



The fact and fantasy of organizational culture management: a case study of Greek food retailing

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Abstract

The management, manipulation or interference in organizational culture has become central to many theories and prescriptions of management. However, despite frequent prescriptions to manage culture in diverse national contexts, little empirical evidence has been forwarded in contexts other than the UK and the US. The current study is designed to overcome the limitations of existing studies through the critical review of culture management in a novel context—in this case, Greek food retailing. The aim is to provide empirical evidence regarding the fact and fantasy of Hellenic culture management. The paper begins with a brief overview of organizational culture literature and in particular culture management studies. After an explanation of the research design and methodology adopted, the analysis of a culture change effort study is presented and discussed. Four main findings emerge regarding: (1) the context of the change, (2) the espoused and perceived rationale for culture management, (3) the nature and process of the change programme and (4) the perceived impact of these changes on the organisation and its members. The paper culminates with a series of conclusions and implications of interest to both theorists and practitioners. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

It is arguable that the notion of organizational culture constitutes the most elusive and yet tantalising concept for both management theorists and practitioners. Indeed, whilst many early studies assume that organizational culture is merely another variable subject to the vagaries of executive whims (see for example Peters and Waterman, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982), contemporary theorists raise conceptual objections and cite pragmatic difficulties which undermine early functionalist views (see Willmott, 1993; Legge, 1994; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998).

Nevertheless, the management, manipulation or interference in organizational culture has become central to many theories and prescriptions of management. Indeed, in addition to the discipline of human resource management, numerous fields have adopted, incorporated and advocated culture management. For example, marketers posit that successful culture management determines the extent to which the ‘philosophy’

of marketing (the marketing concept) is implemented (Narver et al., 1998; Harris and Ogbonna, 1999). Likewise, strategists have claimed that sustainable change pivots on appropriate culture change (Post and Altman, 1994; Welford, 1995) whilst supply chain management is littered with exhortations to manage culture (for example Abell, 1999). Further, organizational culture management is vociferously prescribed for diverse sectors ranging from health care (Huq and Martin, 2000) to auto-motor manufacturing (Dove, 1998) as well as diverse contexts ranging from Russia (Fey et al., 1999) to New Zealand (Parry, 2000).

However, despite frequent prescriptions to manage organizational culture in diverse national contexts (see Fey et al., 1999; Parry, 2000), little empirical evidence has been forwarded in contexts other than the UK and the US. The gap in extant knowledge is such that a number of theorists have called for additional empirical research into organizational culture management in novel contexts (see for example Ogbonna and Harris, 1998). The current study is specifically designed to overcome the limitations of existing studies through the critical examination of organizational culture management in a (comparatively) novel context—in this case, Greek food retailing. The aim is to provide rich

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empirical evidence regarding the fact and fantasy of Hellenic culture management.

The paper begins with a brief overview of organizational culture literature and in particular culture management studies. After an explanation of the research design and methodology adopted, the analysis of a culture change effort study is presented and discussed. The paper culminates with a series of conclusions and implications of interest to both theorists and practitioners.

2. Examining organizational culture

In order more to fully appreciate the complexities of organizational culture management, it is first worthwhile elucidating the concept of culture. Given, space restrictions, this is most parsimoniously achieved through a brief overview of the more common perspectives, typologies and conceptualisations of culture.

While numerous categorisations of culture perspectives have been forwarded (see Smircich, 1983; Schultz and Hatch, 1996), it has been argued that the work of Martin (1992) constitutes the most interesting contribution (Harris and Ogbonna, 1998a). In contrast to the classification of Smircich (1983), which emphasises the distinction between culture as something an organization *has* and as something an organization *is*, Martin (1992) identifies three perspectives of culture, namely: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. Briefly, these perspectives differ in their orientation to consensus, relations amongst manifestations and orientation to ambiguity.

The extent of variation between developed perspectives accounts for the diversity of cultural typologies. Indeed, Brown (1995, p. 67) argues that the typologies that have been developed differ greatly “in terms of their sophistication, the range of variables they take into consideration and their applicability across organizations”. Harrison (1972) identifies four organizational ‘ideologies’: power, role, task, and person, which Handy (1985) later describes as culture types. In contrast, Deal and Kennedy (1982) forward four types of cultures, determined by the degree of risk associated with the company’s activities and the speed of decision and strategy making feedback. Quinn and McGrath (1985) detect four generic cultures (rational, ideological, consensual and hierarchical cultures), each of which has different assumptions and values. However, it is the work of Scholz (1987) that provides the most comprehensive categorisation. Briefly, Scholz (1987) argues that through analysing the internal, external and evolution-induced dimensions, numerous common culture types may be identified.

Finally, it is expedient to highlight the more common conceptualisations of organizational culture. A full discussion of these issues is beyond the remit of this review and it is pertinent to note that innumerable opinions on culture exist. However, it is generally accepted that organizational cultures are typically pluralistic (Sackmann, 1992), are characterised by varying degrees of order and consensus (Martin, 1992) and comprise deep layers of basic assumptions and shallower layers of beliefs and artefacts (which some claim are too shallow to constitute ‘culture’—see Schein, 1992).

