Chapter 1

Definitions and Dimensions of a Developing Construct

Organizational culture researchers do not agree about what culture is or why it should be studied. They do not study the same phenomenon.
—P. J. Frost

Even a cursory overview of organizational culture literature highlights the fact that defining this elusive phenomenon still remains one of the most time consuming, if not one of the most frustrating, problems facing researchers in this area today. Although the task of construct conceptualization may prove tedious, the process of sifting through numerous definitions that emanate from diverse paradigms may lead ultimately to more holistic analyses of organizational culture. The discovery of paradoxical frames may foster richer analyses of organizations, because researchers are forced to delve more deeply into complex and seemingly contradictory circumstances, to discover meaning in organizational contexts (Quinn & Cameron 1988). Likewise, a careful analysis of competing definitions of organizational culture may yield a more mature understanding of the developing construct. The complexity of the organizational culture construct dictates the need for definitional precision. As Schein (1990) warned, researchers should not "rush to measure things," until they understand exactly what it is that they are measuring.

Many definitions that appear in contemporary literature reveal a

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dual-perspective focus. For example, Denison's (1990) definition of organizational culture as "a code, a logic, and a system of structured behaviors and meaning, that have stood the test of time and serve as a collective guide to future adaptation and survival" (p. 195) contains both cause and effect elements. Schein (1990) notes that evidence for the varied conceptualizations of the organizational culture construct may be found in the examination of the equally diverse operationalizations of the construct. For example, survey research methods often elicit dimensions of culture that can be generalized across contexts, while analytical descriptive methods may examine fragments of a culture, such as stories or rituals. Other frequently used methodologies include ethnographic descriptions that provide in-depth understanding of a single context, or historical methods that permit the longitudinal analysis of a culture and its patterns over time. Finally, Schein suggests that organizational researchers, in conjunction with managers, may utilize clinical descriptive methods that allow for joint client/consultant diagnosis and prescription. The use of combined qualitative/quantitative methodologies is quite common in organizational culture research, illustrating a tendency on the part of researchers to embrace definitions spanning multiple paradigmatic views.

In approaching the challenge of defining the complex phenomenon of organizational culture, this chapter will first examine a variety of definitions, in an effort to delineate essential components of the construct. Secondly, the discussion will focus on key definitional components necessary for optimum assessment of organizational culture. Appropriate assessment procedures need to account for multiple layers within organizational contexts, ranging from abstract dimensions to tangible artifacts. Since patterns of cohesion and diversity are also important elements in understanding cultural contexts, the last portion of the chapter highlights the assessment of psychological, sociological, and historical cultural range.

A Potpourri of "O. C." Definitions

Definitions of culture range from abstract *webs of significance* (Geertz 1973) to pragmatic *frames of reference*. The anthropological domain has provided a host of classic definitions that view culture as "a construct describing the total body of belief, behavior, knowledge, sanctions, values, and goals that make up the way of life of a people" (Herskowitz 1948, p. 625). The crux of cultural studies lies in analyzing the way in which a group confronts

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problems and challenges at a given point in its history.

Although anthropologists frequently studied "societies" in the context of national boundaries or ethnic affiliations, researchers in varied social scientific disciplines suggested the efficacy of examining the concept of 'culture' in other contexts. The point of view that a group's culture was a shared frame of reference opened the way for investigations into nontraditional groups such as "street corner societies" (Whyte 1955). When culture is defined as "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas and other symbolic meaningful systems" that shape behavior and artifacts (Kroeber & Parsons 1958, p. 582), it becomes a concept that may shed light on organizational interaction. Definitions such as those advanced by Kroeber and Parsons build a bridge between macroscopic anthropological research and more microscopic sociological inquiries. From the factories of the rust belt to the computer labs of Silicon Valley, each "community" tends to develop an "identifiable character," that emerges through its unique value system (Francis & Woodcock 1990).

The study of organizational culture in an anthropological mode is based on the premise that organizations are miniature societies in which individuals are nurtured and grow. However, some researchers suggest that the "miniature society" metaphor may be inappropriate when applied to large, internally differentiated organizations that require only part-time commitment from members (Gregory 1983). For example, Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) point out that organizations rarely approach the depth and richness of anthropological cultures. Because the learning of an organizational culture occurs in adulthood and members possess alternative societal affiliations, the enacted understandings in organizations are neither as deep nor as immutable as an anthropological metaphor would envision.

Many researchers argue, however, that since members of an organization engage regularly in the process of symbolic interaction, it is probable that corporate "natives" may, indeed, create distinctly shared group identities. Louis' (1980) discussion of organizations as "culture-bearing milieux" is based on the premise that organizational contexts provide opportunities for member affiliation, resulting in the creation of "sets of shared understandings" that are salient within a distinct group. Similarly, Schein (1985) claims that organizational group "paradigms" are revealed, when researchers identify the pattern of underlying assumptions governing shared perceptions about contextual situations and relationships.

