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**MEASURING ORGANIZATIONAL
CULTURE**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe a hybrid approach to the issue of measuring organizational culture. The hybrid approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methodology minimizes social desirability biases, while permitting systematic comparisons across individuals, groups, organizations and time periods. This methodology for measuring culture is illustrated, by a study which focuses on the socialization of newcomers.

MEASURING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Caren Siehl and Joanne Martin

Studies of organizational culture have relied almost exclusively on qualitative methods, such as ethnographic observation or in-depth, open-ended interviewing. There are good reasons for these choices. Qualitative methods produce richly detailed data which can be used to generate "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of cultures. Such data allow ambiguities, contradictions, and paradoxes to be explored with relative ease. In addition, many would define culture in terms of a socially constructed reality, and qualitative methods are usually considered epistemologically congruent with this approach (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Some have stated a preference for these methodological choices in even stronger terms, arguing that culture must be, or is best, studied using qualitative methods (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Smircich, 1980). For example, Daft (1980:632) categorizes culture as a topic of the highest order of complexity. He then states that "low variety" methods, such as quantitative approaches, would be inappropriate for the study of such a topic because of the dangers of oversimplification.

The Need for Systematic Comparisons

The advantages of qualitative approaches have been bought at a cost. It is exceedingly difficult to make analytic comparisons on the basis of the data available. There are many centrally

important theoretical questions which cannot be answered until culture can be measured with repeatable, easily administered instruments which permit systematic comparisons.

For example, culture is generally defined in terms of the values and interpretations that organizational members share (e.g., Gamst and Norbeck, 1976; Pettigrew, 1979; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Baker, 1980; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge, 1983). In order to determine the extent to which values and interpretations are shared, the responses of individual organizational members must be compared. In order to learn if an organization has sub-cultures with distinctive values (cf. Gregory, 1983; Louis, 1983; Martin and Siehl, 1983; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984), it must be possible to identify and compare groups that share values. In order to study culture as a dynamic process of learning and change (Schein, 1981), systematic comparisons across time must be possible. In order to test speculations about a relationship between type of culture and levels of productivity or profitability, it would be helpful if entire organizations could be compared. It is difficult to make these types of comparisons systematically, when only qualitative data are available. Without quantitative measures, important blindspots in our knowledge about culture are inevitable.

Given the potential benefits, it is not surprising that a few studies have used quantitative approaches to the study of culture (i.e., Cooke and Rousseau, 1983; Kilmann and Saxton, 1983). These studies have usually relied upon direct questions about employees' values, such as: "Does it help people in your

organization to 'fit in' and meet expectations if they: please those in positions of authority? Work for a sense of accomplishment? Maintain their personal integrity?" Answers to such direct questions are likely to be biased by social desirability concerns. For example, employees may be reluctant to admit departures from their personal values or the values espoused by top management. If employees are given guarantees of anonymity, and if they respond to such questions with reference to generalized others, rather than themselves personally, these social desirability biases can be reduced, but they will not be entirely removed.

This chapter presents a hybrid approach which combines qualitative and quantitative methods for studying organizational cultures. The methodology minimizes social desirability biases, while permitting systematic comparisons across individuals, groups, organizations, and time periods. Before describing the methodology, it is important to specify the aspects of culture that will be measured.

A Conceptual Framework

A few definitions make the task of measuring cultural content more manageable. In accord with previous research, we define culture in terms of shared values and interpretations. It is important to distinguish espoused values from values-in-use, as these may differ (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Espoused values are the values which people say they believe in. Espoused values are communicated directly, for example, in statements about one's philosophy of management. Values-in-use are those which are actually enacted.

Values-in-use surface in two types of cultural manifestations: practices and forms. Practices may be formalized, for example, a training program or a structured performance appraisal procedure. Practices may also be informal, such as unspoken norms about the deference due superiors or the desirability of smoothing conflicts.

Other cultural manifestations, labeled "forms" in this chapter, reflect values-in-use more indirectly. Cultural forms include jargon or special language (e.g., Edelman, 1977; Pondy, 1978; Hirsch, 1980); humor (Bolan and Hoffman, 1983), organizational stories (e.g., Clark, 1970; Wilkins, 1978; Martin, 1982); and ceremonies and rituals (e.g., Gephart, 1978; Moch and Huff, 1981; Smircich, 1983). Forms may be embedded in practices and one form may be embedded in another. For example, a training program may include award ceremonies where organizational stories are told.

Until recently, organizational members and researchers have focused most of their attention on formal and, to a lesser extent, informal practices. In contrast, organizational culture research has drawn attention to what can be learned from cultural forms. Although employees are often reluctant to admit it, practices are often implemented in a manner which differs from formal rules and procedures. Cultural forms are less subject than practices to managerial control and therefore are less susceptible to social desirability biases. For these reasons, cultural forms, in contrast to practices, offer a clearer reflection of what values are in-use and whether employees are

committed to them. For example, a shared organizational story about a "fast track," frequently promoted employee may give more accurate information about a company's values-in-use than could be obtained from any descriptions of official promotion criteria. For this reason, in the study described below particular emphasis was placed on values-in-use, as they were reflected in cultural forms such as stories and jargon.

A Hybrid Measure of Culture

The present study uses these conceptual distinctions in a two-stage approach to measuring organizational culture. The first of these stages uses qualitative methodology to gain an understanding of the content of a culture or a sub-culture. Ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews, and archival data are used to determine espoused values and values-in-use, particularly as the latter are reflected in cultural forms. These qualitative data are then used to construct a questionnaire, responses to which can be coded quantitatively. In the second stage, the questionnaire is administered to any set of present or potential organizational members, to measure quantitatively their levels of cultural awareness and commitment. If the questionnaire is administered for comparison purposes at two or more points in time, qualitative data collection can be continued during this second stage.

