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Organizational culture: a foundational perspective

1. Introduction

Management research tends to focus on the nature and consequences of managerial actions whereas business research primarily focuses on the determinants of corporate performance (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson 2012). In the complex and dynamic environment in which businesses function today the culture of an organization is recognized as a crucial dimension that can either be an asset or a hindrance in shaping behavior in organizations and in achieving long-term organizational success (NuñezRamírez, WendlandtAmezag, & Álvarez Medina, 2016). As such, developing knowledge and understanding of organizational culture becomes increasingly important. Therefore, it is not surprising that organizational culture (hereafter also OC) has been identified as a focus area in academic research of organizational theory, as well as in management practice (Alvesson, 2012).

Traditionally methodological approaches employed in business research has been divided into quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This basic methodological distinctions have also been used in OC research (Martin, 2002; Pearse & Kanyangale, 2009). Janićijević (2011) believes that an understanding of a complex phenomenon, such as OC, could be enhanced by employing a wider array of methodological approaches.

2. Purpose

In light of the above discussion the question that guides this investigation concerns the nature of research in the field of OC, beyond that which is usually referred to as quantitative and qualitative approaches. The aim of the study is to perform a typological review of published research on OC to contribute to the existing knowledge by expanding the scope of such research efforts. For this purpose a number of sources with a primary focus on each of four basic knowledge-orientations were identified. This approach has not been followed before, hence the current lack of a broader conceptual and methodological perspective in the organizational culture literature.

Given this specific focus, attention was not directed to a full-scale review of research trends in OC. The present discussion is also *not* aimed at a critical analysis and detailed exposition of various OC models and interpretations, as such.

3. Conceptual background

A contemporary definition of OC is that it is a shared set of values, norms, assumptions, and beliefs that exist among organizational members, which influence employee attitudes, thoughts, feelings, decisions and behaviours (Barbars, 2015; Di Stefano & Scrima, 2016). OC has been studied in relation to individual level outcomes (such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention) (Salman, Aslam, Hussain, Sana, & Ibrahim, 2014), financial and social performance (Tanriverdi, Çakmak & Altindag, 2016), safety and health (Živkovića & Ivanovab, 2016), and organizational structure (Csaszar, 2012). Barney's well-known Resource-Based View recognizes OC as a key component to provide a competitive advantage to organizations (NuñezRamírez, et al, 2016). In addition, it has a direct impact on the innovation strategy of organizations (Naranjo-Valencia, Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2011).

Following the trend-setting contribution of Pettigrew (1979), who is generally credited with being the first to introduce the term, OC has become a major research topic in the decades that followed. The background to this development, however, is that there is little agreement on the concept (Tanriverdi, et al, 2016). Van der Post (1996), for instance, uncovered more than a hundred definitions.

It would appear that the decision as to what the concept means will depend on the nature of the particular knowledge premises (paradigm) from which is approached. With reference to a few well-known scholars, the following discussion reviews various research approaches to the concept.

Early on scholarship essentially became split into two competing camps of thought (referred to as the 'paradigm wars'). To date, this debate between the use of qualitative versus quantitative research in the study of OC has not been resolved (Evans, 2013). Various terms are used to depict this dichotomy, such as *functionalist* (read: positivist) versus *interpretive*; and *objectivistic* versus *subjectivistic* approaches (Robson, 2011).

Whereas the first period of scholarship in this field emphasized an interpretive approach which premised that culture is something that an organization *is* (not another variable property that an organization *has*), the trend later reverted to quantitative surveys of variously conceived 'dimensions' and multi-layered models of OC (see Meek, 1988; Denison, 1996).

Pettigrew, who favors an interpretive approach to the study of OC, proposes a methodology that is: ‘more likely to be interested in language systems of *becoming* than of *being*, of processes of structural elaboration rather than the precise description of structural form...’ (Pettigrew, 1979, p. 570). His aim is to address the problem of how organizational cultures are established, by focusing on symbols, language, ideology, belief, ritual, and myth.