Many conceptualizations of organizational culture describe a

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type of centralized belief structure controlling collective meanings. Cognitive "patterning" is often a key component within contemporary definitions (Barnett 1988). For instance, Pettigrew (1979) defines culture as a "system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time" (p. 574). This system of terms, categories, and images aids in the interpretive process of organizational stimuli. Spradley (1972) describes culture as an information system of shared cognitions, consisting of categories used to classify experiences and interpret symbols. Wilkins (1983a) concurs that the search for an organization's culture must entail a discovery of the fundamental shared assumptions within that context. These taken-for-granted assumptions fashion an organization's "self-image," as well as its image of the environment (Broms & Gahmberg 1983).

In addition to the concept of 'shared cognitions', another important theme in cultural definitions is that of discovering the actual pattern or network through which shared assumptions flourish. Theorists such as Geertz (1973) propose that cultures are symbolic structures, or systems of shared meanings, created, sustained, and transmitted through social interaction. Geertz describes culture as "webs of significance," or a "multiplicity of complex conceptual structures" that are "superimposed upon or knotted into one another" (p. 10). In this view, an organizational culture rests in a commonly held fabric of meanings, or a unique symbolic common ground embodied in shared norms, stories, and rituals (Bormann et al. (1982). A description of culture as an enduring, interdependent symbolic system of values, beliefs, and assumptions (Schall 1983) exemplifies the thrust behind definitions grounded in the social construction of reality. It is important to note, however, that the symbolic system known as a "culture," created through the interaction of organization members, is imperfectly shared. Even in the most cohesive of cultures there will exist perceptual differences.

As we have seen, most definitions contain reference to cognitive, symbolic, and system-maintaining elements of culture. Inherent in these approaches is the idea that a distinctive conceptual map functions to guide meaningful behavior. Some researchers claim that an organization's culture can be discovered in "learned ways" of coping with experience that often involve sense-making functions or behavioral rules (Gregory 1983; Louis 1980). For example, Thompson and Luthans (1990) describe organizational culture as consisting of cognitive frames that dictate appropriate behavior, thus providing general operating norms for organizational conduct. In their view, the learned

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behavioral strategies come about through interactions that require organizational members to engage in a process of cognitive matching of antecedents, behaviors, and consequences that will reinforce accepted cultural norms. Other "rules" approaches to organizational culture define the phenomenon as "a set of solutions" devised by a group to confront common problems (Van Maanen & Barley 1985). In order to discover these "sets of solutions" that may be generalizable across several organizational contexts, Rousseau (1990) suggests focusing on task, interpersonal, and individual values and behaviors as the locus of organizational culture.

Overall, many definitions of culture in the literature link cognitive and symbolic conceptual components with the generation of contextual behavioral norms, in order to facilitate system maintenance. Considering the definitional diversity in organizational culture research, the next section will examine several essential components to consider in holistic analyses of organizational culture.

Definitional Components to Assess "O.C."

In the process of reviewing the wide range of organizational culture definitions in use by researchers today, it is essential to summarize the shared components across definitions. Hofstede, et al. (1990) observe that although no consensus regarding a definition of organizational culture exists currently, several characteristics of the construct tend to appear consistently in most conceptualizations. These high-consensus components include the idea that organizational culture is holistic, in the sense that it explores multiple aspects (i.e., cognitive, symbolic, system maintaining) of an organizational context. In addition, many researchers also acknowledge the fact that organizational culture is a socially constructed phenomenon, subject to historical and spatial boundaries. Although these concepts are far from novel ones in organizational literature, their integration into a single construct provides researchers with a unique challenge.

Organizational culture, then, is a construct that may be positioned at a higher level of abstraction than the more familiar, climate concept. While the culture construct enables researchers to delve into the deeper causal aspects of an organization, climate is often seen as a surface manifestation of culture (Reichers & Schneider 1990; Schein 1990). In this view, climate is a single variable within the larger construct of organizational culture. Figure 1.1 illustrates the essential

