

The following are general comments about the structure and content of an academic essay written for university – they are not prescriptive and intended as an educational guide only.

“Culture is a tool used by management to limit resistance”. Consider this statement in relation to how we understand and make sense of power in the post-bureaucratic era.

Due to the shift in socio-economic factors in organisations such as the expansion of the services industry, practices of organisations have also shifted away from the traditional bureaucratic style of management (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). Consequently, different modes of control have been implemented in an attempt to maintain power in the post-bureaucratic era, such as focusing on the values, beliefs and norms within an organisation, in other words, culture (Brewis, 2007). In this essay, I am going to argue that culture is certainly used as a tool by management to maintain control and hence limit resistance. However, this may have both positive and negative implications. According to Kärreman and Alvesson (2004), managers tend to create an excessively strict culture which can be counter-productive to limiting resistance. The positive effects of culture will also be examined by drawing upon Rosen (1988) and Brewis (2007) to examine how culture can bring employees together to form a more collaborative environment as well as to provide a positive sense of identity for employees. In addition, the concern of whether this form of control is considered to be manipulation and therefore unethical is also explored by studying ideas covered by Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003).

Culture is used as a tool to limit resistance in the post-bureaucratic era, focusing on the values, norms and beliefs of organisations. However, if enforced too heavily, it can have adverse effects on the organisation, increasing employees’ resistance (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). Kärreman and Alvesson (2004) explore this notion and discover that in many cases, employees feel trapped by the intense focus placed on culture within their organisation. In order to maintain a certain level of personal identity, employees may become internally hostile; their loyalty to the organisation becoming only an act (Brewis, 2007). Interviews of employees from “Big”, presented by Kärreman and Alvesson (2004), shed light on the pressure of prejudice that can also arise from an excessively strict culture. The prejudice shown towards fellow employees who conform to the organisational culture can go so far as employees receiving insults such as “traitor” or “brownnose” (Brewis, 2007). Both articles demonstrate this behaviour stemmed from employees with strong personal identity and individuality. Although these employees may enjoy the work they do, for instance the employees interviewed at High Technologies Corporation (Tech), they also “routinely distance themselves from organisational ideology, describing it as ‘the bullshit that comes

Commented [u1]: The first sentence introduces the broader topic of post-bureaucratic management styles.

Commented [u2]: A definition of ‘culture’ in this context. It is often necessary to define key terms in order to limit the meaning to the context. The next sentence, which is also the thesis, introduces the specific topic of culture used in management.

Commented [A3]: The thesis tells us the purpose of this essay, i.e. to argue a position. Note that much of the task question is included in the thesis statement.

Commented [A4]: The rest of the introduction provides an outline of what to expect in the essay – in this case, which theorists will be drawn upon to support the writer’s arguments and position.

Commented [A5]: Once again, a definition of culture and a broad explanation of its use.

Commented [A6]: This is the topic sentence. It is a claim, i.e. the writer’s position on the topic. It controls the development of the paragraph.

Commented [A7]: This part of the paragraph – the supporting sentences from sentences 3 to 8 inclusive, explains the writer’s position. It elaborates on this position and uses evidence to support the position.

from above” (Brewis, 2007, p. 367). It is clear that an environment that combines strict culture as well as employees who already maintain strong identities of their own, can cause rebellious attitudes to arise, whether it is displayed internally through hostility or externally through prejudice and discrimination to those who choose to conform. Therefore, culture is indeed used as a tool to limit resistance; however, when employees already have a strong sense of individuality, it is much more difficult for an organisation to maintain power in the post-bureaucratic era.

Culture is indeed used as a tool to limit resistance in the post-bureaucratic era. However, it proves to be more easily accomplished in environments where employees are seeking a source of identity (Brewis, 2007). Culture is constructively used as a tool to bring employees together, building a sense of “collective community” (Brewis, 2007), therefore increase employees’ commitment to the job and so, limit resistance. The Christmas party, “a great choreographed event, a collective gesture”, described by Rosen (1988, p. 470), effectively manipulates organisational culture in order to build a sense of belonging amongst the employees. This is evident from Rosen’s observation that “one can have friends here, bonds can exist” (Rosen, 1988, p. 470), demonstrating that the party was effective in building a sense of security and comfort for employees of belonging to the organisation. By developing culture in an organisation, the ways in which people act and think can also be integrated and shaped to be more consistent, allowing for less conflict to occur (Brewis, 2007). Culture is certainly used as a tool to limit resistance by providing a strong sense of identity and collectiveness. By shaping culture in this manner, managers are enabled to shape a sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation in order to limit employees’ resistance as there is less chance of conflict.