This hybrid methodology retains some of the richness characteristic of exclusively qualitative approaches. The questionnaire focuses on the specific values, practices, and forms which have evolved in the particular organizational setting. However, the questionnaire items are structured to

permit statistical analyses, producing data useful for comparisons within and across organizations at various points in time. Because the items measuring awareness and commitment are indirect and subtle, and because anonymity of questionnaire responses can be guaranteed, social desirability biases are minimized. This methodology for studying culture is illustrated below, in a study which focuses on the socialization of newcomers.

Socialization: Opening the Black Box

The process of socialization often appears to be as mysterious as a black box. New employees enter the organization and, some indeterminate time later, emerge as socialized organizational members. Part of what is in the black box of socialization is an enculturation process, whereby newcomers become aware of and, to some extent, committed to the shared interpretations and values of "old guard" organizational members (e.g., Louis, 1980; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

Some critical questions about this enculturation process are currently unanswered. When do newcomers become aware that particular values and interpretations are shared? At what point, if ever, is that awareness transformed into commitment? Can important parts of this enculturation process be completed within a few months on the job? Are some manifestations of culture predictably learned first? Are others absorbed later, perhaps because they are more difficult to communicate or less essential for survival on the job? Answers to these questions would help demystify the enculturation process.

The hybrid methodology is particularly well suited to address these issues. The first stage of the methodology can be used to gain a preliminary understanding of the culture, especially as it is perceived by longer term employees.(1) The second stage then can be used to determine the extent to which newcomers share these cultural perspectives. This second stage of the process can include the collection of comparative data. If a company has a training program for newcomers, trained and untrained employees can be compared to determine if the training facilitates enculturation. Comparisons can also be made across time, perhaps soon after an employee starts work and again a few months later, in order to address questions about the sequence in which cultural information is learned.

A Building Block Conceptualization of the Enculturation Process

Even after a very short time on the job, new employees should be aware of and, to some extent, committed to espoused values. This kind of cultural knowledge is likely to be absorbed during the hiring process, assuming that the new employees have some choice in the selection of the company and a minimal level of interest in learning about it. In addition, job applicants who espouse the same values as current employees may be more likely to be hired.

Familiarity with values-in-use should develop more slowly than knowledge of espoused values, in part because values-in-use must be inferred indirectly from cultural forms and practices. In addition, the various cultural forms may usually be learned in a predictable sequence.

The information carried in some cultural forms is essential for a new employee's survival. For example, if new employees do not understand company jargon, they will find it difficult to learn the technical requirements of their jobs and they will have problems deciphering the meaning of other cultural forms, such as stories or rituals. Thus, learning jargon is a fundamental building block, essential for comprehending the rest of organizational life. For these reasons, new employees should be familiar with much of a company's jargon soon after starting work and should master most of that jargon relatively quickly.

Having become fairly proficient with jargon, new employees can then use this knowledge to interpret other cultural forms. For example, when new employees start work they probably will be unfamiliar with most organizational stories, but after a relatively short while they should be aware of the stories that figure centrally in the organization's culture.

Organizational stories are ambiguous stimuli. It is difficult to infer values-in-use from a story. Many alternative interpretations are logically plausible. When new employees start work, they should be unable to interpret the value messages of stories in the same manner as longer term employees. After some time on the job, this type of cultural learning should be better developed.

Although meanings and interpretations of a jargon word or a story may vary, at least the word or the story itself can be articulated. Other cultural forms tap tacit knowledge which is more difficult to articulate. For example, it may take a

relatively long time for employees to be able to recognize and anticipate the ways top executives use language to express their values. Employees who have developed this skill would probably find it difficult to articulate exactly what rules are guiding their judgments about language use. This type of tacit knowledge should be difficult to acquire, and even rudimentary traces of it should emerge slowly, relative to the other types of cultural knowledge discussed above. The design of the study described below includes comparisons between groups and across time, thus permitting examination of this building block conceptualization of the cultural learning process.

An analysis of beliefs about practices can be used to assess if the newcomer is becoming ideologically committed to the organization. New employees starting work should be only vaguely familiar with most company practices. Their guesses about the exact nature of those practices may reflect their current beliefs about shared values-in-use. To the extent that those guesses are wrong, the direction of the errors (pro- or anti-company) is an indication of the level of their personal acceptance of, and commitment to these shared values. For example, estimates of the company's willingness to fire employees may under-estimate (pro-company) or over-estimate (anti-company) actual involuntary turnover rates. If new employees are successfully enculturated, the number and magnitude of pro-company errors should be greater after a few months than at the start of employment. This measure of commitment is subtle enough that it should minimize social desirability biases.

METHOD

Stage One: Observation, Interviews, and Archival Study

The study was conducted at a Fortune 500 company in the electronics industry. During the first stage of the study, the first author collected qualitative data for a period of three months. Three methods were used: observation, open-ended, in-depth interviews, and archival study.

The first author began by observing, for 20 days, the daily activities of five employees, representing five functional areas, at a branch office of the firm. She then attended a one-week, off-site retreat. Invitees included the organization's top management team, middle managers labeled as "rising stars," and exceptional sales people who had met pre-established performance criteria during the previous year. A series of interviews were conducted with approximately fifty of these and other, lower ranking employees, during the retreat and subsequently in various field settings. Finally, written documents were studied, including sales reports, personnel records, company newspapers, correspondence, memoranda, and ten years of annual reports.

During all aspects of this data collection effort, field notes were kept, focusing on espoused values and on cultural forms and practices that supported or refuted those values. In the context of this volume, the qualitative aspects of this study are not distinctive, so further description of these procedures and results will be held to a minimum. Appendix A contains more details about the qualitative data collection effort.