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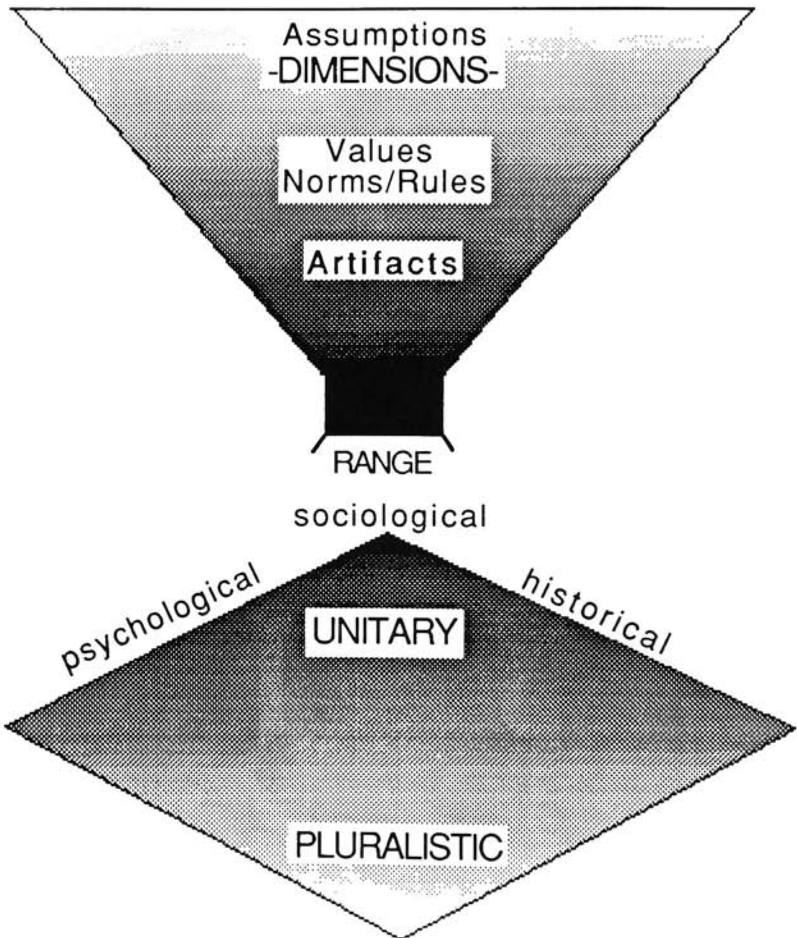
components drawn from contemporary literature, that form the basis for holistic analysis of culture in organizational contexts. First, researchers need to be aware that organizational culture is a multlevel construct comprised of perceptions regarding abstract assumptions, values, norms, and more tangible artifacts. Second, in order to assess organizational culture, researchers need to trace the range of shared dimensions within a context, in order to analyze patterns of unity and pluralism.

FIGURE 1.1
Definitional Components to Assess Organizational Culture



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At this point, we need to distinguish between the terms *organizational* and *corporate* culture. When the term, *organizational* is associated with culture, it is understood that researchers need to examine patterns of cognitive and normative sharing across an entire context. A single organization, then, may exhibit numerous clusters of shared cultural assumptions, values/norms, and artifacts. A *corporate culture* is defined, for our purposes, as one type of culture that may be present in the larger organization. The *corporate* culture generally emanates from basic tenets of a strategic plan and is promulgated across organizational ranks by management. Although the corporate culture may touch all employees at the surface artifact level, there may be differing degrees of acceptance regarding corporate-sanctioned assumptions, values, and norms across the larger organization. The next portion of the discussion will examine in greater depth several of the components displayed in the model that are essential for holistic assessments of organizational culture.

Searching for Multiple Levels

In a summary of the state of organizational culture research, Schein (1990) delineates several consistencies in the literature. The phenomenon is recognized frequently, as a pattern of basic assumptions that are invented by a group as it learns to cope with external adaptation and internal integration problems. Schein also notes that the assumptions and the resulting strategies perceived to be valid in a particular context are taught to new members as the correct way to analyze and to confront problems. According to Rousseau (1990), "layers" of culture range on a continuum from subjectivity to accessibility. The subjective end of the continuum includes the more abstract or intangible aspects of culture, such as underlying values or fundamental assumptions. Behavioral norms occupy a middle point on the cultural continuum, while artifacts represent the layer allowing researchers the greatest accessibility.

As shown in the upper portion of figure 1.1, organizational culture is a multilevel construct consisting of assumptions, values (norms/rules), and artifacts. The lighter shading in the upper portion of the figure, denotes the most subtle, abstract level of organizational culture, *assumptions*, or the tacit beliefs that members hold about themselves, their relationships to others, and the nature of the organization. Assumptions are implicit, abstract axioms that determine the more overt organizational meaning systems (Schein 1985, 1991). For

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instance, Deetz and Kersten (1983) describe this "deep" layer as the unexamined beliefs and values upon which the "taken-for-granted" surface structure rests.