However, shaping culture within an organisation in this manner has also been referred to as “cultural engineering” (Brewis, 2007, p. 348), which raises the question as to whether culture used as a tool to limit resistance is actually manipulation, and therefore, unethical. Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003, p. 1171) raise the concern that employees may be shaped into “corporate actors” Also, that cultural change can be used as an excuse to enforce structural changes, which threatens the jobs of employees “as a deliberate attempt to eliminate” (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 1169) those who do not fit the “culture” (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). This issue arises from the notion that post-bureaucratic management styles rely much more on flexibility and professional judgement (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004) as

Commented [u8]: When a direct quotation is used, ensure that it is well integrated into the sentence, and all the reference details are provided, including the page/paragraph number.

Commented [u9]: This is the writer’s own voice. He or she has reflected upon the evidence and drawn a conclusion.

Commented [A10]: The final sentence links the argument in this paragraph back to the question and the position that the writer holds.

Commented [A11]: The writer restates the question/topic and makes his/her position clear.

Commented [A12]: This is the topic sentence. Again, it is a claim and it states the writer’s position. This shows critical thinking as the writer is adding a qualification: the writer will support this position in this paragraph.

Commented [A13]: The supporting sentences (from sentences 3 to 6) elaborate on the claim, give more information and use academic sources to evidence or support his/her claim.

Commented [A14]: This sentence summarises the paragraph.

Commented [A15]: The final sentence links the argument in this paragraph back to the question and the position that the writer holds.

Commented [A16]: The third paragraph, and third topic sentence, moves the essay on to the second part of the question. The writer established his/her position.

opposed to bureaucracy which is limited and more standardised. The flexibility allows for abuse of power and so, results in “threats to the livelihood of managers who fail to conform” (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 1174), such as job security and career progression. Therefore, although culture can be presented in a positive light, if manipulated to engineer structural changes to organisations under the excuse of building culture, it may also be considered to be unethical as it is being dishonest and providing a false promise (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). Culture is certainly being used as a tool to limit resistance; however, the ethical implications that can arise from abusing the flexibility of post-bureaucratic power are also an issue to be considered.

Commented [A17]: Sentence 5 establishes the context for the view put forward by comparing bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic management styles.

Shifts in organisational management from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic management has allowed for a greater focus on the values, beliefs and norms of an organisation, in other words, culture (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004). By examining the different aspects of culture in the post-bureaucratic era, it is evident that culture can certainly be used as a tool in order to limit resistance. However, it also raises concerns such as the prejudice and rebelliousness that can result from employees with strong personal identities refusing to conform to a new culture (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004), as well as the ethical issues which arise from the flexibility in the post-bureaucratic style of management which heavily relies on professional judgement (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). By introducing more flexibility and reliance on professional judgement, the best way to shape culture to limit resistance may not always be clear and may also provide the opportunity for management to abuse such power (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). Although there are concerns regarding culture being used as a tool to limit resistance, it is also capable of effectively limiting resistance by bringing employees closer together and building a more stable and consistent organisation, while also providing a sense of identity and comfort to employees as demonstrated by both Brewis (2007) and Rosen (1988).

Commented [A18]: The writer links their final sentence back to the statement in the question. The writer's final sentence also reflects the balanced opinion in the paragraph.

Commented [A19]: The opening line of the conclusion restates the context analysing 'cultures' in organisations.

Commented [A20]: This sentence restated the writer's position with reference to the quote.

Commented [A21]: The next two sentences summarise the main ideas and arguments put forward in the essay.

Commented [A22]: The final statement addresses an implication and in doing so, provides a 'balanced' final statement.

Reference list

Brewis, J. (2007). Culture. In D. Knights & H. Willmott (Eds.), *Introducing organizational behaviour and management* (pp. 344-374). Thomson Learning.

Kärreman, D., & Alvesson, M. (2004). Cages in tandem: Management control, social identity, and identification in a knowledge-intensive firm. *Organization*, 11(1), 149-175.

Ogbonna, E., & Wilkinson, B. (2003). The false promise of organizational culture change: A case study of middle managers in grocery retailing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(5), 1151-1178.

Rosen, M. (1988). You asked for it: Christmas at the bosses' expense. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(5), 463-480.

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Commented [u24]: This is how you reference a chapter in an edited book.

Commented [u25]: This, and the rest of the reference entries, is how you reference a journal article.



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