The Questionnaire

Data collected during the first stage of the study were used

to construct a questionnaire for use in the second stage of the study. The questionnaire had five sections: espoused values, company jargon, organizational stories, tacit knowledge, and beliefs about practices. The content of the questionnaire items was tailored to fit the specific culture of the company. Because this questionnaire is the crux of the hybrid methodology, the structure of each section of the questionnaire is described in detail below. Examples of each type of questionnaire item are also presented.

Espoused values: In stage one of the study, five values were espoused by almost all members of the top management team and were mentioned by a majority of the other company employees interviewed. Most of these values were also mentioned in the company's annual reports. For example, one espoused value concerned the importance of meeting social and environmental commitments to communities surrounding corporate facilities. The questionnaire asked respondents to rate the importance of each of these five values to the company and to themselves personally. (On these items, and on all subsequent items unless otherwise mentioned, employees responded on 11-point scales.) This provided a measure of whether the questionnaire respondents were aware that these values were espoused by many organizational members and whether the respondents had a personal ideological commitment to these espoused values. Because these items directly asked respondents' opinions about values, the data from this section of the questionnaire, in contrast to other sections, may be open to social desirability biases.

Jargon: This section of the questionnaire consisted of a vocabulary test. Respondents were asked to define twenty words or phrases. These examples of company jargon were selected because they were particularly relevant to the company, rather than the industry as a whole, and because they had been used by employees in a wide variety of circumstances. Twelve of the words or phrases had technical meanings, such as MOF (Master Order Form), while eight referred to more value-laden aspects of the corporate culture, for example, "working the issue," (confronting disagreement and continuing the discussion until genuine consensus is reached). Definitions were coded as correct or incorrect. (Inter-coder reliability on this and subsequent coding tasks was perfect, with one of the authors and a graduate student reaching 100% agreement after a brief training session.)

Organizational stories: The questionnaire focused on four stories, selected because they had been recounted without prompting by many different types of employees during the in-depth interviews and informal conversations. This section of the questionnaire asked respondents how much of each story they had heard. Three morals to each story were then presented. Although all three morals for each story were logically plausible, data from the first stage of the study indicated that longer term employees generally considered one of the morals to be the "correct" interpretation, another moral was obviously "incorrect," and the third moral was ambiguous. Respondents were asked to assess the appropriateness of each moral on an 11-point scale. The endpoints of this scale were labeled "correct" and

"incorrect" and the midpoint was labeled "ambiguous." To the extent that newcomers evaluated the morals in the same way as the longer term employees, the newcomers were demonstrating knowledge of the shared interpretations of meaning prevalent in this organizational culture. For example, the star of one of those stories was a secretary of a sales unit in Northern California:

Susan Sanders had been working for the company for about two years. She was well-respected by everyone--her manager, the sales people, and other secretaries. She was extremely skillful and her performance had been rated as excellent. Due to her efforts, Susan's manager did not need to direct his attention to proofreading or correction tasks. Susan also had a pleasant personality. In fact, she was one of those people who was generally cheerful, even on bad days. During her second year with the company, Susan's husband, who worked for another company, was promoted to a new job in Arizona. Although he would be losing a valued employee, Susan's manager approved her request for a transfer to a branch office of the company in Arizona. This office was not hiring at the time but gladly accepted her transfer, knowing that her skills would be helpful in some capacity in the future.

The possible three morals to this story were: "We believe that people are clearly our most important asset and we take pride in treating our employees well," (Correct); "Employees are one part of the financial structure of the company and are as important as their contribution to the bottom line," (Incorrect); and "Because good employees are hard to find, we feel it is to

the company's advantage to try to meet the needs of such people," (Ambiguous: logically plausible, pragmatic rather than humanistic, an interpretation not offered or considered appropriate by longer-term employees).

Tacit knowledge: This section of the questionnaire contained extracts from the company president's letter to stockholders, published in the company's annual report. Two paragraphs from the letter, counter-balanced across versions of the questionnaire, were reproduced with every fifth word left blank. Respondents were asked to supply the ten missing words. Their responses were coded as +2, totally correct (exactly the same word as in the president's letter); +1, partially correct (a synonym or more abstract version of the word); or 0, incorrect. Accurate performance at this task indicates knowledge of the subtleties of language used to communicate this company's corporate objectives and philosophy of management. (2)

Practices: Five statements describing managerial practices were taken from published material about the company. A key numerical fact in each statement was left blank. A multiple choice test format required the respondents to fill in the blank with one of two predesignated alternatives. Respondents were not aware that both alternatives were incorrect. Because the missing information was numerical, the incorrect alternatives could be equally incorrect. One alternative made the company look better than in fact it was; the other was biased against the company. For example, one item estimated the company's market share as 35% or 45% (the true figure at the time was 40%); another item calculated sales force turnover to be either 12% or

16%. (the correct figure was 14%). Ideological commitment to the company should be reflected in a disproportionate preference (greater than the 50% expected by chance) for the positively biased, pro-company alternatives.

Stage Two: Sample Selection and Questionnaire

Administration

Subjects: The employees who participated in the second stage of the study were entry-level, newly hired sales people. The sample included all twenty sales people hired by the company during a two-month period. (Preliminary data analyses produced significant results with this small sample size, so a larger sample size was unnecessary.)

Design: Versions of the questionnaire, appropriately counter-balanced, were administered to the new employees at two points in time: within one week of starting work and eight weeks later. The responses of two groups of employees (trained and untrained) were contrasted at each of these time periods. Thus, the design of the study illustrated two different kinds of comparisons (across time and across groups) that can be made using this hybrid methodology. Below, reasons for these comparisons are given and a chronology of the new employees' activities is presented.