The next level, *values*, is distinguished by goals, ideals, and standards that represent members' preferred means of resolving everyday life's problems. The value level encompasses the socially shared rules and norms applicable to a specific context—how organizational members define and interpret situations of their workplace—as well as what "natives" perceive as constituting boundaries of acceptable behavior. The more darkly shaded tip of the organizational culture triangle represents the shared *artifacts*, or symbolic manifestations of the underlying values and assumptions. Verbal artifacts include, language, stories, and myths, while rituals and ceremonies can be classed as behavioral artifacts.

Although many investigations tend to focus on a single layer of an organization's culture, more holistic analyses provide for multilevel assessments. Contextual investigations may employ dual qualitative/quantitative methodologies to assess the entire range of layers on the cultural continuum. For example, Siehl and Martin (1988) used qualitative observation to construct a quantitative survey instrument that assesses collective agreement on espoused values, company jargon, and beliefs about practices. The multilevel assessment focuses on "values-in-use," as reflected in cultural forms and allows for systematic comparisons across individuals, employee groups, and organizations over time. Similarly, a standardized survey instrument derived from qualitative data (Hofstede et al. 1990) permits comparative analyses of values and practices across internal units and among multiple organizations.

A definition that represents a convergence of the numerous approaches summarized in this section would describe organizational culture as a *multilevel phenomenon that represents the shared, symbolically-constructed assumptions, values, and artifacts of a particular organizational context.* The collectively accepted meanings composing an organization's culture are transmitted through the process of communication and emerge as rule-governed behavior. If organizational culture is distinguished by the sharing of contextual assumptions, values, and artifacts, then an important challenge to tackle next is—devising a framework that may be used to describe and eventually assess cultural domains. One such framework consists of identifying universal cultural dimensions that cut across a variety of organizational contexts. The next section will review several generalizable dimensions,

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noted by previous researchers, that form the underlying structure of an organizational culture construct.

Searching for Multiple Dimensions

The practice of delineating dimensions of cultural contexts is derived from an anthropological tradition of searching for regularities both within and across cultural contexts (Kluckhohn 1951). The rationale behind searching for cultural dimensions is that, over time, distinct groups tend to exhibit preferred responses to problems posed by their internal and external environments. Thematic consistencies exhibited across artifactual, value/rule, and assumption levels of an organization form the basis of cultural dimensions. Several researchers have isolated "universal" dimensions of culture (Child 1981; Emery & Trist 1972; Evan 1975; Hofstede 1980; Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck 1961). Many of these attempts at establishing universal cultural dimensions begin at the larger societal level and are subsequently applied to the study of culture in organizations. Patterns of shared cultural dimensions may surface at differing levels of a system. Some researchers claim that cultural dimensions surfacing at the national or macro level often appear at micro levels of individual organizations or subcultures (Beck & Moore 1985; Quinn & McGrath 1985).

The claim that certain universal dimensions of both national and organizational cultures can be isolated is grounded in the idea that there are only a limited number of human problems and a limited range of solutions to those problems. The ways in which certain groups respond to life-challenges constitute collective value orientations that vary systematically across different cultures. The advantage of using a dimensional approach for organizational culture researchers is in providing the means by which to generalize across contexts. A dimensional scheme that has been applied to organizations is Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's (1961) value orientations. This value scheme describes several orientations that surface across collectivities. Determining the range of value orientations toward human nature, the environment, time, activity, or relationships assists researchers in the search for underlying cultural assumptions both within and across organizational boundaries. Further, Schein (1990) suggests that the dimensions drawn from Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's comparative studies provide a relevant way for organizational researchers to draw upon anthropological typologies of universal issues faced by all societies.

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A *human nature* orientation (Kluckhohn & Stodtbeck 1961) refers to basic assumptions held by a society or organization about the intrinsic nature of human beings (i.e., good vs. evil). For example, in organizations, a Theory X approach to management is based on the assumption that human beings are basically lazy, while a Theory Y approach centers on the assumption that human beings are inherently motivated to work (McGregor 1960). Child (1981) notes that an organizational emphasis on subordinate autonomy and intrinsic motivation exemplifies a value orientation of the inherent goodness of human nature. Symbolic manifestations of beliefs regarding human nature might emerge in examining the language used to describe employees in the official print material of an organization, in departmental memos, or in the oral "texts" of superior-subordinate interaction.

A *person-to-nature* cultural dimension restated for organizational contexts would be an organization's relationship to its *environment* (Schein 1985). In other words, what is the basic identity or mission of the organization in relation to its internal and external constituencies? Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck (1961) suggest that the "man-nature" dimension varies from a mastery over the environment to a subjugation imposed on the organization by outside forces. Interviews with employees in corporations facing major restructuring or downsizing frequently reveal themes involving a loss of control in the face of fluctuating economic trends and massive intraorganizational change.

