Different Methods
For Describing Organisational Culture (1)

Liaqat Ali

ABSTRACT

There is a need to know organisational culture so that the management can change it if the culture is not according to the present or future needs of the organisation. Different methods are available for describing the organisational culture. One method (Cultural Web) is described and analysed here in the article to see its suitability for describing organisational culture and some other methods are described in second article on the topic (Different Methods for Describing Organisational Culture (2) by the author).

Keywords: Organisational culture, Approaches,

Classification, Paradigm, values, beliefs and assumptions.

1.0   Introduction

Organisational culture plays an important role in the success of an organisation (see Ali, 2000). There is a need to investigate the organisational culture so that it can be altered if it is not according to the present or future needs of the organisation. There appear to be two main ways of describing organisational culture in the current literature.

Some authors (such as, Handy, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Quinn and McGrath, 1985; Sethia and Von Glinow, 1985; Scholz, 1987; Wiener 1988; and Hofstede, 1991) attempt to describe organisational culture by classifying the organisational culture in one or more ways. The various approaches available to describe organisational culture are detailed in the second article on the topic. Some researchers describe organisational culture in relation to factors that are recognised as influences on culture. Drennan is one such researcher that describes organisational culture on the basis of influencing factors (Drennan, 1992). The factors that influence organisational culture are also described in second article. However, Johnson and Scholes (1999) have stated a third way of describing the organisational culture, that is, "The Cultural Web". The cultural Web is described in this article under Section 2.0. Finally, conclusion is given in Section 3.0.

2.0   The Cultural Web

Johnson and Scholes (1999) have stated a third, albeit a less significant way of describing the organisational culture, that is, "The Cultural Web" (see Figure 1). Johnson and Scholes (1999, p.73) state "the culture web is a representation of the taken-for-granted assumptions, or paradigm, of an organisation and the physical manifestation of organisational culture".

- **The Paradigm**

The Cultural Web is based on the premise that there is a core set of values, beliefs and assumptions commonly held throughout the organisation which Johnson and Scholes (1999) refer to as the paradigm. The way the employees of an organisation behave towards each other and outsiders

provides a distinctive organisational competence. The employees take-for-granted about how things happen in the organisation. The paradigm is comprises six elements which are now described.
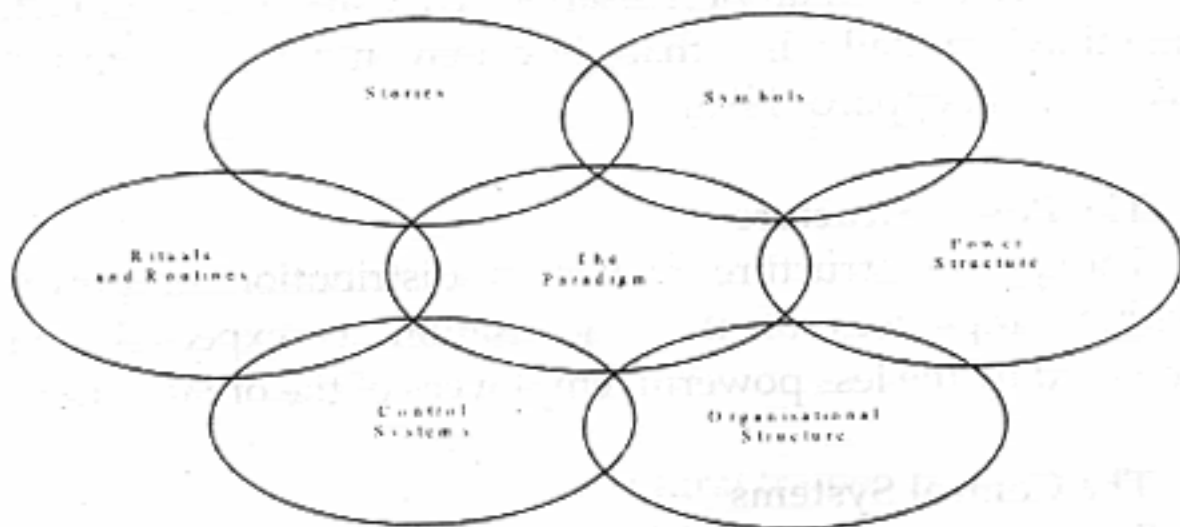

Figure 1 The Cultural Web
Source: Adopted from Johnson and Scholes (1999)

- **The Rituals**

The rituals are the special events through which employees learn what is important in the organisation. The employees learn this from the organisational processes (such as, training programmes, assessment procedures and promotion). It may also include formal and informal meetings and social gathering of employees of the organisation.

