

***UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE UNDER THE IMPACT OF
GLOBALIZATION. THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AS A
DETERMINANT OF WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR***

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to first of all give a definition and clear understanding of what culture is and moreover to focus on an understanding of organisational culture: what it is, how it develops and its importance as the organisation's most powerful determinant of behaviour. In order to develop a clear understanding of what is meant by organisational culture, it will be helpful to provide first an account of how culture is perceived in the societal context and in a close relationship to globalization. Understanding behaviour that occurs in a diverse organisation, because when referring to organisational culture, the academic environment is taken into account from the point of view of an organisation, we must relate to culture first in extra-organisational contexts.

Key words: *globalization, culture, organisational culture, behaviour, multiculturalism*

1. Introduction

Culture may be perceived as a physical, in the forms of architectural designs, machinery etc; and as subjective, such as attitudes, beliefs, values and tacit norms. While culture is not religion, gender, race or nationality, they all do interact. History shows that the physical and the subjective elements of a culture change across time as scientific innovation and intellectual advancements replace old structural designs, attitudes, values and beliefs. Cultures relocate themselves and their languages become more complex; they are continuously evolving.

Culture is defined as a system of shared values and beliefs about what is considered to be important, what behaviours are appropriate and about feelings and relationships internally and externally. Values and cultures need to be unique to the organisation, widely shared and reflected in daily practice and relevant to the university's purpose and academic curricula.

Organisational culture is the collection of relatively uniform and enduring values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices that are shared by an organisation's members, learned by new trainers, and transmitted from one generation to the next. What is new is the individuality of different generations of students, especially in universities where different cultures collide, where different religions and backgrounds come together and meet with a different system of training- different level and with a different curricula, trainers etc. In order to develop a clear understanding of what is meant by organisational culture, it will be helpful to provide first an account of how culture is perceived in the societal context and in a close relationship to globalization.

Another aspect of culture is cultural globalization:
Cultural globalization refers to the transmission of ideas, meanings and values around the world in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations. This process is marked by the

common consumption of [cultures](#) that have been diffused by the Internet, popular culture media, and international travel. This has added to processes of commodity exchange and colonization which have a longer history of carrying cultural meaning around the globe. The circulation of cultures enables individuals to partake in extended social relations that cross national and regional borders. The creation and expansion of such social relations is not merely observed on a material level. Cultural [globalization](#) involves the formation of shared norms and knowledge with which people associate their individual and collective cultural identities. It brings increasing interconnectedness among different populations and cultures¹.

2. Concept of culture and globalization

As far back as 1871, the anthropologist Edward Tylor defined culture as “knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired through membership of society”. In a narrower sense the term is used to describe the differences between one society and another. In this context, according to Giddens:

[...] a culture is an all-pervasive system of beliefs and behaviours transmitted socially. Specifically, it consists of the sets of values and norms or rules held by a society, together with its material expressions. (Giddens 1989, p30)

Values are internalised by young people as they learn what is good and what is desirable. They define for us what is important and worth striving for. Values represent the basic conviction that in a personal or social context, a specific mode of conduct is preferable to any other.

Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by [international trade](#) and [investment](#) and aided by [information technology](#). This process has effects on the [environment](#), on [culture](#), on political systems, on [economic development](#) and prosperity, and on [human physical well-being](#) in societies around the world.

Peter Ludwig Berger, an Austrian-born American sociologist known for his work in the sociology of religion and the sociology of knowledge gives one of the best quotes to define globalization and the impact it has over the individual and the organisation:

We also have a cultural phenomenon: the emergence of a global culture, or a cultural globalization.

Technology has been the principal driver of globalization. Advances in information technology, in particular, have dramatically transformed economic life. Information technologies have given all sorts of individual economic actors—consumers, investors, businesses—valuable new tools for identifying and pursuing economic opportunities, including faster and more informed analyses of economic trends around the world, easy transfers of assets, and collaboration with far-flung partners.