Organizations may be past, present, or future oriented, reflecting their unique orientation to *time*. Frequently, consultants advise that organizations work toward a moderate approach to "time," where tradition is balanced with strategic vision. For example, Peters (1988) urges corporate leaders to foster shared visions that prepare for the future, while "honoring" the past. Symbolic manifestations of time perceptions may surface in corporate slogans, mission statements, or strategic planning documents. Frequently, companies requiring perceptions of security, use images symbolizing stability, such as Prudential's "rock," in order to create the illusion of invulnerability despite social changes. Waterford Crystal's slogan, "Steadfast in a world of changing values," lauds the security provided by a strong tradition. As corporations become more attuned to social responsibility, concern for the environment has gained attention as an important time-oriented theme that is heralded in both mission statements and public relations campaigns. Often, a company's concern for the environment is framed within a future orientation—our business is not just to provide service today, but to build a cleaner, safer

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world for generations to come. Corporations that deal in state-of-the-art technology strive to distance themselves from "present" time orientations, claiming that their products are actually far ahead of their time, by assuming a "future is now" approach. For example, RCA teamed its nostalgic "Nipper" Trademark with an admiring young puppy protege to launch its "new generation of innovation" advertising campaign.

As organizations mobilize to greet the twenty–first century, their orientation toward *activity* is an important element to assess in the cultural mix. Values ranging from a "doing," high-action orientation to a "being," or dominantly passive, state serve to characterize organizations that either survive by "thriving on chaos" or prefer a more "laid-back" approach. Schein (1985) suggests that analyzing how rapidly problems are solved throughout various organizational levels indicates the degree of an activity orientation. In their original assessment of "excellence," Peters and Waterman (1982) stress that organizations with a bias toward action tend to be more productive. While in his later work, Peters' (1988) redefinition of excellence counsels "tomorrow's" firms to assume a proactive stance regarding change. In a "thriving on chaos" atmosphere, constant innovation, aimed at achieving higher quality, coupled with the discovery of potential "niche" markets, provide the keys for organizational survival in a "world turned upside-down."

Once researchers have pinpointed an organization's distinctive orientations to human nature, the environment, time, and activity, another essential universal dimension to consider is *relational* orientation—the patterns manifested in the relationships of persons to each other. This relational dimension ranges from "lineality," or formal hierarchical structure, to "collaterality," or team effort stressing the equality of all persons. Child (1981) suggests that on the organizational level, a minimization of hierarchy and an emphasis on delegation of authority or group decision-making characterizes a collateral orientation. A hierarchical structure in which all decisions are made by the upper echelon with little consultation constitutes an orientation toward lineality. Models of organizational structure requiring a high level of cooperation, such as Ouchi's (1981) Theory Z "clan" approach would fall on the "collateral" end of the continuum for the relational dimension. From PR slogans touting "Team Xerox," to adoption of total quality management (TQM), the focus on more consultative Japanese management styles is evidenced in the trend toward empowerment of individual employees in problem-solving processes.

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Cultural analyses using Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's (1961) dimensions include Dyer's (1985) model of culture change, in which he "mapped" the histories of several organizations across the five value orientations just presented. Evan (1975) uses the cultural dimensions scheme to develop hypotheses for three orientations (time, relational, person-nature), regarding organizational processes of recruitment, socialization, and communication. Further, Child (1981) expanded Evan's analysis to discuss all five dimensions in terms of specific organizational practices and structures.

Other researchers are also using a universal dimension approach to discover orientations that may be particularly relevant to the study of cultures within and across organizational contexts. For instance, Hofstede's (1980) extensive multinational study of IBM employees yields several independent dimensions revealing differences among national value systems. The "power distance," "uncertainty avoidance," and "masculine/feminine" dimensions of Hofstede share similar value orientations as Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's (1961) relational, activity, and human nature concepts. Schein's (1990) "homogeneity versus diversity" dimension, which assesses how organizations perceive themselves in relation to innovation or conformity, resembles Hofstede's 'individualism versus collectivism' concept that emerged across multinational contexts.

Also, in a recent study, Hofstede et al. (1990) assesses organizational cultures across ten European organizations. These researchers describe the dimensions isolated in the dual qualitative/quantitative investigation as a checklist for variations in organizational practices. The dimensions include "process versus results," "employee versus job," and "parochial versus professional" orientations. Other factors in the study explore "open versus closed" systems, "loose versus tight" organizational control, and "normative versus pragmatic" approaches to problems. Investigations like the ones we have just discussed help refine and expand our understanding of the multidimensional value orientations that form the basis for the underlying assumptions of an organization's culture.