Schein, one of the leading figures in the establishment of the field of OC, focused expressly on the role of founder-leaders in creating an OC. He formulated a subsequently influential definition of OC as consisting of: “...the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration...” (Schein, 1983, p. 14). He emphasized that OC is not about observable organizational conduct and practices, but about hidden assumptions about matters such as the nature of truth, reality and human nature that determine observable aspects of organizational life.

He also proposed a scheme of OC elements focusing on so-called problems of ‘internal integration’ and ‘external adaptation and survival.’ *Internal integration* is about reaching consensus on aspects such as: a common language and conceptual categories, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, power, status, friendship, rewards, and so on (Schein, 1983). *External adaptation*, in turn, focuses on consensus with regard to issues such as: organizational mission, goals, means, measurement of progress, and corrective strategies (Schein, 1983). However, later in his career Schein focused on narrative/clinical studies in his writing about OC (Schein, 1997).

For narrative-interpretive scholars (most of whom favors a sociological paradigm of truth and reality as a, non-positivist, *social construction*) understanding OC is about “...symbol, ideational systems, myth and ritual...” (Meek, 1988 p. 453) or about “...the art of reading and understanding organizational life” (Morgan, 1997, p. 4).

Scholars, such as Schultz and Hatch (1996), propagate an approach of multi-paradigm research. Though they are, in terms of the present analysis, on the right track, they unfortunately weakened their position by adopting an incomplete perspective, as well as an acknowledged bias toward a postmodernist (interpretive) stance. Janićijević (2011) also proposes a mixed methodological approach for OC research.

Hofstede’s pioneering quantitative and comparative survey of dimensions of national culture (Hofstede, 1980) generated a lot of interest and many empirical studies. He proposed a culture framework, consisting of: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism,

masculinity/femininity, long/short term orientation, and indulgence/restraint (see Hofstede, 2011 for a recent summary of his work). Hofstede stressed the fact that his focus was on a comparison of national (*not* organizational) cultures. Yet, his set of culture categories became globally accepted as (also) referring to organizational cultures. In addition, Hofstede is primarily concerned with quantitative analysis and in employees' perceptions of their work environment (Hofstede, 2011).

3.2 Foundational orientations in human knowledge

The present discussion is based on basic approaches that repeat itself in the history of scholarship (Pietersen, 2005; 2016). A number of fundamental and interconnected modes of understanding that typically underpin and shape the products of the human intellect, across a diverse range of disciplines and bodies of knowledge, were identified.

The main propositions of this framework are as follows:

- a) Clearly identifiable, fundamental orientations of mind determine different ideas, theories, and ways of making sense of and dealing with the world.
- b) Each orientation co-exists with the others in a dynamic mutuality of conflict and complementariness.
- c) The though products of scholars are based on their preferred (primary) basic mode of thought, as well as varying degrees of interface with other modes. Thus, in the present context, OC theorists may, for example, primarily prefer one type of research approach but may also be willing and able to use other research approaches when appropriate.
- d) Knowledge endeavors in different disciplines and traditions of thought, and at different levels of analysis, show similarity in terms of underlying intellectual mindsets.
- e) The limitations of one modality of mind are complemented by the strengths of others, especially diagonally opposite modes (types I and III; and types II and IV).

The typology of four knowledge orientations may be described as follows:

1. The *Theoretical-integrative* (Type I) mode;
2. The *Systematic-analytical* (Type II) mode;
3. The *Narrative-metaphorical* (Type III) mode,
4. The *Action-advocacy* (Type IV) mode.

Types I and II are associated with abstract theory-building, and an impersonal scientific rationality (often referred to as positivism), respectively. In contrast, types III and IV are primarily associated with human needs, goals and values. The aim of the last-mentioned modes of knowledge is to *understand* and *describe* the meaning of phenomena and also on *improving* the human condition (e.g., creating a just society) and developing human potential (also in work organizations).