The comparisons across time permit an examination of the building block conceptualization of the enculturation process. Given the particular circumstances of this organizational setting, we expected that new employees at the company would already exhibit some types of cultural knowledge within one week

on the job. New employees at this firm could exhibit considerable self-selection, as sales positions in the high technology industry were plentiful at the time this study was conducted. Furthermore, managers at the company exercised considerable selectivity in the recruitment and hiring processes. Both these factors should facilitate shared values and interpretations before and during the initial days of employment.

During the next eight weeks all twenty new employees studied written orientation material and attended a one-day orientation session. In addition, these employees interacted on the job with their peers and immediate managers. Because these new employees were to join the sales force, they devoted most of this time to learning about the company's products and different potential markets. Thus, it was expected that, at the end of the eight week period, some, but not all, of the cultural information described in the questionnaire would have been learned, tacit knowledge being the most difficult to absorb.

During the last two of the eight weeks, half of these new employees participated in a ten-day technical training program at regional headquarters. The training of the other ten employees was deferred until after the present study was completed, due to scheduling reasons which had no relationship to the topic of this study. Thus, responses of the trained and untrained groups could be compared, to determine if the training impacted the content, sequence, or speed of cultural learning.

During the last two weeks of the study, the new employees who did not attend the training class continued to interact with co-workers, learning product and market information on the job.

During this time, their activities were the same as they had been during the preceeding weeks. In contrast, the other group of employees had been taken off-site, to regional headquarters, to attend the training class. Their training was designed to be exclusively technical, as were the formally and informally stated objectives of the trainers. In spite of this technical focus, participation in an off-site training program should have freed the new employees from the time pressures and cognitive demands of performing an unfamiliar job, giving them slack for learning non-technical information. For these reasons, we expected that participation in the training process, in spite of its technical focus, would facilitate the learning of cultural information. Thus, in contrast to the untrained group, the trained employees were expected to have learned more of the material included in the questionnaire. (3)

During the entire eight weeks of this second stage of the study, collection of qualitative data continued. The first author attended the orientation session, observed employees on the job, and attended eight of the ten days of the training program, including several after-hours events such as a tequila party and a graduation dinner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Observation, Interview, and Archival Data

Space limitations preclude a detailed description of the qualitative data, so highlights, relevant to the conceptual framework outlined above, are presented. These highlights are drawn from both the stage one data and the qualitative data

collected during stage two of the study. Five espoused values recurred frequently in the speeches, interviews, informal conversations, and written documents of the company's top executives. These espoused values included a focus on the quality of the firm's products, the importance of the financial prosperity of the firm, its social responsibility to maintain the environment and to be a good neighbor to the surrounding community, and, to a lesser extent, humanitarian concerns for employees.

The employee's values-in-use, as inferred indirectly from cultural forms and practices, had a somewhat different emphasis. The importance of an humanitarian approach was accentuated, while less stress was placed on other types of values.(4) Specifically, a core of four values-in-use repeatedly surfaced: first, "The family of an employee is an integral part of the company;" second, "The company doesn't undercut the future by considering only the short-term consequences of decisions; third, "The company believes that people are clearly the most important asset of the company;" and fourth, "We are different. We build a unique product and our people are unique also." A sampling of forms and practices, from which the employees and researchers inferred these values, is presented below. Many of the examples are taken from the orientation session and the training program, in order to illustrate ways in which the new employees were exposed to these aspects of the culture.

The first of the values-in-use, which emphasizes the company's concern for the families of its employees, is

illustrated by the story of the secretary whose request for a transfer was granted so she could remain near her husband and stay with the company. This story also illustrates the second value-in-use. The branch office, to which she was transferred, did not immediately need her services, although it was likely that her superlative skills would be useful in the longer term future. In this story, the company did not undercut the future by considering only the short-term consequences of decisions.

The company's third value-in-use, that the company cares about its employees, was manifested in the ritualistic orientation session. The coordinator of the orientation session described its objective as follows: "Most employees go through buyer's remorse. They aren't totally confident they made the right decision. All we want to do today is let them know that we are really happy to have them on board. We want them to share our ideal of giving 100% to each other and to the company." As the last part of this statement indicates, the company's emphasis on caring about its people was not totally altruistic.

Another illustration of this third value-in-use was observed during the technical training program. Trainees had been told to prepare for a test, to be administered during the afternoon of the second day. Just before breaking for lunch, the instructor held an "impromptu" review session. She asked several sample exam questions of each individual, beginning with the last person in the last row and moving sequentially through the class. One trainee appeared to be completely unprepared and failed to answer a single question correctly. Rather than reprimanding this individual publically or privately, the instructor was

encouraging and offered additional study help during lunch. Later that afternoon the trainer observed to the researcher, "We believe that if an employee is failing to perform, we owe that person assistance." This statement is clearly consistent with caring about the company's employees and considering them a primary asset.

The company's fourth value-in-use emphasized the organization's uniqueness. This value was primarily communicated through jargon and humor. Jargon is understandable only to company insiders, so by definition this cultural form emphasizes something unique about an organization. At this particular company, for example, the "company ethic" was a phrase used to characterize the organization's pride in its supposedly unique emphasis on quality and service.

As employees remained longer at the company, their humor also began to reflect a concern with the company's uniqueness. For example, at the beginning of the training program laughter was scarce. The few jokes told contained little jargon and were understandable to an outsider. Rather than focusing on the unique attributes of the company, these early jokes were relatively universal: foolish mistakes, sexual innuendos, etc. By the end of the training program, laughter occurred frequently. Understanding these jokes required more knowledge of the unique attributes of the company, and more familiarity with its jargon. These later jokes were not funny to an outsider. The targets of the jokes were out-groups, either competitive companies or employees who were not members of the sales division. These

changes in joking behavior suggest that jokes, like humor, may be a cultural form particularly well-suited to communicate the value placed on uniqueness (5).