As the previous discussion has shown, several researchers have suggested the usefulness of identifying core evaluative dimensions in organizational culture analysis (Adler & Jelinek 1986; Child 1981; Dyer 1985; Evan 1975; Hofstede 1980). By isolating key cultural dimensions, the researcher creates a framework for analyzing the shared orientations that are consistent in the assumptions, values, and artifacts of individual contexts or that are generalizable across a num-

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ber of organizations. The dimensional approach promises to be an integral part of future development of an organizational culture construct. As dimensions emerge within a wide variety of organizations, researchers can engage more readily in the process of generalization across contexts. Dimensional comparisons across organizations in the private and public sectors will yield information about value orientations that seem to be universal in all organizational cultures, and will also bring to light distinctive contextual dimensions.

So far, we have looked at the construct of organizational culture in terms of multiple levels and multiple dimensions. Once it is recognized that distinct cultural orientations give rise to varying degrees and levels of shared assumptions, values/norms, and artifacts, we need to turn our attention to the range of these salient dimensions within an organization.

Searching for Cultural Range

If we define organizational culture as a set of shared dimensions that shape the assumptions, values, and artifacts of a particular context, the next challenge lies in tracing the scope of a culture. To assess the scope of shared cultural dimensions, the researcher needs to establish boundaries of the investigation. Louis (1985b) used the metaphor of a "cultural Geiger counter" to illustrate the art and science of detecting boundaries of shared conceptualizations within an organizational context. If social scientists possessed such an instrument, they might be capable of identifying precisely the "loci" of the multiple and overlapping cultures in a single organization. Exploring the issue of "penetration" may provide a first step toward charting the range of salient dimensions within a cultural context. Penetration refers to the extent, consistency, and stability of shared meanings within a culture. Louis' (1985a) framework delineating three aspects of cultural penetration—psychological, sociological, and historical—seems to be an appropriate starting point for developing more valid measurements of an organizational culture construct.

Psychological cultural penetration assesses the consistency or homogeneity in interpretation of shared meanings in an organizational culture. Researchers charting psychological penetration focus on the extent of variation in perception of salient cultural schemata in the organization. Empirical investigations of psychological penetration might measure coorientation among employee groups regarding cultural dictates, or the degree of employee

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identification with the organization's mission. For instance, Cooke and Rousseau (1988) discuss "direction" and "intensity" as pertinent dimensions involved in assessing cognitive cultural domains. Direction involves the actual content or substance of cultural schemata, while intensity represents the degree of consensus on salient values and norms among organization members.

Sociological cultural penetration represents the pervasiveness of cultural assumptions in an organization. A macroscopic analysis of sociological penetration would map the range of cultural schemata beyond the individual organizational context to include the effects of more broadly based cultural systems, such as regional or national cultures. A microscopic analysis, on the other hand, might investigate how many subsystems or levels within an organization compose a distinct culture. The resulting patterns of cohesion and differentiation assist researchers in identifying unitary and pluralistic cultural pockets.

A third type of assessment, *historical cultural penetration*, charts the stability of cultural schemata over time in a particular context. Organizational researchers tracing historical penetration of an organizational culture would determine how long cultural assumptions have dominated a system. For instance, an analytic technique such as Pettigrew's (1979) sequencing of key events on timelines helps to depict graphically the patterns of cultural assumptions operative throughout organizational lifecycles. Holistic investigations need to look at all three aspects of penetration (psychological, sociological and historical) in order to provide a valid assessment of cultural range within an organizational context.

Investigators seeking to determine cultural range by assessing penetration of cultural dimensions engage in processes of "sourcing" and "bounding" in order to discover multiple cultures within organizational contexts. Louis (1985b) defined "sourcing" as locating the roots or primary sites of shared understandings, while "bounding" identifies the extent of shared perceptions. Assessing cultural range in terms of psychological, sociological, and historical penetration allows researchers to map an organization's culture across spatial and temporal dimensions, resulting in a more sophisticated level of analysis. Once the researcher has assessed the range of shared dimensions within a context, it is then possible to analyze the more general patterns of cohesion and differentiation across the organization. Identifying the boundaries of distinct subcultures will provide a graphic cultural map highlighting clusters of unity and pluralism within a context.

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Searching for Cultural Patterns

Although popularized organizational culture literature with its emphasis on the benefits of fostering "strong" cohesive communities has gained prominence in business circles, many scholars question the notion that a certain type of culture may be preferable for all contexts in all circumstances. As Schein (1985) has suggested in his work on leadership, cultures cannot be deemed good or bad but depend primarily on the match between cultural assumptions and environmental realities. Individual organizational goals impact on manifestations of culture in certain contexts. A particular cultural orientation that proves successful in one organization or situation may be a liability in another case (Hofstede et al. 1990). The notion of "strong" or "weak" cultures is a concept with broad appeal, because it fills a need for consistency in organizations. However, ignoring the often contradictory nature of organizations may be disfunctional for both researchers and managers alike (Cameron & Quinn 1988). In this view, organizations are by their very nature paradoxical entities that have a simultaneous need for integration and differentiation (Lawrence & Lorsch 1967).