3. Organizational culture management

The character of organizational culture management has been portrayed in different ways by different authors. Siehl (1985, p. 139), for example, defines managing culture as “articulating a possible culture, coming to agree that it is desirable, and then attaining it through the sharing of desired values”. In contrast, Ogbonna (1993, p. 8) notes that managing culture does not necessarily equate to cultural change and may include “creating it, changing it, maintaining it and abandoning it”. Conversely, the critical view of Anthony (1990, p. 4) is that culture management often entails “an attempted repackaging of managerial expertise, rather than any advance of understanding or control”. These views reflect the previously discussed perspectives on organizational culture in that theories of organizational culture management may be divided into two broad categories. Firstly, writers which reject the concept of conscious cultural management (for example, Anthony, 1990; Legge, 1994) and secondly studies which argue that some manipulation (Martin, 1985) or even management of culture (Bate, 1995) is possible. These two positions deserve greater discussion.

The first stance regarding culture management posits the view that whilst cultures do gradually change over time, the notion that management are able consciously to direct culture is a fallacy (Knights and Willmott, 1987; Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Legge, 1994). These theorists often reject the culture-variable perspective in favour of what Martin (1985) labels ‘purist’ culture definitions and perspectives. This position often presents culture as a concept deeply embedded at an unconscious level and thus untouchable by management intervention techniques. Indeed, a number of theorists have suggested that many culture change programmes merely manipulate the tangible manifestations of culture at the artefact level and fail to reach the deeper, unconscious assumptions of ‘true’ organizational culture (see Anthony, 1990; Legge, 1994). These arguments lead Ogbonna and Harris (1998) to note that the perspective and conceptualisation adopted by the researcher

determines their position regarding culture management. Thus, where culture is defined broadly to include artefacts, culture manipulation is often presented as feasible. In contrast, where culture is viewed narrowly (as in the assumption-oriented definition of Schein, 1992), management is argued not to be possible.

The second position presents the conscious change of organizational culture as possible (albeit often very difficult). An extreme stance from this position is that if one accepts that organizational culture is a variable, then a logical extension of that view is that culture is subject to the direct control of management. This somewhat optimistic stance may still be found in the less critical practitioner-oriented texts (see for example, Bate, 1995; Dawson, 1994; Brown, 1995). However, a more prevalent stance is that some manipulation of organizational culture may be possible under certain prescribed (and rather rare) contingencies. This position is reminiscent of Martin's (1985) culture 'pragmatists' who favour broad and shallow definitions of culture (for example Lundberg, 1985). A good example of this stance may be found in the work of Martin (1985) and Siehl (1985) who maintain that some periods of transition may allow judicious culture management. Such conditions include leader turnover, employee dissatisfaction with existing shared values and organizational foundation. Similarly, some authors have noted conditions which mitigate against the manipulation of culture, including when communication is poor (see Nord, 1985) and where strong subcultures predominate (see Harris, 1998). Thus, whilst many theorists suggest that culture management is *possible*, the extent to which management is *probable* is best summarised by Fombrun (1983, p. 151) who describes the complexities of the process as such that culture management is "an awesome if not impossible task".

Whatever the theoretical probability of successful organizational culture management, widespread evidence has been advanced documenting practitioners attempting to manage the cultures of their organizations (for example Denison, 1990; Bate, 1995). Interestingly, academic understanding of the rationale for such interventions appears to have evolved in recent years. During the 1980s and early 1990s, culture change efforts were popularised by management writers as the means directly to improve organizational performance (for instance Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Thus, Deal and Kennedy (1982) forward a raft of reasons for culture change including poor profitability, weak growth and environmental uncertainty. This view is still in evidence today where culture change programmes are presented as rational processes designed to improve organizational efficiency and benefit all stakeholders (see Casey, 1999). However, more critical contemporary theorists have suggested that culture management techniques are designed more to

exert control than directly to improve financial performance (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). Thus, Willmott (1993) proposes that cultural control methods have significantly increased the extent to which management is able to dominate and even exploit their workers.

This growing body of more critical literature is complemented by a range of insights into individual and group resistance to culture change. Whilst the populist culture magicians painted resistance as futile and illogical (for instance Peters and Waterman, 1982), Burack (1991) claims that resistance to culture change is rational since change entails the destabilisation of relationships and the altering of work behaviour patterns. Consequently, many contemporary writers suggest that resistance to culture change is a logical and understandable defence mechanism. Thus, culture change programmes which emphasise participative decision-making are often forwarded as potential solutions to employee resistance (see for example Hassard and Sharifi, 1989; Giles, 1990). Similarly, practitioner oriented texts are dominated by apparently ever-increasing lists of individual, group and organizational sources of resistance to culture change which the organization must acknowledge and counter (a good example being the text of Brown, 1995). However, once again, such prescriptive optimistic views have recently been somewhat eroded by more critical research (see Harris and Ogbonna, 1998b; Feldman, 1999). This research suggests that even where extensive participation occurs and detailed steps are taken to overcome sources of resistance, employee reactions to culture change efforts depend more on subcultural strength and personal willingness to change (see Harris and Ogbonna, 1998b). Thus, although apparent total compliance may occur, circumstances may lead to active and vociferous resistance to change. Such is the strength of these and other findings when matched with conceptual concerns, that some culture theorists now question the ethics of culture management techniques (Sinclair, 1993; Woodall, 1996; Legge, 1998).