These examples can only suggest the richly detailed portrait of the corporation's culture which emerged from the first stage of the study. The descriptions of the examples do, however, illustrate the kinds of material subsequently integrated into the questionnaire.

Questionnaire Data

At time 1, the new employees scheduled to receive training, and those whose training was to be deferred, were not expected to respond differently to the questionnaire. Two-tailed t-tests revealed that the two groups responded significantly differently ($p < .05$) to only three of the 57 questionnaire items. Since this proportion of the responses would be significantly different simply by chance, the data from the two groups at time 1 was pooled for the first part of the discussion below.

At time 1 the new employees were already aware of, and personally committed to, the espoused values of the management of the company. At time 1 the new employees rated the five values espoused by top management as highly important to the company (mean of 8.8 on an 11-point scale, averaging across the five values) and to themselves personally (mean of 8.8, again averaging across the five values).

At time 1, the new employees had also begun to learn the jargon of the company. At this time, the new employees correctly defined a mean of 7.1 of the 12 technical words or phrases (59%) in the vocabulary test and a mean of 3.9 of the 8 more value-

laden words or phrases (49%). The technical jargon may have been learned somewhat faster than the value-laden jargon because the former may have been more essential for performance on the new job. It may also be normatively appropriate to teach definitions of technical terms explicitly, while value-laden jargon may be transmitted in a more tacit manner (Goffman, 1963).

At time 1 the new employees were partially familiar with two organizational stories (means of 5.3 and 4.8, respectively, on 11-point scales). The other two stories were essentially unfamiliar (means of 0.8 and 1.5, respectively). The new employees showed only a rudimentary ability to interpret the story messages in the same manner as longer term employees. On the 11-point scales rating the messages, "correct" morals should have received high ratings, "neutral" morals should have been rated near the mid-point of the scale, and "incorrect" morals should have received lower ratings. At time 1, averaging across the four stories, the new employees showed a weak trend in the predicted direction, giving the "correct" morals a mean rating of 8.3, "neutral" morals a mean of 7.8, and "incorrect" morals a mean of 5.6. At time 1, tacit knowledge was less well developed, as indicated by the new employees' inability to fill in the blanks in the president's letter correctly (mean of 7.1 correct out of a possible score of 20.0).

The multiple choice test, measuring values-in-use inferred from company practices, was scored by assigning +2 for each selection of a pro-company error and +1 for each anti-company error chosen. Summing across the five items in this test,

employees showing no bias should, on the average, score 7.5. A score of +10 indicates the maximum pro-company bias and +5 is the lowest possible score, indicating maximum anti-company bias. Using this scoring method, the new employees at time one showed virtually no evidence of pro- or anti-company bias (mean of 7.6).

The next step in the analysis examined the changes in cultural knowledge which occurred between time 1 and time 2. Differences between these two time periods are referred to as cultural learning scores. These scores were calculated, separately for the trained and untrained groups, for six types of cultural learning: espoused values, jargon, stories, story interpretation, tacit knowledge, and beliefs about practices.

The magnitude of the cultural learning scores of the trained and untrained groups were then compared using one-tailed t-tests. These tests revealed no significant differences between the two groups in three areas of cultural knowledge acquisition: espoused values, jargon, and tacit knowledge. In the discussion below, data from the trained and untrained groups are pooled for these variables. In the remaining three areas of cultural knowledge (story familiarity, story interpretation, and beliefs about practices), the trained group learned significantly more than the untrained group, so these data are discussed separately for the two groups.

Table 1 presents the mean espoused value scores for the combined groups (trained and untrained employees). By time 2 the new employees showed very high levels of awareness of, and personal commitment to, the values espoused by the top management of the company (means of 9.1 and 9.2, respectively, averaging

across the five values). Although the ratings at time 2 were higher than at time 1, these differences were significant for only one of the five ratings of awareness ($t=2.12$, $df=18$, $p<.03$) and were marginally significant for only one of the five commitment ratings ($t=1.67$, $df=18$, $p<.06$). For all of these measures of espoused values, the same explanation can be offered. Awareness of and commitment to espoused values was already so high at time 1 that a ceiling effect at time 2 prevented the differences from being significantly higher. This ceiling effect is not unexpected, given that these items are more direct, hence more open to social desirability biases, than the other items in the questionnaire.

Table 1 also contains the jargon data for the combined groups. By time 2 the new employees showed considerable mastery of company jargon, correctly defining a mean of 9.5 of the 12 technical words or phrases (80%) and a mean of 6.2 of the 8 more value-laden words or phrases (78%). For both of these types of jargon, the differences between time 1 and time 2 scores were significant ($t=5.79$, $df=18$, $p<.0001$ and $t=6.57$, $df=18$, $p<.0001$, respectively). Although the newcomers were familiar with some of the jargon at time 1, eight weeks later they had become significantly more adept at understanding the special language of the corporation.

Table 2 presents the story data for the trained employees and Table 3 presents the same data for the untrained employees. By time 2 the trained group was quite familiar with two of the stories (means of 9.3 and 7.7, respectively) and was partially

familiar with the remaining two stories (means of 4.4 and 3.0, respectively). At this time the untrained group was moderately familiar with two stories (means of 7.2 and 6.6, respectively) and was still unfamiliar with the remaining two stories (means of 2.9 and 1.7, respectively). For the trained group, the differences between time 1 and time 2 were significant for all four stories ($t=4.81$, $df=18$, $p<.001$; $t=3.13$, $df=18$, $p<.006$; $t=3.84$, $df=18$, $p<.002$; $t=2.68$, $df=18$, $p<.02$, respectively). For the untrained group, only one of the four differences between time 1 and time 2 was marginally significant ($t=2.00$, $df=18$, $p<.08$).