In searching for distinctive patterns by which to identify the scope of an organization's culture, several researchers have suggested theoretical frames conceptualizing unitary or pluralistic contextual models. For instance, the integration, differentiation, and fragmentation perspectives are especially helpful in understanding patterns of cultural unity and pluralism in organizational contexts (Meyerson 1991; Meyerson & Martin 1987). An integration approach is characterized by consistency, organization-wide consensus, and denial of ambiguity. The lower portion of figure 1.1 depicts the density of shared cultural dimensions that serve to unify or differentiate contexts. A valid conceptualization of a "strong," "unitary" culture is a high level of psychological, sociological, or historical penetration of core cultural dimensions. Conversely, an organization exhibiting some differentiation allows for the coexistence of shared assumptions with inconsistency, as represented in figure 1.1 by less density in shading at the base of the figure. In differentiated cultures, strong subcultural groups often emerge as "islands of clarity" amidst organizational pluralism. Fragmentation approaches describe organizations exhibiting a lack of clarity and consensus, coupled with an acknowledgement of ambiguity. In fragmented cultures, no clear consensus is evident.

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Although many organizational culture investigations focus on a single perspective, researchers are discovering that, realistically, organizational culture needs to be assessed from dual unitary and pluralistic viewpoints. For example, in their study of the culture creation process, Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm (1985) found evidence that both integration and differentiation paradigms may be simultaneously accurate. Similarly, in her longitudinal investigation of values among three groups of professional employees, Bullis (1990) noted a transorganizational pluralistic perspective. Likewise, Martin and Siehl (1988) conclude that, paradoxically, workplace countercultures may express conflicts and address needs for differentiation while maintaining an "uneasy" symbiotic relationship with an officially sanctioned corporate culture. In their analysis of organizational accounts, Brown and McMillan (1991) stress that the potential to produce culture lies within employees at all levels of the hierarchical ladder. They argue that rather than focusing solely on "texts" produced by management levels, researchers will glean more broadly based, efficient, and realistic interpretations of an organization's culture by analyzing lower-level "sub-texts." Further, Brown and McMillan suggest that the creation of a "narrative," which represents the diverse points of view across a single context, can provide researchers with a richer analysis of an organization's cultural patterns.

When approached from a unitary perspective, cultures are conceptualized as integrative and are often evaluated in terms of organizational consistency. The use of the term *weak*, in reference to a unitary culture, presupposes that the polar opposite, a *strong* culture, can indeed exist or be created. Van Maanen and Barley (1985) note that a homogeneous culture would exist where all members of an organization face similar challenges and subscribe to a similar normative order. Likewise, in their competing values perspective, Quinn and McGrath (1985) describe a "congruent" state in an organization where the cultural forms, personal information processing styles, leadership orientations, and external demands are matched, so that contradiction and paradox appear less prevalent. According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), weak cultures exhibit a high degree of differentiation at all levels of the system, as evidenced by rituals that enact contradictory values. Highly ambiguous cultural contexts may also have "heroes" who fail to build a common consensus of what is important for business success, resulting in lower productivity. These researchers also suggest, however, that states of "incongruence" actually afford more fruitful

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examination of organizational systems. Creative cultural analysis often begins by identifying "weaknesses" evident within a system.

A differentiation or pluralistic view challenges unitary cultural models by stressing the idea that it is erroneous to assume that an organization has a single culture. For instance, Louis (1985b) identifies dual "loci" of culture: intraorganizational and transorganizational. Intraorganizational loci consist of alternative sites of culture within an organization, such as distinct departmental subcultures. Transorganizational loci allow "streams of culture" to flow into the organization from outside groups and influences. Intraorganizational sites function as "breeding grounds" for the "birth" of locally shared meanings. For instance, a corporate culture represents a more public type of culture developed at the top of the organizational ladder. Other intraorganizational sites at which shared meanings emerge could be dictated by structural constraints such as vertical or horizontal slices of the organization.

In a university context, strong pockets of differentiation across the campus may result from the broad range of affiliations with disciplines that vary greatly in terms of philosophical orientation. The core cultural value orientations held by a department of physical scientists may bear little resemblance to collectivities formed in the social scientific disciplines. Although cohesive pockets of differentiation emerge from the way subcultures perceive their distinct role in the traditional university mission of research, teaching, and community service, there may exist simultaneously a strong convergence on a collective vision that elicits identification across the organization.