The present paper utilizes this broad framework of four basic orientations or modes of knowledge, outlined above, to analyze the nature of OC scholarship. Some differentiating characteristics of each of the four modes in studies of culture are shown in Table 1.

PLACE TABLE 1 HERE

4. Research design and methodology

A documentary analysis of OC publications that shows clear evidence of the existence of each of the four basic modes in the typological framework was conducted. Scientific publications with the key search term “organizational culture” were obtained, using the Ebscohost and Google Scholar search engines, over a period of six months.

4.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is employed when researchers, based on their own judgement, build a sample up to satisfy the specific needs of a project (Robson, 2011) until data saturation has been reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In order to cast a sufficiently wide net and working back from most recent publications on the topic (2016), 200 OC sources, largely published during the past two decades (but also including a few earlier keynote contributions by research leaders in this field, were accessed. For evidentiary purposes, 34 publications, judged to be exemplars of each of the four research types, was subsequently included for further analysis.

4.2 Content analysis

The review process employed corresponds to a large extent with the process used by Pisani (2009). Full-text (pdf) OC publications was download into a folder. Each of the first selection of articles (n=200) was inspected in detail to arrive at a selection for further analysis. Non-

scholarly, controversy-provoking and promotional articles were excluded from further consideration. Following this, each of the final selection of 34 articles was scrutinized systematically and in detail. An article's primary focus, as evidenced by its *aim, method and reported results*, was judged for its suitability for inclusion in one of the four categories chosen as template. An article was then classified in terms of its suitability or fit with the typological framework.

Articles in which the primary aim of the research was the construction or development of models and theories were judged to be Type 1 research. Articles which focused primarily on hypothesis-testing were categorized as Type 2. Articles which dealt with narratives of perceptions and experiences of OC were identified as Type 3 research. Where the primary focus was changing and managing OC in terms of interventions and evaluation, policies and procedures, articles were deemed to be Type 4 research.

Yang, Wang and Su (2006) emphasize that issues of reliability have to be addressed in the process of content analysis. For this reason, evidence for the credibility of the typological framework is provided in terms of repeated cases of published research for each of the basic modes of research in the Results section.

5. Findings

The following sub-sections show the results in terms of examples of each of the four fundamental types in OC studies. It is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely to serve as sufficiently convincing evidence for the typological framework which is followed here. This should provide a more rounded perspective on the nature of enquiry and study in the field, and help to place the existence of its internal 'paradigm wars' in a proper light, as an ongoing characteristic of the dialectic or dynamic interplay of human intellectual endeavors, generally.

5.1 Type I: Culture Theory

Levi-Strauss, an exemplar of this approach to knowledge was (see Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984), concerned with a search for universals, for unconscious, so-called 'deep structures' of mind. Work in this area is typical of the theoretical-integrative quest to find the most encompassing of frames or possible ideas about phenomena.

In the field of organizational studies an early example is Harrison's Type I schematic of what he refers to as an organization's 'character.' His aim was to propose a way of explaining and

dealing with organizational conflicts through knowledge of: “basic ideological differences that underlie these conflicts” (1972, p. 119). For this purpose he identified four organizational orientations: *task*, *role*, *person* and *power*, and showed the strengths and weaknesses of each. He recommends an open confrontation by organizations of these ongoing ideological differences.

Another of Schein’s typologies (Schein, 1996) in the OC vein, is his discussion of three cultures of management, in which he distinguishes between: *operators* (line managers and workers), *engineers* (technocrats, operational designers), and the *executives* (founder-leaders of organizations).

Allaire and Firsirotu (1984, p. 214) conceive of organizations as multi-layered *socio-cultural systems* (in line with anthropological research). Some of the distinguishing components of OC they propose are: the *cultural system* (myths, values, and ideology); the *socio-structural system* (structures, strategies, policies, and processes); and the *individual actor* (personality and cognitions). This is very similar to Parson’s scheme for sociology, referred to earlier.