Averaging across the four stories, at time 2 the trained employees were appropriately giving the "correct" morals high ratings, rating the "neutral" morals near the midpoints of the scales, and giving the "incorrect" morals low scores, (means of 9.5, 7.6, and 3.8, respectively). Again averaging across the four stories, at time 2 the untrained group also gave high ratings to the "correct" morals (mean of 9.2) and rated the "neutral" messages near the midpoints of the scales (mean of 7.6). However, in contrast to the trained group, the untrained group gave relatively high ratings to the "incorrect" morals (mean of 5.5). The untrained group was less able than the trained group to differentiate story messages considered "incorrect" by longer term employees.

For the trained group, these differences between time 1 and time 2 were significant for all four of the "correct" messages, for all three of the "incorrect" messages, and for two of the five neutral messages. For the untrained group, no significant

differences between the time 1 and time 2 message ratings were found, with the exception of the ratings for one "neutral" message. Thus, after eight weeks of employment the trained employees generally interpreted the organizational stories in the same manner as longer term employees. After the same time period, the untrained employees also showed some improvement in their ability to interpret the stories, but not to the same degree or with the same consistency as the trained employees.

The tacit knowledge data, for the trained and untrained groups combined, are presented in Table 1. At time 2 the new employees received a tacit knowledge score of 8.5 (out of a maximum of 20 points). Although this represented an improvement over their time 1 score, the difference between the two time periods was not significant. Although some improvement in this difficult arena of cultural knowledge was noted, these skills were still quite rudimentary after two months of employment, even for those who had participated in the training program.

Finally, the measure of beliefs about practices showed that at time 2 the trained employees had a strong tendency to make errors which were favorable to the company (mean of 8.7). For the trained employees, this bias, indicating commitment, was significantly stronger at time 2 than at time 1 ($t=4.00$, $df=18$, $p<.002$). At time 2 the untrained employees also had a strong tendency to make errors which were favorable to the company (mean of 8.7), a marginally significant increase in comparison to time 1 ($t=1.96$, $df=18$, $p<.09$). The change in the trained employees' pro-company bias was significantly greater than that for the

untrained employees ($t=1.99$, $df=19$, $p<.03$). However, it should be noted that at time 2, both groups showed strong tendencies to make errors favorable to the company.

CONCLUSION

Comparisons across the two time periods provided support for the building block conceptualization of the enculturation process. The new employees who had just started work were aware of, and committed to, many of top management's espoused values. At this time they were familiar with much of the company's technical and value-laden jargon and aware of a few organizational stories. However, at this time the new employees failed to interpret the messages of those stories in the same fashion as longer-term employees, showed virtually no evidence of tacit forms of cultural knowledge, and did not exhibit a strong pro-company bias in misperceptions of company practices.

After a few months on the job, the enculturation process apparently was successful. New employees had fully mastered the jargon, were thoroughly familiar with the organizational stories, generally interpreted those stories in the same manner as longer-term employees, showed a slight improvement in tacit forms of cultural learning, and exhibited a strong pro-company bias in misperceptions of company practices.

Although these results provide support for the building block conceptualization of the enculturation process, it is important to note two limitations of the present study. First, the exact amounts of cultural knowledge exhibited at the two time periods are probably particular to the organization

studied. For example, in a firm with less opportunity for selection of, and self-selection, by new employees, there should be less evidence of shared cultural knowledge immediately after starting employment. However, the relative mastery of the different categories of cultural knowledge fits predictions based on the building block conceptualization. If that conceptualization is correct, a similar pattern of relative mastery should be found in other organizational settings.

It is possible that jargon is easier to learn than stories because less information is conveyed in a word or phrase than in an entire event history. It is also possible that the content of the value messages transmitted with jargon is simpler and easier to understand than the complex and ambiguous messages of stories. Both of these explanations may contribute to the results of the present study and are worthy topics for future research.

The results also supported predictions concerning the effects of training expected in this particular company. In contrast to the untrained group, the trained group showed greater mastery of some kinds of cultural information by the end of the eight week period of the study. These results are consistent with the explanation that attendance at the off-site training sessions may have facilitated cultural learning, by removing the new employees from the time pressures and cognitive demands of performing an unfamiliar job. Training primarily facilitated familiarity with, and interpretation of, organizational stories. Perhaps in the first few weeks on the job, learning jargon is essential. Mastering tacit knowledge is inessential, and absorbing organizational stories is an intermediate priority,

occurring only if a training program or some other stimulus creates slack which permits this kind of deferrable cultural learning.

This explanation for the results, however, must be tentative. Differences between the trained and untrained groups may be attributable to factors other than the training (cf., Campbell and Stanley, 1963). For example, the two groups may have been differentially exposed to company events which impacted the rate at which they absorbed cultural knowledge. Even if differences between these two groups can be attributed to the training, in other organizations the content of training and on-the-job experiences may be different. Future research, testing the slack explanation in other firms, could rule out such alternative explanations for differences between the trained and untrained groups.

This discussion of the issues raised by the present study has led to several suggestions for future research. A general theme underlies these suggestions: in order to understand the results of this study more fully and generalize from them, comparative studies are needed. This need for more comparative research is not particular to the present study. The entire domain of organizational culture is faced with problems which cannot be resolved without comparative data. Although some culture researchers do not aim to construct generalizable theory, others could use comparative data, collected with the hybrid methodology, to address a wide range of theoretical problems.

For example, too many culture studies have assumed the

existence of a universally shared organizational culture or sub-culture. The hybrid methodology can be used to test this key assumption by comparing individual and group differences in perspective. For example, researchers could measure the extent to which top management values and interpretations differ from those of lower level employees. In a firm with a single dominant culture, pockets of ignorance, resistance, and fanatic enthusiasm can be discovered. Occupational, divisional, and hierarchical sub-cultures could be located. Congruencies and conflicts among groups and individuals could be mapped, providing a complex and detailed picture of what is -- and what is not -- shared.