Globalization is deeply controversial, however. Proponents of globalization argue that it allows poor countries and their citizens to develop economically and raise their standards of living, while opponents of globalization claim that the creation of an unfettered international

¹(www.wikipedia.org/accessed 29.05.2015)

free market has benefited multinational corporations in the Western world at the expense of local enterprises, local cultures, and common people. Resistance to globalization has therefore taken shape both at a popular and at a governmental level as people and governments try to manage the flow of capital, labor, goods, and ideas that constitute the current wave of globalization.

3. The Relationship between values and norms

The relationship between values and norms becomes clear when a breach of norms defies the group's values; the establishment of behavioural norms reflects its values. This concept extends beyond the group, into larger groups and out into the whole of society itself: for example the way people address each other, and how they conduct themselves in public. People dress according to what is expected of them in the professional environment, such as the academic institution, but differently to their spare time. All such situations demand certain attire and particular ways of behaving.

Therefore, examined through its systems of norms and values, "the culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation" (Linton, 1945). At birth, children are totally helpless and dependent on others to provide for their needs. In order to survive in the longer term, however, children must develop knowledge and skills, and must learn how those around them survive. In other words, children must learn the culture of the society into which they were born.

Culture therefore has to be learned, and for a society to operate effectively, its guidelines must be shared by its members through their behaviour. Learning and sharing a culture is achieved largely without conscious control. It just happens as people develop and become socialised, and even though it directs their actions and thinking, and establishes their outlook on life, most members of a society take their culture for granted. People are hardly aware of their culture, even though their adoption of its values and conformity to its norms demonstrate a mutual understanding of what is and is not acceptable.

4. Definitions of culture

It is difficult to define overall culture since it is an elusive concept. Culture is a dichotomy in the sense that it constitutes first, visible and tangible factors, and second, abstract and intangible characteristics. For example, it was noted earlier that Giddens summarises culture as a consisting sets of values and norms or rules held by a society, together with its material expressions. The term "material expressions" refers to features of the environment that were put in place by people. This includes such tangible items as architectural designs that reflect the culture of a specific community. Values and norms, however, are among the abstract and intangible psychological characteristics of individual and groups.

Herskovits defined culture as a "man-made part of the human-environment". Triandis (1997) qualified this by pointing out that:

[...] this includes both physical objects, such as roads, buildings and tools, which constitute physical culture, and subjective responses to what is “man-made”, such as myths, roles, values and attitudes, which constitute subjective culture.

Later, however, Triandis further qualified this saying that “cultures are human creations but, unlike bridges, buildings, roads and other material objects of our making, cultures are subjective” (Triandis 1997, p36).

Undoubtedly there is a strong relationship between physical and subjective cultures. Subjective perceptions of how things are, how they should be and how they should look, for example, do vary from one society to another. It is in these and many other ways that cultures from one society to another, and since culture defines what is acceptable and what is not, frequent misunderstandings occur between members of different societies, as illustrated above. It seems that the physical culture, which is created by people, may be separated from the subjective culture, which is apparent through the values and norms of societies. It is certainly true that the academics, that have produced non-organisational definitions of culture all include the physical culture. As we shall see below, however, those who define organisational culture tend to exclude the physical aspects.

Misunderstanding may occur if cultures are treated as discrete entities. Just as there is diversity within indigenous populations, there is also intra-cultural diversity created by individual and small-group differences. Within a culture, groups (sub-cultures) look across at each other and do not always approve of what they see and hear.

We look at people from other cultures, see that their ways are different and often dislike these ways. We find similar arguments to support our view in the work of Triandis (1997, p34) that states that we use our own culture as the standard and judge other cultures by the extent to which they meet our standard.

This is referred to as ethnocentrism, and is similar to the in-group concept, the people with whom we identify.

Studies of ethnocentrism show that everyone tends to:

- Define their own culture as “natural” and “correct” and other cultures as “unnatural” and “incorrect”
- Perceive in-group customs as universally valid- what is good for us is good for everybody
- Think that in-group norms, rules and values are obviously correct
- Consider it natural to help and cooperate with members of one’s in-group
- Act in ways which favour the in-group
- Feel proud of the in-group
- Feel hostility towards the out-groups

(Based on the work of Campbell and associates, cited in Triandis (1997, p35).