- **The Stories**

The stories are about the important events, successes, disasters, heroes, villains and mavericks told by employees to each other. Most of these have evolved over the years and have become part of the organisation's folklore (Ward and Peppard, 1996).

- **The Symbols**

The symbols include logos, office structure, dress code, job titles and the type of language and terminology commonly used in an organisation. They are often so much ingrained in daily life that they may not be recognised (Ward and Peppard, 1996).

- **The Power Structure**

The power structure relates to distribution of power within employees of the organisation as expected and accepted by the less powerful employees of the organisation.

- **The Control Systems**

The pay, measurements and reward systems in an organisation have great impact on quantity or quality of work. These examples of control systems serve to highlight what is valued by the organisation.

- **The Organisational Structure**

The organisational structure reflects power structures and what is important in the organisation. Functions, departments, geographically-based business units, product-based business units, flat management hierarchies, large bureaucratic hierarchies, are all examples of how the structure of an organisation can impact the paradigm (Ward and Peppard, 1996).

Johnson and Scholes (1999) acknowledge that there are a variety of influences on an individual in an organisation. Figure 2 provides a summary of these influences. These influences are described below.
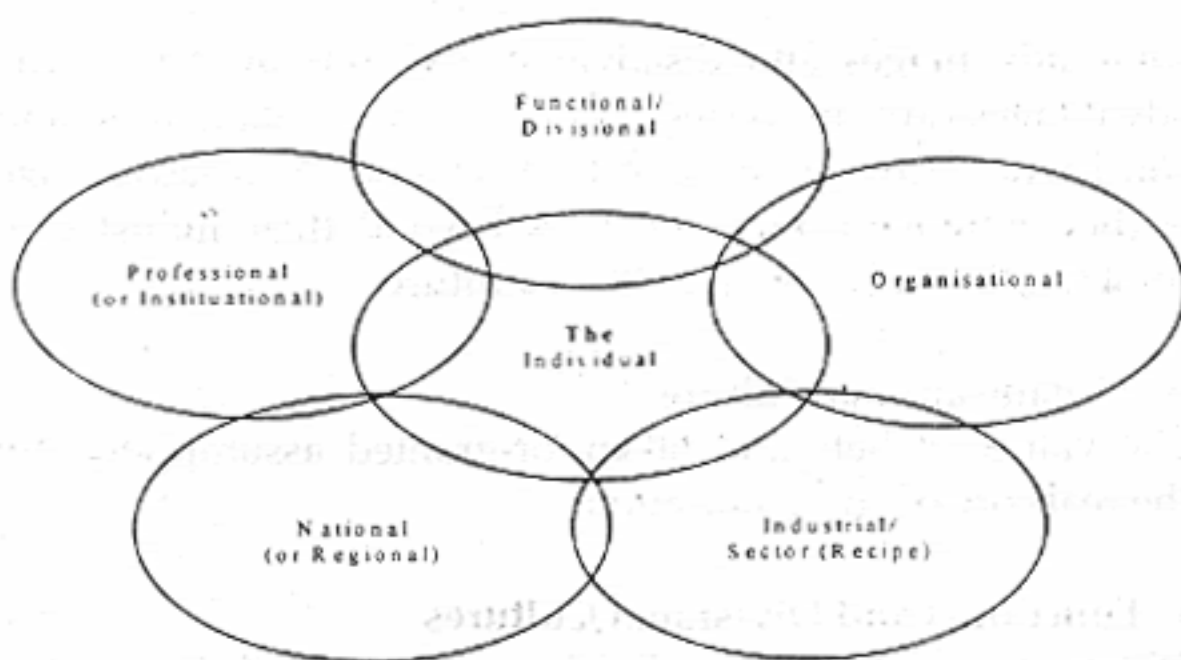
Figure 2 The cultural frames of reference
Source: Adopted from Johnson and Scholes
(1999)

- **National and Regional Cultures**

National and regional cultures have great influence on individuals in an organisation (such as attitude towards work, authority, equality and number of other important factor.