With the hybrid methodology, systematic comparisons across time can be made, permitting the study of culture as a dynamic process. For example, researchers can use the methodology to map the spread of a new belief across an organization. The death of an obsolete culture or the birth of a new culture could be studied. In a mature organization responding to a crisis, the process of cultural adjustment could be examined, to determine where accretion and adjustment occur easily and where inertia is strongest. If deliberate attempts to manage cultural change were attempted, short and long term effectiveness could be assessed.

With careful attention to standardizing data collection procedures during the first stage of a study, the hybrid methodology can be used to make systematic comparisons across organizations, making a whole domain of previously inaccessible theoretical issues open to empirical examination. For example, potential mergers and acquisitions could be evaluated for

cultural "fit." Cluster analyses could determine if distinctive types of cultures exist, for example, with particular orientations towards humanism, innovation, or the importance of the "bottom line." Claims that some types of cultures generate more commitment, productivity, or profitability could be empirically tested.

Perhaps most importantly, if comparisons across organizations are possible, the institutions studied by previous researchers can be classified as deviant or as representative of particular subgroups. One can determine if the frequently mentioned members of the "Culture 500," such as I.B.M., Digital Equipment, and Hewlett-Packard, are cultural norms or anomalies. The results of previous studies could be systematically integrated. The existence of comparative data would make it easier to explore relationships between culture and other areas of organizational research, eventually facilitating the integration of culture into the core of organizational theory.

The hybrid methodology retains some of the strengths of qualitative approaches, avoids strong social desirability biases, and permits the generation of comparative data. With variants on this methodological approach, organizational culture researchers could address the centrally important issues described above. If we continue to fail to generate comparative data which address these theoretical blindspots, our interesting speculations will remain speculations and interest in culture may be deservedly evanescent.

APPENDIX A: QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The researcher began a typical day of observation at the local branch office by riding to the office with the first-line manager. During the one-hour drive, the manager would dictate his "to-do" list for the day into a hand-held recorder. He would also dictate any correspondence to be typed by his secretary. Of special interest to the researcher were his internal memoranda, which contained numerous examples of company jargon.

Upon arriving in the office, the manager made copies of all these documents available to the researcher for subsequent examination. The researcher usually spent the next hour talking informally with employees in the coffee room. She attempted to learn what activities were planned for the day, in order to distribute her observation time evenly across individuals and functions. At the end of the hour, a record was made of the announcements and memoranda posted on the bulletin board in the coffee room.

The remainder of the day was spent observing meetings and discussions. The number of participants in these activities ranged from 10-15 employees to one-on-one discussions, for example, between a manager and a subordinate. The researcher joined employees for lunch every day and met with at least one employee at the end of each day to discuss any questions which had arisen. For example, at first, much of the jargon and almost all of the jokes were unintelligible to the researcher. Employees provided explanations and definitions of unfamiliar

terminology and helped the researcher distinguish jokes and jargon unique to this company. These definitions and explanations were corroborated by asking similar questions of other employees on subsequent occasions. Each night, after leaving the field setting, the researcher expanded field notes and reviewed documents collected during the day.

During the off-site retreat for top management and "rising stars," each morning began with two-hour meetings of small groups. Each group was composed of eight sales representatives and a rotating chairperson selected from the top executive team. The topics of the small group sessions varied each day, and included issues directly relevant to the present study, such as the importance of the company's philosophy of management and the "culture" of the company. At the end of each morning, all participants gathered in a large room, where the small group discussions were summarized by one member of each group.

Dinners during this retreat were elaborate. Pre- and post-meal receptions featured top executives as keynote speakers. These speakers emphasized the future of the company, the technical and marketing challenges which faced the firm, and the importance of the talents of the assembled superior performers. Several award ceremonies were also held. The researcher attended all these functions and joined informal conversations and leisure activities, such as tennis, golf, tours of the surrounding locale, and various eating and drinking gatherings.

FOOTNOTES

Portions of an earlier version of this paper were presented in invited addresses at the meeting of the Western Academy of Management, Colorado Springs, Colorado, April 1982 and at the NATO International Symposium on Managerial Behavior and Leadership Research, St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, July 1982. We wish to thank the following people for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper: Robert Faulkner, Peter Frost, Harold Leavitt, Meryl Louis, Nigel Nicholson, Jeffrey Pfeffer, Lee Sproull, and Andrew Van de Ven.

1. A researcher, somewhat like a new employee, "learns" a culture. Particularly if the learning process is a short-term endeavor, the researcher will learn most about the relatively superficial aspects of the culture, more accessible to outsiders and new employees. The present study focuses on the short-term enculturation of new employees, with reference to a particular set of cultural manifestations. For a longer-term study, with a need for deeper knowledge of tacitly-held cultural assumptions, it would be helpful to use sophisticated qualitative methods during the first stage of the research process described in this chapter. Particularly useful would be lengthy participant observation (e.g., Van Maanen, 1979; Smircich, 1980) and/or in-depth clinical interviews (Schein, 1984). However, no length of involvement, clinical skill, or mix of qualitative techniques can guarantee that the researcher has understood the culture in the various ways it is perceived by its members.

2. Karl Weick encouraged us to take an imaginative approach to

designing this questionnaire and suggested this measure of tacit cultural knowledge. We are grateful for both his encouragement and this particular suggestion.

3. A cover letter to the questionnaire requested the new employees' voluntary assistance and assured them that the confidentiality of their responses would be respected and that no one at the company would have access to their individual data. The response rate was 87%.