Based on their empirical leadership research, Bass and Avolio (1993) developed a number of OC types that reflect various combinations of *transactional* and *transformational* leadership styles, as indicated in Table 2. From a narrative-interpretive perspective Hatch (1993) proposes a model of ‘*cultural dynamics*’ consisting of the symbolic processes of: manifestation, realisation, symbolisation, and interpretation. A number of additional organizational culture schemes are those (see Table 2) of: Trompenaars (1996); Martins and Martins (2002); and Cameron and Quinn (2011).

In sum, there are a wide variety of often highly evolved and complex models of OC, all of whom showcases the existence of the Type I (theoretical-integrative) mode of human knowledge in this field. Table 2 provides a brief list of examples of OC studies in the *theoretical-integrative mode* of knowledge.

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5.2 Type II: Culture Science

As can be seen from the contents of Table 3 below, OC research in the Type II (systematic-analytical) tradition are essentially *hypothesis-testing*, empirical projects aimed at either establishing significant quantitative relationships with other organizational variables, such as

leadership and job satisfaction, *or* as being engaged in the psychometric validation of various culture assessment instruments. This sort of study normally uses large populations and samples in what can also be referred to as theory-verification ventures. In the organizational literature Hofstede (2011) with his global, empirically-based, dimensional structure of culture, represents a prominent approach in the type II (positivist) modality.

Table 3 presents examples of Type II (systematic-analytical) knowledge endeavors originating from a number of different countries.

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5.3 Type III: Culture Narrative

This particular approach seems to have become one of the more popular ways of making sense of organizational life. Scholars working in the ethnography, and social constructionist, tradition are strongly inclined toward narrative descriptions of organizations, typically, as *being* and *not having* cultures. The anthropological exemplar is Geertz (see also Gregory, 1983) who emphasizes the importance of discovering the ‘native’s point of view’. One version of this basic approach to organizations has been called semiotics for its focus on language, symbolic speech, ‘discourse’ and what is referred to as “thick description”. Smircich and Calas (1987), in their treatment of OC from a ‘culture symbolist’ view, is perhaps representative of work in this area. They see the post-modernist goal of organizational scholars as: “The transformation of the organizational culture literature into the cultured organizational literature...it will center on issues of (textual) representation: “...in a never-ending deconstruction of their claims” (Smircich & Calas, 1987, p. 257). Table 4 provides a brief list of examples of OC studies in the *narrative-interpretive mode* of knowledge.

PLACE TABLE 4 HERE

5.4 Type IV: Culture Development

Those who approach OC from this, more ‘ideological’ side are concerned with changing or influencing organization cultures. They are the so-called ‘social engineers’, whether it be, for

instance, from a Neo-Marxist angle or, more commonly, from an ‘organization development’ perspective.

Much of the relevant literature therefore reflects the pragmatic, practitioner focus, which is not surprising in view of the fact that: “...the study of organizational culture is dominated by behavioral scientists working in the 600 schools of management in the U.S.” (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985, p. 469). This group, which also by and large includes the field of Organization Development (OD), is in varying degrees concerned with changing organizations (and by implication OC) in order to help them achieve greater effectiveness and an improved quality of working life for its members. Table 5 provides a brief list of examples of OC studies in the *action-advocacy mode* of knowledge.

PLACE TABLE 5 HERE

6. Discussion and conclusion

The review of the literature on OC shows clear evidence of the appropriateness of the proposed framework for classifying research orientations in this field of endeavour. It provides a more nuanced and comprehensive perspective than the current intellectual polarisation in the OC literature allows for.

OC scholarship in the Type I (culture theory) mode gives evidence of the theoretical-integrative quest to find the most encompassing of frames or possible ideas related to the phenomenon. Type II (culture science) research in this field operates in the standard scientific paradigm of empirical, hypothesis-testing studies. The aim is to provide objective explanations of various elements of OC, also in its relationship with other organizational variables. Type III (culture narrative) research is about recounting the lived experiences of, and meaning of organizational life for its members, using a variety of methods such as content analysis, in-depth interview and case studies, and metaphorical descriptions. Type IV (culture development) research concerns itself with activities and programs aimed at influencing, changing, even transforming organizations in terms of its basic management philosophies, values, norms and corresponding policies and practices.