Whatever the ethics of culture management, extant theory appears based largely on results derived from the study of a narrow sample of contexts. Organizational culture management has been explored in a range of industrial sectors. Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1988) and Harris and Ogbonna (1998a,b) both study retail companies, Deal and Kennedy (1982) refer to a public corporation (called 'MSDW') while Schein (1992), Siehl (1985) and Silvester et al. (1999) examine culture change in manufacturers. Overall, these studies constitute a fair spread of sector types. However, the same is not true of national representation. Inexplicably, almost without exception, empirical research into organizational culture management is dominated by studies of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The studies

of Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990), Ogbonna and Harris (1998), Ogbonna and Whipp (1999) and Silvester et al. (1999) focus on UK firms whilst the research of Siehl (1985), Deal and Kennedy (1982), Lorsch (1986), Burack (1991), Schein (1992) and Sims (2000) all examine US organizations. Whilst some studies of culture and strategy include broader cross-national comparison (for example Everett et al., 1982; Hofstede, 1991), the issue of culture management is often totally ignored. The gap in existing knowledge is such that a number of recent studies have noted that more research into culture management in diverse contexts is required (see for example Ogbonna and Harris, 1998).

4. Research methods

The objective of this study is to provide insights into management attempts to manage organizational culture in a context previously ignored by extant studies. To investigate these issues and supply the desired insights, this aim requires a descriptive research design (Churchill, 1999) that provides for the detailed examination and outline of culture management within this context. A useful and appropriate way of approaching such research is the case study method which Yin (1994, p. 13) defines as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. In the current study, the use of the case study approach was deemed appropriate since a holistic picture is required (Gummesson, 1991), a deep contextual sense of the issues is advantageous (Geertz, 1973; Miles, 1979) and because theory development is considered (Van Maanen, 1979).

Whilst some debate has occurred regarding the optimum number of cases for case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; cf. Dyer and Wilkins, 1991), in the current study, the recommendations of Dyer and Wilkins (1991) are accepted as a single case study approach is pursued. To this end, a medium sized Greek food retailing company (‘Islaco’—a pseudonym) was identified as an appropriate subject having recently undertaken a culture change programme. A food retailing organization was selected since retailing is important to all economies being both a large employer of workers and a significant proportion of GDP (see McGoldrick, 1990; Cox and Brittain, 1996). Further, a number of existing studies both in the UK and the USA have researched culture change in food retailing companies (for example, Schein, 1985; Harris and Ogbonna, 1998b). Such studies all recommend that further research is required in the area and provide an interesting point of comparison and contrast. A Greek organization was pursued since this national context is sufficiently different to the UK and USA to provide an

interesting contrast but also economically developed and a member of the European Union enabling the discussion of pertinent similarities.

The study of Islaco’s culture change programme required the retrospective analysis of organizational activity. Miller et al. (1997, p. 201) note that such an approach is far from unusual as “a great deal of strategic management and organizational theory research has been and continues to be based on retrospective reports”. Indeed, retrospective accounts have been employed in the study of firm strategy (Boeker, 1989; Feeser and Willard, 1990), decision-making (Mintzberg et al., 1976; Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, 1988) and organizational and strategic change (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1990; Hubber and Glick, 1993). Nevertheless, in recognition of the concerns of Golden (1992) the tactical suggestions of Huber and Power (1985) and Miller et al. (1997) were employed to improve the reliability and validity of retrospective analysis.

The examination of the Islaco case principally employed interview-based methods of data collection, although some non-participative observation also occurred and access was granted to records of the culture change process. The interview used a combination of open- and closed-ended questions in what is often called a ‘focused interview’ (Bailey, 1994). In such interviews, topics are selected in advance, but the actual questions are not. The people interviewed were known to have been involved in the culture change process. The structure of this process was provisionally analysed, and on this basis an interview guide was developed. A total of 35 interviews were undertaken. These included five interviews with the directors of the company, an interview with the single General Director (in effect the Chief Executive Officer), 12 discussions with store managers and 17 interviews with shopfloor workers. The length of the interviews was up to 1.5 h, although the average interview was approximately 1 h. The interviews were conducted mainly in Greek (as the favoured language of the informants), although twice English was used as two of the directors preferred to be interviewed in that language.

Merton et al. (1990) recommend for rigorous data analysis, interviews should be recorded, transcribed and examined jointly with interview notes. Consequently, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The subsequent transcriptions were translated into English by a trained interpreter whose interpretations were independently checked. Data analysis employed Turner’s (1981) iterative approach to qualitative data analysis which relies on interview transcriptions to generate illustrative narratives of the case. Consequently, the illustrative quotations used in the current study are not in their original form (Greek) but are careful translations of the interview conversation.

5. Findings

The analysis of case study findings led to a number of interesting insights into the rationale, nature, process and impact of Islaco's culture change programme. Whilst a number of interesting findings emerged, four main issues are of particular interest: (1) the context of the change, (2) the espoused and perceived rationale for culture management, (3) the nature and process of the change programme and (4) the perceived impact of these changes on the organisation and its members. These are discussed in turn below.

5.1. *The history and business environment of Islaco*

To contextualise the case company and their change initiative, it is worthwhile providing a brief historical overview and a general introduction to the Greek food retailing industry.

Currently, the Greek economy is generally performing better than it has been for many years (Bank of Greece, 1999; Anonymous, 2000a). Stable monetary conditions have been created for the first time in decades, resulting in a reduction of inflation aided by the relative stability of the exchange rate between the Greek drachma and the other main European currencies. All these factors have created an economic macro-environment, which satisfies the criteria for the entrance of Greece into the European Monetary Union on one hand, and improves the Greek standard of living and disposal income on the other hand.