- **Professional and Institutional Cultures**

A professional or institutional group's (such as, a trade union or professional association) values and beliefs have a great influence on individuals in an organisation. There might be key differences in expectations when purposes become specific during discussion about the priorities and resource allocation.

- **Industrial Sector (Recipe).**

An industry recipe is a set of assumptions held in common within an industry about organisational purposes and a shared wisdom on how to manage organisations. There are

some advantages and disadvantage of this influence. The advantages are in terms of maintaining standards and consistency between individual providers. The disadvantage is that employees may not look beyond their industry in thinking through strategies for the future.

- **Organisational Culture**

The values, beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions are the real core of an organisation.

- **Functional and Divisional Cultures**

Different departments or divisions may have different sub-cultures within them. For example, there are likely to be differences between geographically dispersed divisions in a multinational company as well as between functional groups such as finance, marketing and production.

This approach (cultural web) is not considered further for describing the organisational culture due to the following reason.

These five cultural influences are indeed part of thirteen important factors found to influence organisational culture (see second article on the topic, Different Methods for Describing Organisational Culture (2)).

3.0   Conclusion

It is important to know the organisational culture so that it can be changed if it does not suit to the present or future needs of the organisation. There are different methods for describing the organisational culture. One method, Cultural Web is described in the article. The Cultural Web is based on the premise that there is a core set of values, beliefs and assumptions commonly held throughout the organisation.

Johnson and Scholes (1999), the author of the Cultural Web acknowledge that there are a variety of influences on an individual in an organisation. A summary of these influences is described in second article on the topic. Some other methods for describing organisational culture are described in second article on the topic (Different Methods for Describing Organisational Culture (2) by the author).

4.0   References

Ali, L. (2001). Importance of Organisational Culture for the Success of an Organisation: A Literature Review, **Journal of Research (Humanities)**, University of the Punjab, July, Vol. xxxiv, No. 1-2, pp. 3-11.

DEAL AND KENNEDY, (1982). **Corporate Culture:** The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life. London, Penguin Group.

DRENNAN, D. (1992). **Transforming Company Culture.** London, McGraw-Hill.

HANDY, C. (1976). **Understanding Organisations.** London, Penguin.

HOFSTEDE, G. (1980). **Culture's Consequences:** International Differences in Work-Related Values. London, SAGE Publications.

HOFSTEDE, G. (1991). **Cultures and Organisations:** Software of the Mind, Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival. London, McGraw-Hill.
JOHNSON, G. AND SCHOLES, K. (1999). **Exploring Corporate Strategy.** 5th Edition, London, Prentice-Hall.

QUINN, R. E. AND MCGRATH, M. R. (1985). The Transformation of Organisational Culture: A Competing Values Perspective. In: FROST, P. J., MOORE, L. F., LOUIS, M. R., LUNDBERG, C. C. AND MARTIN, J. (editors), **Organisational Culture,** California, SAGE Publications.

SCHOLZ, C. (1987). Corporate Culture and Strategy: The Problem of Strategic Fit. **Long Range Planning,** <u>Vol. 20,</u> No. 4, pp. 78-87.

SETHIA, N. K. AND VON GLINOW, M. A. (1985). Arriving at Four Cultures by Managing the Reward System. In: KILMANN, R. H., SAXTON, M. J. AND SERPA, R. (editors). **Gaining Control of the Corporate Culture,** London, Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp. 400-420.

WARD, J. AND PEPPARD, J. (1996). Reconciling the IT/Business Relationship: a Troubled Marriage in Need of Guidance. **Journal of Strategic Information Systems.** <u>Vol. 5,</u> pp.37-65.

WIENER, Y. (1988). Forms of Value Systems: A Focus on Organisational Effectiveness and Cultural Change and Maintenance. **Academy of Management Review,** <u>Vol. 13,</u> No. 4, pp. 534-545.