The present investigation has shown that all four basic modes of understanding and impacting on OC, whether utilizing positivist or non-positivist methodologies, or some combination there-

of, are typically at play. An important implication is that it would be best to avoid an overly narrow approach to doing research in this area, by favoring only one or the other modality of knowledge and research – as occurred earlier on with the so-called ‘paradigm wars’ between researchers and thinkers on this topic.

6.1 Practical implications

Researchers, academics, organizational managers, and human resource management practitioners may fruitfully consider a more comprehensive and integrated perspective on knowledge of OC, instead of getting caught up in endless, either-or, ‘paradigm wars,’ which merely result in ineffectual conceptual conflicts. Simply put, there is room for more than just the usual two ways of conceiving, talking about and influencing OC.

The four-fold framework could also be utilized as a valuable source for restructuring and teaching of research methodology programs and courses in institutions of higher education, especially concerning the general need for greater attention to: theoretical (type I), and evaluation (type IV) research in management and organizational behaviour.

6.2 Limitations and recommendations

Even though the present paper explicitly focused on a selection of paradigm-relevant scholarship in the field of OC, it could be argued that it is a limitation not to have included a wider sample of the literature. However, in view of the aim and originality of the paper, this is not regarded as a serious limitation, as long as sufficient and clear examples of each of the four basic types of research orientations could be shown to exist.

It is recommended that the broadly applicable knowledge (and by implication research) orientations that were introduced here, be considered by OC researchers. The analysis of fundamental approaches to research provides an inclusive perspective on the nature of different ways of studying and understanding OC. This should assist in expanding both scholarly and practitioner horizons.

It is concluded that the analysis of research in the field of OC in terms of fundamental types of human knowledge provides a unique and expanded view on research in this area.

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TABLE 1: Basic approaches in culture scholarship

(Type II)	(Type I)
Culture science	Culture theory
<i>Aim:</i> Explaining culture	<i>Aim:</i> Conceiving culture
<i>Mode:</i> Systematic-analytical	<i>Mode:</i> Theoretical-integrative
<i>Examples:</i> Malinowski, Hofstede	<i>Examples:</i> Levi-Strauss, Schein
(Type III)	(Type IV)
Culture interpretation	Culture development
<i>Aim:</i> Describing culture	<i>Aim:</i> Changing culture
<i>Mode:</i> Narrative-interpretive	<i>Mode:</i> Action-advocacy
<i>Examples:</i> Geertz, Pettigrew	<i>Examples:</i> Brondo, Trompenaars

Table 2: Culture theory (Type I) examples

Author (s)	Year	Description
Harrison, R	1972	<i>Organizational ideologies</i> : task, role, power, person.
Schein, E. H	1996	<i>Management cultures</i> : operator, engineer, executive.
Schein, E. H	1983	<i>Levels of culture</i> : artifacts, beliefs and values, assumptions
Allaire, Y & Firsirotu, M. E	1984	<i>Systems</i> : Socio-structural system, cultural system, individual actors.
Bass, B. M. & Avolio, B. J.	1993	<i>Types</i> : loosely guided, coasting, moderated contractual, garbage can, pedestrian, predominately contractual.
Hatch, M. J.	1993	<i>Cultural processes</i> : manifestation, realization, symbolization, interpretation.
Trompenaars, F.	1996	<i>Dimensions</i> : Universalism-particularism, individualism-collectivism, neutral-affective, specific-diffuse, achievement-ascription, internal-external control.
Martins, E & Martins, N.	2002	<i>Dimensions</i> : strategic vision and mission, customer focus, means to achieve objectives, management processes, employee needs and objectives, interpersonal relationships, leadership.
Cameron, K. S. & Quinn, R. E.	2006	<i>Dimensions</i> : internal-external focus, flexibility-stability. Four culture types: clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, market.