Within this economy, the Greek supermarket sector is performing above average. The food retailing sector of Greece is crowded by a large number of small and medium-sized companies, which like Islaco (the case company), tend to focus on particular regions. There are also two large chain operators, which have a nationwide store network. Currently, the sector is undergoing a difficult period characterised by a drive for economies of scale, saturation of local markets and a trend toward business concentration (somewhat akin to the UK market in the 1980s—Harris and Ogbonna, 2001). Such market conditions are complicated by a recent increase in the entry of big foreign-based supermarket chains (Anonymous, 1999, 2000b). These environmental conditions appear to be driving an escalation of competition within the sector.

The case company was founded in 1965. A successful product offering matched with a price-oriented strategy led to rapid growth to the extent that in 1999 the company operated out of 17 outlets. Currently, the company has a simple organization structure. The four founding partners act as Directors and own equal shares in the company. They employ a General Director with duties akin to a Chief Executive Officer. Supported by a small Central Office and stores, Islaco runs 17 outlets

each headed by a General Store Manager. The company employs nearly 500 full-time staff, a number which increases considerably during the summer period when sales reach a maximum level. Annual sales are currently more than 20 billion drachmas (or ten million pounds sterling) whilst the company has captured just over a quarter of the regional market.

5.2. *The perceived and espoused rationale for change*

In 1998, Islaco launched a culture change programme which was known throughout the company as the 'NewTech Change Initiative' or 'NewTech'. The process and nature of the designed change initiative is discussed later. However, prior to this review it is worthwhile examining the hierarchical differences that emerged in organizational members' interpretations of the rationale for change.

Top management argued that the initiation of a cultural change programme was driven by a recognition that the new foreign entrants to the Greek food retailing industry were sufficiently different from traditional competitors to require immediate competitive reaction. This recognition was accepted to have caused widespread uncertainty throughout the sector triggering a belief that change was needed. The focus of such change on organizational culture appears to have been influenced by knowledge of the apparent success of other culture management efforts in the UK and US. A manager claims:

I read an article about the culture change strategies that supermarkets in UK have adopted. Of course, I am not saying that everything is copied exactly the way it is done in other countries but, yeah, that's where we got the idea! (Head Office Manager, aged 50, 22 years service.)

The focus on culture management appears to have been accentuated by the purposeful employment of young UK trained managers who are viewed as both knowledgeable of current UK retailing practice and thus valuable sources of modern information. These new employees seem to have introduced fresh ideas into the company and have vigorously extolled the virtues of culture management—something the older Greek managers considered a novel source of potential competitive advantage (see Barney, 1986). A Head Office Manager refers to the recent employment of a UK trained MBA graduate:

New ideas need to come into the organization. This is the main reason for the attention we pay to the recruitment and selection of young and talented employees. Young employees can think outside the 'box'. (Head Office Manager, aged 49, 22 years service.)

Thus, the study of Islaco indicates that the perceived value of culture management programmes may be dispersing throughout the global economy, driven by the publicity of apparent successes in some contexts.

Whatever the trigger behind the perceived need for cultural change, the official company justification, expressed by head office managers, was that in such a dynamic environment, fundamental changes needed to be implemented. A Director argues:

There are three drivers of the changes that occurred in Islaco: (1) the survival and development of the company, (2) the adaptation to the new retail environment and (3) the closing of the gap between us and the new foreign competitors. (Director, aged 45, 12 years service.)

This top management justification is also consistent with the reasons espoused in Deal and Kennedy (1982) and similar to the Head Office claims of the UK case analysed in Ogbonna and Harris (1998).

This Head Office justification is partly mirrored in the views of 60 percent of the store managers interviewed, who also espouse the official company justification and appear to adopt an integration perspective of culture (Martin, 1992). This finding contrasts with the results of Harris and Ogbonna (1998a) who contend that whilst top management favour integrative perspectives, store managers hold a differentiated view of organizational culture. This contrasting finding may be interpreted in three ways. First, it may be that Greek food retailing store managers operate in smaller organizations with flatter hierarchies and thus develop perspectives more closely aligned with top management. Secondly, given that this study is retrospective, the integrative opinions expressed could reflect the success of top management in persuading managers. Finally, the espousal of such views may reflect what Ogbonna and Harris (1998) label 'instrumental value compliance', in that managers are advocating such views for career reasons.

Interestingly, the remaining store managers interviewed hold radically different views regarding the rationale for the NewTech change initiative. These managers are very suspicious of one of the changes, which involved the employment of more people for the position of the store manager (basically a night-time and a day-time store manager). A long serving store manager claims:

I suspect that people at the highest level of the hierarchy want to feel powerful again. Of course they have not lost their power, but they see that store managers have started taking responsibilities, and they do not like this. By employing more store managers they want to take some of the power we have got and distribute it to a larger number of people. (Store Manager, aged 32, 8 years service.)

This illustrative interpretation, more clearly reflects a differentiated view of culture, wherein the change programme is viewed as a polarised medium of domination (Willmott, 1993).

Similarly to store managers, 50 percent of shopfloor workers interviewed appeared to hold views which reflected the Head Office espoused justification for change. A shopfloor worker argues:

I perfectly understand that improving the performance of Islaco was the reasoning behind the NewTech change...I don't think that top management want to harm anyone—its more about getting our service standards right. (Shopfloor Worker, aged 33, 7 years service.)

