is the history of France since Louis XIV (Peyrefitte, 1976). Change comes mainly from the outside, through forces of nature (changes of climate, silting up of harbors) or forces of man (trade, conquest, colonization). The arrow of outside influences is deliberately directed at the origins, not at the societal norms themselves. I believe that norms change rarely by direct adoption of outside values, but rather through a shift in ecological conditions: technological, economic, hygienic. In general, norm shifts will be gradual, unless the outside influences are particularly violent (as in the case of military conquest or deportation).

One of the most effective ways of changing mental programs of individuals is changing behavior first (Bem, 1970. P. 60). That value change has to precede behavior change is a naïve (idealistic) assumption that neglects the contribution of the situation to actual behavior. This applies on the level of societies as well. Kunkel (1970. P. 76), dealing with the economic development of societies, concludes that "The major problem of economic development is not the alteration of character, values or attitudes, but the change of those selected aspects of man's social environment which are relevant to the learning of new behavior patterns." I would in this case omit "social."

The system in Figure 3 is in a homeostatic (self-regulating) quasi-equilibrium. History has shown cases of peoples that, through such a system, have maintained an identity over hundreds and thousands of years, even in the face of such sweeping changes as loss of independence, deportation, or loss of language; examples are Jews, Gypsies, and Basques (Spicer, 1971). Other peoples in similar conditions have disappeared, however, when their self-regulating cycle was too much disturbed by outside influences. Obviously, both the strength of the existing self-regulation and the strength of the outside forces have played a role in these cases.

Culture and Organization

As nearly all our mental programs are affected by values,

nearly all are affected by culture, and this is reflected by our behavior. The cultural component in all kinds of behavior is difficult to grasp for people who remain embedded in the same cultural environment; it takes a prolonged stay abroad and mixing with the people there to recognize the numerous and often subtle differences in the way they and we behave because that is how our society has programmed us. It has been said that the last thing a fish will discover is water; it finds out about water only when it has landed in a fisherman's net. If I take the train from Brussels to Rotterdam, I can tell the Belgian passengers from the Dutch: most Dutch people greet strangers when entering a small, closed space such as a train compartment, elevator, or doctor's waiting room; most Belgians do not.

Even clearer than cultural differences in individual behavior are cultural differences in institutional behavior: in families and in organizations such as schools, churches, public services, businesses. The subculture of an organization reflects national culture, professional subculture, and the organization's own history. Professional subcultures are to some extent international: there is something common in the behavior of bank employees, journalists, policemen, or university professors from one country to another.

The influence of an organization's own history on its subculture has long been neglected by organization sociology (Pettigrew, 1977); but it is a fact that as soon as an organization has a history, the options for organizational behavior thereafter are constrained by it. Beyond the history of individual organizations there is a striking historical continuity in the forms and techniques used to control hierarchically structured organizations, which go back even to pre-industrial state and church bureaucracies (Luhmann, 1976. P. 102). The rules of behavior in industrial workshops in the nineteenth century were modeled after those in armies and monasteries. The structure and functioning of organizations are determined not merely by rationality, or, if they are, by rationality that varies according to the cultural environment. Technology contributes to the shaping of organizations, but it is insufficient for explaining how they work.

There is no "one best way" that can be deduced from technical-economic logic (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977. P. 168). Harrison (1972) speaks of "organizational ideologies" that vary not only among organizations but even among parts of organizations.

Culture affects organizations in a variety of ways. First, it affects them through its influence on the distribution of power. Whereas social systems in general can exist because human behavior is predictable, organizations can exist because that behavior is controllable. The control of human behavior necessary for organizations is achieved through an unequal distribution of power. Any organization has its dominant coalitions and its other members; but the relative size of the dominant coalition, the fixity of its composition, and the distribution of power between it and the other members can vary widely under the influence of, among other things, culture.

Second, culture affects organizations for various reasons and in various ways, through its influence on the values of the dominant coalitions:

1. Because the dominant coalition defines organization goals and objectives and identifies the stakeholders whose interests have to be respected. Business organizations, for example, face a value issue with regard to social responsibility versus economic success to which they will respond according to the values of their elites (Lindstedt-Axhamre and Stymne, 1977). In Western countries "success" is usually seen as the satisfaction of more demands, which leads to goals different from those of societies that follow the Buddhist view of success as a reduction in demands.

2. In decision-making processes, both through the alternatives that are considered and the actual choice among them. These include values in the form of economic utilities and indifference curves but also valuation criteria in accounting — for example, in the fact that machines are usually considered "investments," but people are not. Decision-making processes lead to the attribution of scarce resources among competing applications.