Table 3: Culture science (Type II) examples

Author (s)	Year	Description
Klein, A. S. & Masi, R. J.	1995	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 823): Organization culture, control, performance, service
Van der Post, W. Z. & De Coning, T. J. & vd M Smit.	1997	<i>Validation</i> study (N = 408): 15 organization culture dimensions supported.
Howard, L. W.	1998	<i>Validation</i> study (N = 68): Competing values model (CVM) supported.
Tsui, A. S. & Wang, H & Xin, K. R.	2006	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 542): Organization culture (CVM), performance, China.
Baird, K. & Harrison, G. & Reeve, R.	2007	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 184): Organization culture (OCP), strategy, Australia.
Martin, N & Coetzee, M.	2007	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 181): Organization culture, job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, South Africa.
Roos, W. & Van Eeden, R.	2008	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 118): Organization culture, motivation, job satisfaction, South Africa.
Marchand, A. & Haines, V. Y. & Dextras-Gauthier, J.	2013	<i>Validation</i> study (N = 1164): Organization culture dimensions (CVM) supported, Canada
Acar, A. Z. & Acar, P.	2014	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 512): Organization culture, business performance, Turkey.
O'Reilly III, C. A. & Caldwell, D. F. & Chatman, J. A. & Doerr, B.	2014	<i>Hypothesis-testing</i> (N = 1258): Organization culture, personality, performance, USA.

Table 4: Culture narrative (Type III) examples

Author (s)	Year	Description
Pettigrew, A. M.	1979	Longitudinal <i>interview</i> study of social drama processes in a private school in terms of symbols and the language of meaning describing ideologies, beliefs, rituals, and myths.
Barley, S. R.	1983	Ethnographic <i>interview</i> study of a funeral home and the funeral director's understanding of his tasks in terms of semiotic analysis.
Heracleous, L.	2001	Ethnographic <i>interview/observation</i> study of the organizational culture of a consulting firm.
Butterfield, L. D. & Borgen, W. A. & Amundson, M. E. & Erlebach, A. C.	2010	<i>Interviews</i> to surface workers' experience of their work, using the critical incident technique.
Cilliers, F.	2011	Describe leadership coaching experiences, using <i>participant observation</i> and <i>discourse analysis</i> .
Crabb, S.	2011	In-depth <i>thematic analysis</i> to identify drivers of employee work engagement.
Nokelainen, M.	2016	<i>Thematic qualitative interviews</i> to identify elements of a happy organizational culture.
Campbell, J-L. & Göritz, A. S.	2014	<i>Content analysis</i> of in-depth interviews to study organizational culture in corrupt organizations.

Table 5: Culture development (Type IV) examples

Author (s)	Year	Description
Morgan, G.	1997	Intervention using <i>metaphors</i> of octopi, amoebas, spiders, supernovas, and dandelion seeds to create a shared appreciation of the ideas and principles on which on organization builds and the role they can play in helping maintain unconventional forms.
Ogbonna, E. & Harris, L. C.	1998	Reports the consequences of attempts to manage change in an organization's culture, using <i>case study</i> findings.
Young, D. W.	2000	Identifies <i>levers</i> for organizational culture change: strategy formulation, authority and influence, motivation, management control, conflict management, and customer management
Scheel, R. & Crous, F.	2007	Uses the method of <i>appreciative inquiry</i> (AI) to show how the spirit (culture) of an organization is rejuvenated.
O'Donnell, O. & Boyle, R.	2008	Reports on a culture <i>change project</i> in the Australian public sector.
Kulvinskienė, V. R. & Seimienė, E. S.	2009	Uses a mixed methodology to report on a furniture firm's organizational culture <i>change program</i> .
Van Eeden, R.	2010	Reports on the impact of an organizational change project in a production company, using a <i>system-psychodynamic</i> approach.