Again, this is inconsistent with work of Harris and Ogbonna (1998a) who found that shopfloor workers tend to adopt fragmented views of culture which leads to different interpretations regarding the rationale for change. The predominance of an integrative perspective may again signal retrospective compliance to the change programme. However, some support was found for Harris and Ogbonna (1998a) in that the remaining half of the shopfloor workers did hold fragmented views of the rationale for change which were limited by their hierarchical position. These shopfloor workers view the NewTech change as a way of reducing costs and exploiting workers. A shopfloor worker explains:

One of the changes involves the recruitment of more workers. This means that the existing staff has to work for fewer hours every day than before. This results in lower wages for us. I think that top management wants to get rid of some of the staff. Using cost reduction as an excuse they go on with this change. To me, this is just a cheap excuse. (Shopfloor worker, aged 28, 4 years service.)

In summary, the views of Islaco organizational members vary regarding the rationale for the change programme. Whilst many appear to agree with the espoused performance rationale advocated by top managers, evidence also emerges of more differentiated and fragmented perspectives at the lower levels of the hierarchy.

5.3. The nature and content of 'NewTech' change programme

The NewTech change initiative entailed a rolling twelve-month programme designed to change not only the operations of the company but also the underlying philosophy of organizational members. In this regard, it appears that the top management of Islaco supported the development of change focused on enforcing customer sovereignty and increasing levels of customer

orientation (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; du Gay, 1996; Narver et al., 1998).

Despite involving significant capital and time expenditure, the process of change at Islaco is freely admitted not to have been extensively pre-planned. At the end of 1997 the owners of the company decided what they felt needed to be done and implemented the change over the following year, as quickly as possible (often without consideration of possible unintended consequences). The change programme did not have any phases as such, although six months into the initiative an increased emphasis was placed on changing store-level employee beliefs and behaviours. Early systems and structural changes were rushed through as smoothly as was possible. The initial changes tended to focus on artefact changes whilst later changes were centred on store procedures and improving store-level customer-orientation. Reflecting a strong internal cultural focus, the four owners of the company strongly believed that the culture change was needed but that Islaco should rely on internal personnel and expertise rather than external agents. Although some changes were copied from other organizations, top managers have always had the belief that no external help was necessary for their implementation. Instead, top management argued that the large-scale physical changes could be handled by Head Office personnel whilst store managers would be able to influence the behaviours and beliefs of shopfloor staff. A Head Office Manager claims:

We thought that by using store managers' influence on shopfloor workers, we would have been able to change opinions and attitudes. (Head Office Manager, aged 50, 22 years service.)

As stated earlier, the Head Office initiators, designers and implementers of the NewTech culture change programme typically held an integrative perspective of organizational culture (Martin, 1992). Consistent with this view, such managers regarded compliance as rational and conflict or resistance to change as irrational and undesirable. A Senior Head Office Manager argues:

The changes that occur in Islaco are a result of the decisions taken by the Head Office Managers. Whoever questions them does not promote the common company interest. (Senior Head Office Manager, aged 49, 22 years service.)

A consequence of this position is that in some cases illogical or ill-conceived changes were imposed on store managers who (for the good of their careers) knew that resistance was futile. A manager claims:

Some of the changes that happened were just dumped on me by the Head Office Managers. What I am supposed to do? All I can do is try to get the co-

operation of the shopfloor! (Store Manager, aged 36, 9 years service.)

In Islaco, Head Office Managers appear to have a romanticised view of store managers as opinion leaders, who are able easily to influence the attitudes and behaviours of others (somewhat aligned with the arguments of Hassard and Sharifi, 1989).

Possibly the most pervasive physical change of NewTech was the introduction of new technology onto the shopfloor. The company introduced new checkout computer systems, revolutionised stock control and brought in a variety of new technology improvements. A Director notes:

The introduction of advanced technology, in my opinion, is the most important change that has occurred in Islaco. Thanks to the new technology, we have had the chance to improve other areas in the supermarkets. Anyway, the importance of the new technology is reflected in the name of our change programme, 'NewTech.' (Director, aged 45, 12 years service.)

Aided by such systems and driven by increasing customer expectations, top management also broadened the product range and offering of the stores. Such an increased range entailed new contracts with suppliers, and the expansion of importing of low-cost products (largely from Italy). To service the broadened range, new departments were opened in each store (such as bakeries and butcher services). New customer service regimes were enforced, particularly emphasizing service standards. Such changes entailed alterations to many of the stores' layout and design. Previously unused space was exploited and car-parking provisions expanded in ten of the stores. To promote such changes to its customers, Islaco up-dated its logo and launched an advertising campaign playing on regional loyalty.

The extent of these changes was such that the organization required some restructuring and additional senior management. Principally this involved the creation of a position of a 'General Director' and the establishment of a small finance department. Shortly after the changes were announced, three store managers resigned—this is discussed later in the paper. To support changes to store operations, internal procedures and processes were also revamped and in particular, procedures for recruitment, selection and training of employees.

In a recognition that such physical changes were 'uncomfortable' and to 'change' the attitudes of store workers, efforts are also made to persuade shopfloor workers that change was necessary and conformance was non-debatable. A Manager claims:

Since we noticed that resistance to change was greater than expected, and that possible expression of this

dissatisfaction, for example in the form of strikes, could cause serious problems to the organization, we decided to organise regular seminars to let the workers know about everything concerning the change programme. By allowing them to ask questions and express possible problems, we managed to gain their conformance, which has been our objective from the beginning of this process. (Head Office Manager, aged 50, 22 years service.)