3. In shaping the organization structure and its formal procedures. For example, U.S. subsidiaries of business firms in

India have fewer hierarchical levels than comparable local Indian firms (Negandhi and Prasad, 1971. P. 158). French firms tend to use different internal transfer pricing procedures than British ones (Granick, 1975).

4. In reward systems. Both in schools (Hofstede, 1978) and in business organizations (Senger, 1971), members of dominant coalitions have been shown to rate people with similar value systems higher in competence. This has consequences for financial rewards and promotion, and it is one of the processes by which the continuity of the dominant value system in the organization is guaranteed.

Third, the values of the nonelites that form the majority of an organization's members have an indirect but profound impact on the functioning of organizations:

1. By determining the members' reasons for complying with organizational requirements. A well-known distinction has been introduced by Etzioni (1975. Pp. 12 ff.): Members' involvement with an organization can be alienative, calculative, or moral; the kind of power commonly used within the organization can be coercive, remunerative, or normative. Members will comply best with organizational requirements if there is congruence between type of power and type of involvement — coercive power for alienative involvement (as in a prison), remunerative power for calculative involvement (as in a business firm), normative power for moral involvement (as in a church). Business organizations assuming calculative involvement of workers and, consequently, using remunerative power may meet with growing alienation in more-educated workers valuing job-content factors besides money.

2. By determining what regulation and control processes are necessary to guarantee desired behavior. If people cooperate spontaneously, rules for cooperation can be minimal; if conflict is frequent, there should be rules for conflict resolution (Vickers, 1970. P. 142; 1973. P. 171).

3. Generally, by determining members' zone of manageability. Laaksonen (1977) has shown how in present-day China, work organizations can function with relatively little supervision be-

cause members are very manageable. It should be noted, however, that great efforts are spent in ideological training to assure that the zone of manageability is not reduced by a shift in values.

4. By affecting, through value consensus between the dominant coalition and other members and among members themselves, the accuracy of communication going on within the organization (Connor and Becker, 1975. P. 556).

5. By determining members' support to competing elites in alternative organizations, such as labor unions, or in pressure groups that directly affect the organization's functioning.

Fourth, culture affects organizations through the values of nonmembers of the organization: values of members of competing organizations, interacting organizations, and governments, and of representatives of the press and of the public at large. The values dominant in the environment of the organization to a large extent determine what an organization can and cannot do. Shifting values in society may lead to a legitimacy crisis for organizations (Habermas, 1975. P. 96).

Culture and Organization Theory

The cultural relativity of the laws that govern human behavior was recognized as early as the 16th century in the skepticism of Montaigne (1533-1592): "Quelle vérité que ces montagnes bornent, qui est mensonge au monde qui se tient au délà?" [What kind of truth is it that is bounded by these mountains and is a lie to people living elsewhere?].(5)

The founding fathers of the theory of modern organizations, such as Tolstoy (1828–1910), Fayol (1841–1925), Taylor (1856–1915), Weber (1864–1920), and Follett (1868–1933), and most of their successors up until the present day have not taken Montaigne's wisdom to heart, but have typically looked for universal principles. The paradox is that in their theories, the influence of their own cultural environment is clearly discernible.

Let us take the issue of the exercise of authority. Weber, who was German (and, as his other work shows, quite sensitive about the role of values in society), whote about authority in a bureau-

cracy — by which he meant any large organization, public, voluntary, or private: "The authority to give the commands required for the discharge of these duties is distributed in a stable way and is strictly delimited by rules concerning the coercive means...which may be placed at the disposal of officials" (from Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, 1921. Part III, ch. 6, p. 650; English version in Weber, 1958. P. 196). For Weber, authority is in the office, not the man.

Fayol, who was French, puts it differently: "We distinguish in a manager his statutory authority, which is in the office, and his personal authority, which consists of his intelligence, his knowledge, his experience, his moral value, his leadership, his service record, etc. For a good manager, personal authority is the indispensable complement of statutory authority" (Fayol, 1916. P. 21 [my translation — G.H.]).

Mary Parker Follett was American. She wrote: "How can we avoid the two extremes: too great bossism in giving orders, and practically no orders given?... My solution is to depersonalize the giving of orders, to unite all concerned in a study of the situation, to discover the law of the situation and obey that.... One person should not give orders to another person, but both should agree to take their orders from the situation" (from a paper presented in 1925; in Metcalf and Urwick, 1940. Pp. 58-59).