Having given examples and definitions of culture in general, in the foregoing section, we should now have a sound understanding of the elements of culture. In this section, we examine the degree to which those elements can be read across into the organisational situation. First however, the following definitions will clarify the concept of organisational culture.

Organisational or academic culture is the pattern of values, norms and beliefs that may not have been articulated but shape the ways in which people behave and get things done. (Armstrong 1999)

Organisational culture refers to a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguish the organisation/university/institution from other similar forms of organisation. This system of shared meaning is[...] a set of key characteristics that the organisation values. (Robbins 2001, p510)

Organisational culture is the collection of relatively uniform and enduring values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices that are shared by an organisation's members, learned by new recruits and taught to new trainers (Huczynski and Buchanan 2001).

Robbins (2001, p53) supports the subjective culture within an organisation, saying that: [...] the physical properties of organisations tend to obscure the fact that organisations are really nothing other than the aggregate of individuals. Individuals, therefore, provide the foundation of the organisation; they bring it to life, and to understand why the organisation is what it is and why people behave in the way they do, you have to focus upon the individuals.

5. Organisational subcultures

The interested parties, students and academics, tend to talk and write about any single organisational culture as if it is a uniform phenomenon, while in fact organisations are made up of subcultures that represent different professions, functions and levels. This reduces the number of attitudes and core values that are shared across the whole organisation. It seems, therefore, that from this, one may deduce that the subculture at say, location A, will be different from that of the training department at location B. Furthermore, organisations may have a boardroom subculture, a middle management subculture, a students' subculture, a staff subculture and a trainers' subculture.

Furnham and Gunter (1993) describe the possible effects of the existence of subcultures at different levels and functions:

These sub-cultures can assume varying degrees of significance within the organisation, and can be beneficial if they adopt a common sense of purpose, but problems arise where they have different priorities and agendas. Then sub-cultures can clash with each other or with the overall corporate culture, impeding organisational functioning and performance.

Trainers must understand why students in the organisation behave as they do and must have the ability to alter the culture in order to make it more conducive to the achievement of sectional and overall objectives.

Approaching the issue of educational values can have as a starting point, pertinent and inciting, the idea that, generally, education is perceived as a value. At the basis of this perception there is the belief according to which the key of success in the contemporary society is education itself – a kind of vital force on whose accumulation depends the human accomplishment. But, for education to represent a source of success in life, it must become an education for the real world, to provide the preparation for the real world. The modern educational system standardizes, equalizes or ignores the differences when the informative dimension becomes more and more significant. In this context, some researchers have

formulated the hypothesis of learning as an expression of direct participation in the every day life (the pattern of situated learning). Such a participative learning involves a community dimension and a valoric one and it must respond to the following desiderate: learn to know, learn to learn, learn to be, learn to exist together with others.

Organisational culture probably exerts the greatest influence on individual behaviour when it is taken for granted. One of the major reasons that organisational culture is such a powerful influence on members of an organisation is that it is not explicit. Instead it is an implicit part of the trainee's values and beliefs. It is for these reasons that trainers and academics need to study organisational culture.

In the process of globalization, the intimate relationship between people from different racial, ethnic, national and regional groups becomes such a normative thing and is seen as a good sign of integration process and social diversity. Intercultural communication is an evolving discipline that encapsulates the interactions between individuals or groups from different backgrounds. Diversity and the need for cultural awareness are forever increasing, and this solidifies the direction in which diversity will take in the future. Intercultural communication is going to be a tremendous part of our future and as individuals it will be part of our personal, social and professional relationships. The term "culture" refers to the complex accumulation of knowledge, folklore, language, rules, rituals, habits, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, and customs that link and provide a general identity to a group of people. Cultures take a long time to develop. There are many things that establish identity give meaning to life, define what one becomes, and how one should behave. In contemporary, there is a globalization of society while there are some problems of cross-cultural communication.