Multiple store-level meetings were held and expected customer-oriented attitudes and behaviours identified and promoted. Store managers were charged with ensuring that displays of such attitudes and behaviours were rewarded both financially and otherwise. During celebrations like Christmas or Easter, top management organised company-wide social events for the shopfloor workers and their families. Moreover, competitions rewarding excellent customer service were organised and widely promoted.

Overall, the change programme of Islaco included a range of changes of company structures, systems and procedures underpinned by efforts to alter the philosophy and orientation of organizational members. The impacts of this initiative are detailed below.

5.4. Impacts of the culture change programme

The NewTech change programme resulted in different impacts across a range of hierarchical levels. Due to space restrictions, unfortunately, a full discussion of all the impacts of the change is not feasible. Consequently, for reasons of parsimony and clarity, the impacts of the culture change programme will be reviewed in relation to (1) Head Office, (2) store management and (3) shopfloor workers. The remainder of this section is dedicated to the discussion of these changes.

5.4.1. Head office impacts

Analysis of interview data reveal that the NewTech changed was perceived to have impacted on performance outcomes, behavioural stakeholder interaction as well as strengthening some common existing opinions. However, some unintended consequences of these changes also appear to have altered the views of Head Office managers.

In terms of performance outcomes, Head Office staff felt that the NewTech initiative had a direct, positive impact on performance. Whilst it is accepted that subjective interpretations of performance may (sometimes) be misleading (Venkatraman and Ramanujam, 1986), discussions with Head Office personnel found that (without a single exception), personnel believe that the culture change initiative had improved performance relative to immediate competitors. A Head Office Manager argues:

In the initial stages of the change programme, the company incurred some unavoidable costs. But, especially after the first year, after the changes occurred, some positive results became obvious. These were reflected in a rapid improvement in sales and the covering of all the costs incurred during the first year. We estimate that by the end of the next year, our sales will have increased by a good twenty percent. (Head Office Manager, aged 50, 22 years service.)

Indeed, all of the top managers interviewed, identified financial improvements including profitability, growth and market share. These findings may indicate some support for earlier theories and studies which find links between culture and performance (Denison, 1990 cf. Siehl and Martin, 1990; Hopfl et al., 1992).

Head Office personnel also argued that the change process had altered the nature of their interaction with other stakeholders. In terms of external agents, the nature of technological change was such that the personnel felt that suppliers and distributors interacted more favourably with Islaco. A Head Office Manager claims:

I am very, very happy with the new relationships we are forming with suppliers. It's all down to the fact that processes, like stock control, can be carried out more efficiently now. Suppliers certainly like it.... (Head Office Manager, aged 53, 25 years service.)

Whilst elements of this perceived change are clearly linked to the changes to the systems and structures of the company, informants contended that it was also related to their application of NewTech espoused customer-oriented approaches to interaction with suppliers.

As stated earlier, the extent of change also appeared significantly to have altered the working lives of individuals and influenced some of their work-oriented beliefs and attitudes. For example, the implementation of new technology and the subsequent development of organization-wide systems and procedures appear to have strengthened earlier views favouring standardisation and conformity to legitimate hierarchical authority. A Head Office Manager extols the needs for organization-wide consensus:

NewTech has shown us that everybody in Islaco should have a clear understanding of the mission of the organization, even the shopfloor workers. They should believe that the success of the company is their interest. (Head Office Manager, aged 49, 22 years service.)

This view is consistent with the integration perspective of Martin (1992) and mirrors the findings of Harris and Ogbonna (1998a).

Nevertheless, the NewTech programme also changed views in unintended ways. Whilst managers generally felt that performance improvements had occurred and that such improvements were attributable to a change in philosophy and approach, it was also recognised that the change had resulted in some negative consequences. Notably, a number of high profile resignations at the start of the programme had significantly undermined early progress. However, this process, when matched with a later recognition that more attention to 'people issues' was needed, appears to have altered the mindset of top management. Top managers started the process believing that culture change could be driven by artefact change coupled with store manager surveillance and conformity enforcement. The initial failure to change shopfloor opinions seems to have shaken this assumption:

The truth is that we relied too much on the store managers to do the job for us. But, that was not very effective, as the immediate responses we got, as a result of the change programme, were negative. This is why now seminars are organised, and more information is provided to employees, so that they can really see the reasons behind the change. (Head Office Manager, 53, 25 years service.)

Subsequently, it would appear that top managers recognised the limitations of their approach and became more concerned with vertical consultation and participation in change (as recommended by for example Casey, 1999).

5.4.2. *Store management impacts*

In contrast to Head Office views, Store Managers had a somewhat different interpretation of the impact of these changes. First, whilst store managers were generally pleased with the modernisation aspects of the NewTech change programme, changes to their powers and their role were considered legitimate and understandable but also unwelcome. A Store Manager refers to the creation of a new store-level assistant manager position:

I did not expect such a fundamental, shocking change to occur. This is why I am very surprised. They (top management) probably want to take some of the power we have got. (In an aggrieved tone) Anyway, I will try to behave like nothing has happened. (Store Manager, aged 37, 10 years service.)