With regard to the same issue of the exercise of authority, Weber stresses the office; Fayol, the person; Follett, the situation. Between the American and the French view, a direct dispute was started elsewhere by Fayol when he took issue with Taylor's proposition of eight functionally specialized superiors for one person. Fayol (1916. P. 84) calls this idea "wrong and dangerous" because it "flagrantly violates" the principle of unity of command. This principle, however, is much more sacred in France than in the United States. It must be admitted that U.S. practitioners were not too eager to try this idea of Taylor's either; but some of it can be recognized in the modern model of matrix management, which was developed in the United States and, not surprisingly, is not popular in France (Laurent, 1978).

What is available as organization theory today is written

mostly by Americans and hence reflects the cultural context of one specific society. A collection of fifteen recent contributions by leading European scholars (Hofstede and Kassem, 1976) shows remarkable differences in focus according to culture area. Authors from Latin Europe focus on power; from Central Europe, including Germany, on truth; from Eastern Europe, on efficiency; from Northern Europe, on change; and, the Western Europeans, in this case British and Dutch, have a bit of all of these, but more than the others display a concern with data collection, which we also find in the United States.

Theorizing is only a semirational activity. "There are large sections of culture that act as a bar to the free exercise of rationality" (Kluckhohn, 1951a. P. 91 [after E. Sapir]). Or, as I should prefer to put it, there is no such thing as absolute rationality: there are different rationalities colored by different culturally influenced values, your rationality differs from mine, and there is no standard by which to determine which of the two is more "rational." Culture particularly affects ideas that are taken for granted without further proof, because nobody in our environment ever challenges them. Only comparison of cultures can show that other ideas are possible. Douglas (1973) has collected documentary evidence on the relevance of an "anthropology of everyday knowledge": our reality is man-made. We also have a natural tendency to choose our environment so that certain of our basic ideas are not challenged. Ideas are entangled with our values and our interests (6), a truth we recognize more easily in others than in ourselves. Ideas and theories become popular or unpopular at a certain time not because they are more or less "true," but because the value systems that support them are activated or suppressed by ecological and institutional developments (more or less in the way pictured by the diagram in Figure 2). Bartell (1976) has shown why the "human relations ideology" in the United States developed there at the time it did (the 1930s), putting it in the context of such factors as traditional American values, labor-union expansion, the economic depression, the New Deal, and the bureaucratization of industrial organizations.

The claim for universal principles in organization theory was weakened in the "open systems" and "contingency" theories of organization, which grew around 1950 with the work of the Tavistock Institute in Great Britain (Miller, 1976). Whereas earlier theories tended to treat organizations as closed systems, able to control all relevant variables inside themselves, "open systems" models recognize explicitly that organizations respond continuously to changes in their environment, and "contingency" models acknowledge that the applicability of organization principles depends on specific outside factors ("contingencies") that may or may not occur. Initially, open systems and contingency organization theorists were more concerned with context factors such as technology and market uncertainty (on which research data were more readily available) than with culture. As studies of organization structure were repeated in different countries, the factor culture got some attention, but the notions of "culture" used have been vague. A general theory of the components of culture and their impact on organizations has been missing. Research has usually been done without a priori hypotheses about the kind of cultural effects expected — culture being treated as a "variable x" that should account for the variance left unexplained by other factors. Whereas contingency theories formally have dropped the claims for "one best way," in practice this idea is sometimes reintroduced through the back door: "Tell me what your contingencies are and I will tell you the one best way." For cultural factors this is difficult, which may explain the unpopularity of culture as a contingency.

Another source of cultural relativism in organization theory could have been the "comparative management" studies conducted in the 1950s and '60s, mainly by U.S. business-school professors under the influence of the internationalization of U.S. business organizations. Management practices in other countries were compared with U.S. practices; but these studies looked at commonalities rather than differences and, moreover, assumed that where differences existed, they would become smaller over time — the so-called "convergence theory" (Harbison and Myers, 1959. P. 117; Inkeles, 1960; Kerr et al., 1960; Likert, 1963).

Explicit emphasis on the cultural relativity of organization principles is recent. A seminal article was published in 1974 by Brossard and Maurice: using data comparing structures of matched German and French business organizations, they showed that universalist models of organization structures do not exist but that societal influences determine what works in a certain country. The way we organize ourselves depends not only on the task at hand but also on our mental programming. Lammers and Hickson (1979) have undertaken to develop the beginning of a general theory of "culture and organization." They argue that comparative studies of organizations tend to have a bias toward showing similarities ("organizations alike") or differences ("organizations unlike"), but that scientific integrity implies that we can show similarities only by trying to find differences, and vice versa. A general theory needs to explain similarities and differences in terms of something, so we have to be more specific about what it is in culture that makes organizations alike or unlike.