4. Although a disjunction between the company's espoused values and values-in-use was anticipated, the content of this disjunction was unexpected. In contrast to the espoused values, the values-in-use placed more stress on humanitarian concerns and de-emphasized financial, product, and social responsibility values. One plausible explanation for this disjunction concerns the audiences to whom these value statements were addressed. Values-in-use may be primarily oriented toward an internal audience of employees, the primary beneficiaries of humanitarian policies. In contrast, espoused values concerning finances, products, services, and social responsibility should be more relevant to an external audience, such as customers and shareholders. If this explanation is correct, studies of other organizations should reveal similar disjunctions between the content of espoused values and values-in-use.

5. This company is not unique in its focus on the value of uniqueness. Most organizational cultures place strong emphasis on unique accomplishments or distinctive institutional competence (cf. Selznick, 1957; Clark, 1970; Wilkins, 1979). The claim to

uniqueness is often communicated through organizational stories. Ironically, these stories are of themselves unique to a particular setting. Instead, in widely divergent organizations, virtually identical stories transmit the value of uniqueness (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin, 1983). The present study suggests that, in addition to stories, humor and jargon are cultural forms particularly well-suited to transmit claims of uniqueness.

Table 1. Mean Amount of Cultural Knowledge for Trained and Untrained Employees Combined

<u>Type of culture knowledge</u>	<u>Maximum possible</u>	<u>Mean at time 1*</u>	<u>Mean at time 2*</u>	<u>t-value (time 2 - time 1)</u>	<u>Probability**</u>
<u>Espoused Values</u>					
Importance of goals to XYZ					
Goal #1 - Financial	11	7.2	8.0	2.12	.024
Goal #2 - Quality	11	10.0	10.1	0.24	n.s.
Goal #3 - Products	11	9.2	9.2	0.20	n.s.
Goal #4 - Social Responsibility	11	8.3	8.5	0.55	n.s.
Goal #5 - People	11	9.1	9.6	1.63	n.s.
Importance of goals to subject					
Goal #1 - Financial	11	7.1	7.7	1.67	.054
Goal #2 - Quality	11	10.0	10.2	0.94	n.s.
Goal #3 - Products	11	9.1	9.6	1.63	n.s.
Goal #4 - Social Responsibility	11	8.3	8.1	-0.52	n.s.
Goal #5 - People	11	9.8	10.0	0.96	n.s.
<u>Jargon</u>					
Technical	12	7.1	9.5	5.79	.0001
Cultural	8	3.9	6.2	6.57	.0001
Both	20	11.0	15.7	8.81	.0001
<u>Tacit Knowledge</u>	20	7.1	8.5	1.23	n.s.

Note: N = 20

* Higher scores indicate greater cultural knowledge

** One-tailed

Table 2. Mean Amount of Cultural Knowledge for Trained Employees

<u>Type of culture knowledge</u>	<u>Maximum possible</u>	<u>Mean at time 1*</u>	<u>Mean at time 2*</u>	<u>t-value (time 2-time 1)</u>	<u>Probability**</u>
<u>Story familiarity</u>					
Story #1	11	4.6	9.3	4.81	.001
Story #2	11	0.0	4.4	3.13	.006
Story #3	11	4.3	7.7	3.84	.002
Story #4	11	1.0	3.0	2.68	.02
<u>Story messages rated appropriately</u>					
Correct messages					
Story #1	11	8.1	9.9	5.51	.0001
Story #2	11	7.4	9.7	5.81	.0001
Story #3	11	9.0	10.2	3.67	.003
Story #4	11	5.4	8.1	6.82	.0001
Incorrect messages					
Story #1	11	8.1	4.9	-5.40	.0001
Story #2	11	7.1	5.0	-2.60	.02
Story #3	11	3.3	1.6	-3.43	.004
Story #4***					
Neutral					
Story #1	11	6.6	4.5	-11.7	.0001
Story #2	11	8.9	8.7	-0.48	n.s.
Story #3	11	9.4	7.7	-3.43	.004
Story #4****	11	6.9	6.9	0.00	n.s.
	11	9.2	8.7	-0.83	n.s.
<u>Values-in-use</u>	10	7.1	9.7	4.00	.002

Note: N =10

- * Higher scores indicate greater cultural knowledge
- ** One-tailed
- *** No incorrect message for story 4
- **** Two neutral messages for story 4

Table 3. Mean Amount of Cultural Knowledge for Untrained Employees

<u>Type of culture knowledge</u>	<u>Maximum possible</u>	<u>Mean at time 1*</u>	<u>Mean at time 2*</u>	<u>t-value (time 2-time 1)</u>	<u>Probability**</u>
<u>Story familiarity</u>					
Story #1	11	6.0	6.6	0.66	n.s.
Story #2	11	1.6	2.9	0.89	n.s.
Story #3	11	5.2	7.2	2.00	.08
Story #4	11	1.9	1.7	-0.29	n.s.
<u>Story messages rated appropriately</u>					
Correct messages					
Story #1	11	9.0	9.1	0.32	n.s.
Story #2	11	8.4	8.8	0.29	n.s.
Story #3	11	10.3	10.0	-1.15	n.s.
Story #4	11	8.3	9.2	1.59	n.s.
Incorrect messages					
Story #1	11	6.0	5.9	-0.10	n.s.
Story #2	11	6.1	7.6	0.29	n.s.
Story #3	11	2.8	3.0	0.12	n.s.
Story #4***					
Neutral					
Story #1	11	6.9	6.1	-0.79	n.s.
Story #2	11	7.6	9.0	1.23	n.s.
Story #3	11	8.1	7.2	-1.65	n.s.
Story #4****	11	5.5	7.3	3.52	.007
	11	8.3	8.6	1.15	n.s.
<u>Values-in-use</u>	10	8.1	8.7	1.96	.09

Note: N = 10

* Higher scores indicate greater cultural knowledge

** Two-tailed

*** No incorrect message for story 4

**** Two neutral messages for story 4

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