Indeed, in contrast to Head Office personnel who viewed standardisation favourably, at the store-level, it was common to find such changes viewed in terms of power reduction and negative consequences. Typically, store managers complained that the changes have resulted in work pattern alterations and an intensification of their labour process, to the extent that unpaid

overtime was now normal and expected. A Store Manager moans:

The first thing I have noticed during the implementation of changes is the sudden increase in workload. I have to spend more time in the store and I often work overtime without even getting paid for it. My wife is complaining that she does not see me enough. (Store Manager, aged 33, 9 years service.)

Thus, it appears that the NewTech change programme had a negative impact on the work-home overlap (see Munton and Forster, 1990).

Nevertheless, despite some personal negative impacts, store managers claimed that the change initiative had generally a positive impact on their approach to customers suggesting that some of the aims of the NewTech change had been accomplished. A Store Manager claims:

I don't believe that relations with customers could be better now. I guess I thought that a slightly more formal relationship with the customers was a bad thing. (Store Manager, aged 30, 5 years experience.)

However, store managers argued that their position as a 'manager' protected them from many of the negative consequences of the implemented customer-oriented changes. A Store Manager claims:

Since NewTech change has taken place, I have often found myself in a position where I had to intervene in order to calm a worker down, because he/she was upset with a particular change or customer. I understand that changes and improvements should occur, but the shopfloor workers are human beings!!! (Store Manager, aged 29, 14 months service.)

The instances of such impacts varied but tended to be either enforced reductions in working hours or requirements of customer-focused emotional labour (Rafaeli, 1989; Hochschild, 1983). These occasions appeared to have deeply affected the managers concerned—many of whom consider their subordinates as close personal friends.

Store managers also claimed that the NewTech change had resulted in a series of apparently unintended consequences. Despite widespread recognition that shopfloor workers had been negatively affected by the NewTech change, store managers were surprised to find that staff turnover fell during the period by over 20 percent. This aided greatly in the control of their operating costs and had a small but noticeable knock on effect on company financial performance. Further investigations found that employees preferred the modernised facilities which were considered prestigious. This led some store managers to conclude that for shopfloor employees the benefits of the change outweighed the costs.

5.4.3. Shopfloor impacts

Overall, consistent with store management, the majority of shopfloor accepted the espoused rationale for change but felt that actual changes were an unwelcome evil. For example, whilst technology made procedures more efficient, the introduction of such technology was perceived to have eroded workers' motivation and satisfaction. Indeed, many workers claimed that their jobs had become mundane and boring. A shopfloor worker notes:

Now I feel that what I am doing can be done by anyone in the world and this doesn't really make me happy... my responsibilities are very limited, since the machines are doing everything for you. Being a cashier has become the most boring job in Islaco. (Shopfloor worker, aged 35, 8 years service.)

Such was the results of such 'deskilling' (Braverman, 1974) that the impact of such artefact changes appears to have countered early attempts at customer service improvement. However, after an extensive period aimed at motivating shopfloor staff and rewarding customer-focused behaviours, praising displays of espoused emotions and acclaiming customer-oriented attitudes some impacts were argued to have occurred. Gradually managers argue that the opinions of *some* shopfloor workers appear to have become *more* aligned with top management expectations (a finding mirroring the Westco study of Ogbonna and Harris, 1998). A shopfloor worker claims:

I understand that managers in Islaco want to make the organization more customer oriented and that the way to achieve this is by making us treat customers in a more friendly way. We have been shown how to do this in seminars. I totally agree with this philosophy. (Shopfloor Worker, aged 26, 4 years service.)

However, significantly more workers exhibit that which Legge (1994) labels 'behavioural compliance':

I have been told to smile at the customers at all times. I do not really want to behave in this way. I cannot see what I can gain from this. But, if this is the way management want me to behave, then I guess I will have to do it. (Shopfloor Worker, aged 27, 5 years service.)

Thus, the optimistic aims of the culture change have been far from universally met. Indeed, whilst some examples of seemingly genuine compliance were uncovered and grudgingly acceptance is common, some shopfloor workers continue (privately) to express their disdain for the rationale and process of the NewTech change:

I am sure top management understand that changes cannot be copied so simply. It is not only the nature

of the changes, but, mainly, the people who determine their effectiveness. I mean, I cannot have the same attitude with a Tesco worker. We're so different in many ways. (Shopfloor Worker, aged 24, 4 years service.)

Overall, the study of Islaco reveals an interesting attempt to manage culture. Apparently driven by the 'successful' example of other foreign (UK and US) retailers, Islaco launched the NewTech change programme. The rationale for this change differs between hierarchical levels as do interpretations of the impacts of the change. Systems, structure and strategies have changed. Some evidence of behavioural changes was found and some indications that opinions and mindset have been altered. This could suggest that 'culture' change has occurred (albeit somewhat chaotically). The remainder of this paper is dedicated to the discussion of the implications of these findings.

6. Conclusions and implications

The case study of Islaco leads to a number of interesting conclusions and implications. In particular, five main implications appear especially worthy of discussion.

First, the central contribution of this study encompasses the findings regarding culture change and management. The management of the company believes that they *managed* the culture (albeit with some 'side effects'—discussed later). A more objective view clearly shows that such change occurred but that labelling such change as culture management is misleading. Artefact change certainly occurred with significant and wide-ranging alterations to the systems, structures, strategies and technologies of the organization. Further some evidence emerged of behavioural change with (in particular) Store Managers and shopfloor workers claiming that artefact changes and seminars on customer service had altered their working behaviours (although behavioural compliance was evident—see Legge, 1994). At a deeper level, organizational members also indicated that some opinions, attitudes and beliefs had been influenced by the change—for example, the strengthening of Head Office opinion in favour of increased standardisation. However, an important difference is evident between artefact change and alterations to deeper-rooted attitudes. Changes to artefacts (and some behaviours) were *managed*, controlled and enforced by executive action. In contrast, beliefs were unpredictably merely *changed* by events. That is, whilst evidence did emerge of changes to deep-rooted attitudes, such change was undirected, unpredictable, uneven and erratic and thus could not be

directly attributed to be solely caused by the conscious management of culture.