Other challenges to the exclusive use of unitary perspectives warn that ethnocentrism increases the tendency for misunderstandings, not only in national cultures, but also in organizational contexts as well. Gregory (1983) suggests that a multicultural image of organizations enables researchers to consider both cohesive and divisive functions of culture, thus avoiding a "managementcentric" bias that often characterizes unitary cultural investigations. In Gregory's view, organizations are more accurately viewed as multiple, crosscutting, cultural contexts that change over time, rather than as stable, homogeneous, time-bound entities. As a prescription for investigations emanating from integration perspectives, Gregory advocates use of an "intracultural variation" approach in which multiple "native" views are explored. In addition, a researcher's choice of focus within cultural investigations is dependent on both theoretical and empirical grounds for the study. For example, cul-

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ture might be conceptualized in one investigation as existing within the focal organization's boundaries (coterminous), while another study might consider the impact of factors that exist outside the focal organization (noncoterminous).

Holistic investigations acknowledge the paradox that unitary and pluralistic manifestations of culture coexist in every organizational context. Sackmann (1991) argues that because culture is a complex entity, it is a construct that exhibits both homogeneous and heterogeneous properties. So far, we have stressed the importance of exploring organizational culture as a complex entity consisting of multiple levels, dimensions, and layers. The next section will summarize the key considerations in defining a culture construct for organizational analysis.

Definitional Considerations for Clarity of Assessment

One point of concern for organizational culture researchers centers around the idea that although many definitions currently in use reflect multiple theoretical approaches to the construct, most assessment procedures are unidimensional in nature, thereby tapping only a single level of the construct. Future assessments of organizational culture demand a more sophisticated multilevel focus that considers the scope of deeper assumptions in addition to the significance of the more accessible surface manifestations of culture. A fruitful avenue for researchers is to delineate generalizable dimensions that emerge within cultures or across cultural contexts. For instance, value orientations pertaining to human nature, the environment, activity, time, and structure of relationships may reveal distinguishing characteristics of organizational contexts or illuminate subcultural differences.

The selection of a unitary or a pluralistic perspective for contextual analysis is another important consideration for organizational culture researchers. Literature emanating from a unitary perspective tends to focus on consistency and cohesion across organizational ranks and often describes cultures as "ideal" or "excellent." Deal and Kennedy's (1982) exhortation, "in culture there is strength," exemplifies the strong causal link that unitary researchers forge between organization-wide cohesion and superior performance. Conversely, pluralistic perspectives acknowledge the existence and impact of multiple cultures, both within an organization and beyond its boundaries.

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In analyzing patterns of cultural differentiation, researchers need to become more aware of the way in which certain paradoxical elements, within a context, function in producing a dynamic interplay of competing values that can either facilitate or hinder desired organizational outcomes.

In summary, it is evident that some contemporary researchers are striving for a more distinct focus in conducting organizational culture investigations. For instance, Dansereau and Alutto (1990) identify four analytic levels framing contemporary organizational culture investigations: single-level, multiple-level, multiple variable, and multiple relationship. Single-level analyses spotlight one slice of an organization's culture, perhaps the shared values and practices formed within a particular employee segment. As stated previously in the discussion on pluralistic perspectives, multiple-level analysis attempts to identify various loci of culture and to diagnose the strength, consistency, and pervasiveness within pockets of shared conceptualizations. Analytic complexity increases with multiple-variable investigations that explore correlations among factors such as commitment, satisfaction, structure, or performance and organizational culture. Finally, holistic multiple relationship analyses trace interactions among several key variables across multiple cultural levels. Presently, many organizational culture researchers conduct single-level analyses, however, future studies need to increase the precision by which culture is assessed and also strive to integrate more holistic conceptualizations of culture as a multidimensional phenomenon.

The use of a hologram metaphor is a particularly apt way of grasping cultural complexity in organizations. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992) suggests that contemporary investigations of complex organizations are similar to holograms by the way in which they capture only a small portion of a larger picture and also because they are simply representations of reality. Looking at a hologram, the point of view changes dependent upon the angle of view. Likewise, most organizational culture investigations are able to capture only a limited picture of an organizational gestalt. And, like holograms, organizational culture investigations are depictions or interpretations of reality, occasionally labeled as mere fiction. The researcher's choice of analytic angle, whether it involves focusing on a particular cultural level or structural layer, will alter the resulting "picture" of an organization's culture.

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As we have seen in this chapter's discussion of key definitions evident in contemporary research, organizational culture is a construct with roots embedded in multiple paradigms. Chapter 2 will discuss in greater depth the positioning of an organizational culture construct within interpretive and functionalist paradigmatic approaches.

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