6. Individual differences within cultures

When you ask a student about the university where they study, they tend to tell you something of the departments within the university, tradition, statistics and perhaps its size and location. Then when you go to visit the university you see its buildings, classrooms, equipment. However none of this tells you how it is like to study there; only the people can tell you that. If you were to ask them, however, you would get a different account from each one of them, since they are a diverse group and will have his/her unique interpretation of the place and its culture. As an outsider, it is only from this combination of perceptions that you begin to get an idea of the kind of culture in which they train and develop.

The values and norms that make up the culture of the organisation are taken for granted by students and there seems to be a degree of passive acceptance about this. The organisational values and norms are basic assumptions made by students and do not necessarily appear as opinions in questionnaires within a training programme, although from time to time, can and should be expressed in written form.

7. Organisational development and the need for change

Organisational development (OD) is the term used to describe a process through which, using the principles and practices of behavioural science, a change programme is applied in the

organisation, often on an organisation-wide basis. OD is driven by the ultimate purpose of creating an effective organisation by altering the structure and changing for the better, improving some of the trainee's beliefs, attitudes and values. It is concerned not with what is done but with the way things are done, and with creating a new culture of cohesiveness, interdependence and mutual trust.

French and Bell defined OD as:

[...] a planned systematic process in which applied behavioural science principles and practices are introduced in which applied behavioural science principles and practices are introduced into an ongoing organisation towards the goals of effective organisational improvement, greater organisational competence, and greater organisational effectiveness.

The focus is on organisations- universities and their improvement, or to put it another way, total systems change. The orientation is on action- achieving desired results as a result of planned activities. Once the areas and aspects that require change have been identified, the next step is to introduce the ideas to the students. Students vary in their attitudes towards significant change. In general terms, senior students, tend to resist it more than students in the first year that may see it as an interesting challenge. For the latter a new way of training, new training or organisational methods are interesting and may not meet the same resistance factor as by students in their last years of study.

From the analysis of the current culture, there will have been identified, what are defined as "change levers". Some of these change levers described include:

- Performance: performance related or competence pay-schemes, performance management processes, leadership training, skills development
- Commitment: communication, participation and involvement programmes, developing a climate of cooperation and trust; clarifying the psychological contract
- Training programmes: clarifying minutely the training
- Teamwork: team-building, team performance, team-rewards, team/group- motivation
- Organisational learning: taking steps to enhance intellectual capital and the organisation's resource- based capability by developing a learning organisation
- Values: gaining understanding, acceptance and commitment through involvement in defining values, training performance programmes, trainers' development interventions

While working on the change levers, the positive aspects of the traditional culture should be emphasised and re-affirmed, while the new values should be stated clearly and frequently. Students' behaviour that is conducive to the success of the change programme should be rewarded for motivational reasons. When an appropriate culture is in place, action should be taken to ensure that it is embedded or that at least, it remains necessary. We tried to list the five "mechanisms" observed for embedding and reinforcing the culture:

- What trainers pay attention to and control
- Trainer's reactions to critical incidents and crises
- Deliberate role-modelling, teaching and coaching by leaders
- Criteria for allocation of rewards and status

- Criteria for admission within the university, selection, promotion and development

8. Conclusions

Cultural globalization is the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe. [Culture](#) is a very broad concept and has many facets, but in the discussion on globalization, Steger means it to refer to “the symbolic construction, articulation, and dissemination of meaning.” Topics under this heading include discussion about the development of a global culture, or lack thereof, the role of the media. Every organization has its own unique culture or value set, and different organization may have its own comprehension of culture meaning. The culture of the organization is typically created unconsciously, based on the values of the top management or the founders of an organization. In order to achieve a successful culture, trainers shouldn't ignore organizational culture and its themes, because culture can be used as a competitive advantage during development, and a strong culture (one in which beliefs and values are widely shared and strongly held) can also offer many advantages, such as cooperation, control, communication or commitment. Meanwhile, the importance of organizational culture is growing as the result of several recent developments, and the cultural themes can be used constantly to measure the culture of the organization in shaping our identities and desires, and the globalization of languages.

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