Resistances to Cultural Relativism

I regularly take part in international discussion groups at scholarly meetings; and having become sensitized to it, I cannot help but recognize the cultural influences on the interest areas and points of view taken by Scandinavian, French, American, German, British, Italian, and Dutch participants — not to mention the cultural influence on their way of presenting their ideas. Yet I have noticed that drawing attention to the cultural component in our points of view is a risky strategy that polarizes the audience. Some think it highly enlightening — an "Aha-erlebnis" [a revealing experience — the "aha phenomenon"] that suddenly puts the entire discussion into perspective. Others, however, rigorously reject the notion of a cultural component, become upset, and seem to feel threatened by it. "Possibly one of the many reasons why the culture concept has been resisted," Hall (1959. P. 50) writes, "is that it throws doubt on many established beliefs. Fundamental beliefs...are shown to

vary widely from one culture to the next. It is easier to avoid the idea of the culture concept than to face up to it." And further on (P. 165)"...the concepts of culture...touch upon such intimate matters that they are often brushed aside at the very point where people begin to comprehend their implications."

Nevertheless, I believe that the battle for recognition of the cultural component in our ideas is worth waging. First of all, now more than a generation ago, most of us meet people with cultural backgrounds different from ours, and are expected to work with them. If we stick to the naïve assumption that because they look just like us, they also think just like us, our joint efforts will not get very far. Second, from the moment we start to realize that our own ideas are culturally limited, we need the others — we can never be self-sufficient anymore: only other people with different mental programs can help us discover the limitations of our own. Once we have realized we are the blind confronting the elephant, we welcome the exchange with other blind persons.

Acceptance of cultural relativism is in itself easier in some cultures than in others. On the level of intellectual discourse (not necessarily on the level of practice), the French have little trouble with it. I know of no other country where a violent criticism of national values like Alain Peyrefitte's Le Mal Français (1976) could be written at all, especially by a cabinet minister of the majority party who, instead of being publicly rebuked, was then admitted to the country's most illustrious intellectual club, the Academie Française. Perhaps the French's sublime gift for separating theory and practice allows them to react this way. In Germany, by contrast, any type of relativism is digested with difficulty; the German tradition is to search for absolute truth; and in the sciences of man, most of the great theorists of the Western world have been from the German culture area — Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Weber, Lewin. Germans can, however, accept the relativity of their ideas as part of an absolute truth of a higher order — some "Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Strebens." ["Insufficiency of Human Endeavor"].(7)

Sex was the great taboo of the Victorian age. At least in the

organization literature, power was the great taboo until the 1960s. Both taboos have since been more or less lifted. Culture in the organization literature may be the great taboo of today. In all three cases, the taboo is about something we are all involved in, but not supposed to speak about. To the extent that it breaks the culture taboo, cross-cultural research is deliberately subversive.

Notes

1) This analogy is borrowed from Kluckhohn (1951b. P. 405).

2) This refers to a famous little German poem by Christian Morgenstern (1871–1914), who created a magical animal by defining it.

3) Those with a vested interest in societal inequality are fond of theories trying to prove that collective differences in behavior are due to heredity. The German Nazis had their race theories; in the United States not so long ago a professor from a respectable university tried to prove that Negroes were genetically less intelligent than Whites (Jensen, 1969), against which the American Anthropological Association took a public stand (for critiques of Jensen, see the articles following his article in the Harvard Educational Review and also Brace and Livingstone, 1974). In Great Britain the heredity versus environment issue led to the disgrace of a once-glorified psychologist's being suspected of having manipulated his data in favor of heredity (Sir Cyril Burt: see Wilmott, 1977). The opposite extreme has been found in the Soviet Union, where the dominant ideology favors playing down heredity in favor of environmental factors, which led to the now-refuted biological theories of Lysenko.

4) Dale (1974) and Dale and Spencer (1977) have further disentangled the definitions of norms. They show that the statistical norm of a "sentiment" such as a value may be different from the perception of this norm by the majority: there is such a thing as pluralistic ignorance.

5) Montaigne, Essais, II, XII, 34.

6) The stress on interests as the source of ideas is found throughout the works of Marx and Engels, but they focus almost exclusively on the modes of production; Merton (1968. Pp. 516 ff.) shows how Marx's ideas have been broadened by Scheler and Mannheim to include other institutional structures and group formations as existential bases of ideas.

7) The title of a song in Bertolt Brecht's Threepenny Opera.

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