Thus, it is contended that culture change did occur to the shallower levels of the company's culture but that the 'management' of deeper-rooted beliefs did not (a view mirroring the conclusions of Ogbonna and Harris, 1998). This is not to suggest that attitudes did not alter. Clearly, management and workers alike changed their views and attitudes and learned from their experiences. However, such change was merely *influenced* by management action and certainly not *managed* by executive choice. This finding implies that greater care is needed in the study of culture change and management. Whilst the distinctions between culture evolution (see Harrison and Carrol, 1991) and revolution (see Ogbonna and Harris, 1998) are well recognised, the delineation between culture *change* and culture *management* is frequently overlooked (see Brown, 1995; Bate, 1995). Inattention to these distinctions and the incumbent terminology is (at best) dangerously misleading.

A second main implication may be derived from the finding that strong evidence emerged to indicate that trade-specific and general management publicity surrounding culture change programmes is having a pervasive effect. It is accepted that (for good reasons) the current study entails but a single deep case, however within the case it emerged that knowledge of 'successful' culture initiatives was widely disseminated in the Greek management-community, leading to a widespread belief that culture management was a potent source of competitive advantage. Consequently, in the face of increased competition, a broad culture change programme was initiated before other 'options' (such as strategy development, marketing initiatives or cost reduction processes). Interestingly, the Islaco change was initiated as a stand-alone change programme and not as part of a considered, on-going change programme. These findings indicate a somewhat naïve view of, and approach to, culture change driven by incomplete or overly optimistic data regarding the culture change programmes of successful foreign retailers (largely in the UK and US). Nevertheless, the finding of a culture change programme in Greek food retailing supports earlier studies which claim that such programmes will become more common (Harris and Ogbonna, 2001). Clearly, the partial/limited success of the NewTech change indicates the rashness of undertaking change without considering fully the context-specific contingencies. Ironically, the managers of Islaco appear ignorant of this danger whilst it is recognised by shopfloor workers who complain of Americanisms and copying 'Tesco' (see earlier).

A third important implication is related to the above point. Interestingly, whilst views regarding the rationale for the change varied quite considerably, organizational members were generally in agreement that the change

process had resulted in a series of unexpected and/or unintended consequences. Head Office staff were shocked to find that at the start of the NewTech change, three Store Managers were so incensed by the proposed changes that they summarily resigned their positions and left the company. Similarly, management and workers alike recognised that the introduction of new technology had an unexpected impact on shopfloor worker motivation and satisfaction resulting in the need for remedial action. However, not all unexpected consequences of the change were negative. Indeed, evidence was found that employee turnover was reduced due to modernisation effects despite generally lower motivation levels. These findings strongly illustrate that the purposeful intervention into an organizational culture is fraught with difficulties. Not only are an array of unintended consequences possible but also given the dynamic nature of culture (Hatch, 1993), the impacts of such actions are likely to reverberate throughout all facets of culture for many years to come. This implies that the true long-term impacts of a culture intervention can only truly be evaluated years, possibly decades, after such changes have happened. A potentially fruitful avenue for further research could be the evaluation of culture change interventions over long periods of time (although limited budgets and access would undoubtedly make such research difficult).

The fourth series of implications centre on the difference between the perceived impacts of the change. From an owner's perspective, the culture change programme was successful, apparently leading to improved financial performance and indicating support for some form of culture-performance link (Denison, 1990). Similarly, Head Office managers viewed the change as favourably as a range of tangible and intangible efficiencies were improved. However, lower down the hierarchy Store Managers experienced an increased workload, more stress and an unfavourable work-home overlap (see Munton and Forster, 1990) whilst shopfloor workers experienced deskilling, demotivation, reduced job satisfaction and pay reductions due to fewer hours of paid work. The pattern clearly suggests that the change programme has had a proportionally greater and a more negative impact on organizational members at the 'bottom' of the hierarchy. This empirical evidence would seem to support a number of earlier theories which suggest that cultural interventions are often mechanisms of exploitation, emasculating the shopfloor worker (see Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Willmott, 1993). Whether such impacts are attributable to management design or are an artefact of hierarchical position is an issue in need of further research.

Finally, this study leads to a number of implications specifically for practitioners. Whilst the management of the case company believe that culture management has

occurred, the evidence revealed suggests that this view is inaccurate although many shallow artefact changes have occurred as have some alterations to deeper-level attitudes. Managements desiring to change the culture of their company should consider carefully the full implications of such a position. Altering systems, structure and procedures may be comparatively easy but also may lead to innumerable unexpected consequences which have significant and on-going effects. Attention to surveillance and closer management control may influence behaviours but may also lead to resigned behavioural compliance (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1988) undermining the desired change. Attitudinal or value change whilst ultimately desirable may be achievable but certainly not manageable—the complexities of beliefs and behavioural interaction preclude such simple impacts. These conclusions demonstrate that (currently) culture *management* is fantasy but that nevertheless, culture *change* is a fact.

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