



Journal of Organizational Change Management

Managing conflicts in the nonprofit sector through organizational culture change

Alexis Louis Roy, Christelle Perrin,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Alexis Louis Roy, Christelle Perrin, (2018) "Managing conflicts in the nonprofit sector through organizational culture change", Journal of Organizational Change Management, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-11-2016-0254>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-11-2016-0254>

Downloaded on: 22 July 2018, At: 11:18 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 60 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:573577 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Managing conflicts in the nonprofit sector through organizational culture change

Alexis Louis Roy and Christelle Perrin

Graduate School of Management, Université de Versailles St-Quentin en Yvelines, Guyancourt, France

Managing
conflicts in the
nonprofit
sector

Received 27 November 2016
Revised 21 June 2017
27 August 2017
Accepted 15 December 2017

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of organizational culture on the conflict handling style in non-profit organizations. Conflicts in non-profit organizations and especially in associations are more numerous, mainly because of the search for compromise in the decision-making phases and the high level of loyalty in mission that strongly stimulates the voice of one's opinion. The authors observe that a modification of the organizational culture, through symbolic changes, can resolve the conflicts sequence.

Design/methodology/approach – Culture is measured through the organizational culture profile tool and the culture deciphering technique. The authors detail two cases of non-profit organizations, in which conflicts sequence resolution was handled through organizational culture change while conflicts resolution at the individual level could not bring an end to the conflicts sequence.

Findings – These cases highlight how organizational culture shapes behaviors and conflicts handling styles. These cases also give insights on how an organizational culture can be changed to setup new default conflict handling styles in an organization. The cultural change management only worked when it was planned on critical cultural change readiness factors with a strong enforcement of the change by the governing bodies.

Research limitations/implications – This study complements research studies on how organizational culture shapes attitudes and behaviors and shows how and under which conditions a cultural change could resolve a conflict sequence. This study also presents a conflict resolution method when the roots of conflicts are embedded in the existing organizational culture. In such conflicts situation, interpersonal conflict resolution technique did not solve the conflicts sequence and only cultural change finally brought an end to the sequence.

Practical implications – A combined search on two levels, the individual level and the organizational culture level, will thus show convergent conflict sources and get a great deal of knowledge before solving individual-level conflicts.

Social implications – The non-profit sector is sometimes subject to high-conflict situation and this research contributes to more efficient conflict resolution protocols with an applicable method of conflict analysis, change management and conflict resolution.

Originality/value – The work showed how the organizational culture is a key element in the explanation of conflict sources and conflict handling in case of high and repeated conflict situation. It is thus possible to resolve conflict sequence by changing a carefully chosen cultural trait. Nevertheless, the culture change management program is complex and risky. In a high-conflict situation, the authors identified several key conflict resolution factors: the careful identification of the organizational culture traits explaining conflict handling style; the alignment of the management team on the cultural change plan to raise up the intensity of the new set of behaviors; and the selection of the most efficient symbolic change decision.

Keywords Culture change, Conflict resolution, Organizational culture, Culture deciphering, Nonprofit sector

Paper type Research paper

This paper discusses conflict management in the nonprofit sector through organizational culture change. While most research on conflict management points to the importance of psychological factors and situational factors in conflict resolution (Rahim, 1983), fewer works have explored the link between conflict resolution and organizational factors (Lawless and Trif, 2016). Works on organizational factors focus mainly on the training of line managers in conflict resolution and support from the HR department (Roche and Teague, 2012). Our paper considers a new perspective and illustrates the link between organizational culture and conflict. In this study, we have designed a new conflict resolution mechanism based on corporate culture change. Interpersonal conflicts within organizations, either linked to the work organization or to daily tasks, have negative and costly impacts, such as absenteeism, deterioration of involvement



at work (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), in particular, in the context of complex task achievement (De Dreu *et al.*, 2001). Researchers have proposed the deployment of conflict management systems (Rahim, 1983; van de Vliert *et al.*, 1995) to achieve improvements in organizational efficiency and cost reduction (Ury *et al.*, 1988; Lipsky *et al.*, 2003; Le Flanchec and Rojot, 2009). Moreover, some authors have shown that conflicts in non profit organizations, and especially in associations, are more numerous, mainly because compromises are sought in the decision-making phases (Schwenk, 1990), the management style is informal (Hunter and Renwick, 2009; Saundry, Jones and Wibberley, 2015), there are opportunities to react when dialoguing with managers and directors as they are open to consensus (de Reuver, 2006), there is high level of loyalty in the workplace and the non profit's mission strongly stimulates people to voice their opinion, in conflict situation instead of demonstrably backing down (Vigoda and Cohen, 2003; Hoffmann, 2006; Unal and Turgut, 2015).

Within organizations in the sector of non profit sector interpersonal conflicts can emerge sequential manner. In a conflict sequence, different pairs of employees, at various managerial levels, can enter into highly intensive conflicts on various and unrelated work subjects (e.g. conditions of expatriation, decision on a salary raise or change in scope of work) over a period of time. Such sequences strongly impact the efficiency of the organization. Neither the classic collective dispute resolution with employee representatives, nor individual mediation on each interpersonal conflict with an ombudsman (Young, 1982; Mayer, 1995) can halt the conflict sequence.

In view of the difficulty of such situations, we wanted to reconsider the conflict resolution mechanism in nonprofit organizations. Based on our empiric experience of the non profit sector, we observed that organizational culture change was a more efficient method of conflict resolution: cultural change would change professional behaviors that would, in turn, solve the conflict sequence. Following new directions of research claimed by Chatman and O'Reilly (2016) in organizational culture studies, we set out, in this paper, to study how culture shapes attitudes and behaviors and how organizational culture change produces new observed behaviors. Our model thus considers the interplay between two separate levels and how this explains the dynamics of conflict: the individual conflict handling level and the cultural level that shapes the default style for conflict handling.

The authors conducted a research study to demonstrate the impact of organizational culture on conflict sequence resolution in non profit organizations. An organizational culture assessment was conducted at two non profit organizations facing problematic conflict sequences. The organizational culture profile (OCP) tool (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991), combined with field culture deciphering interviews (Schein, 2004, p. 212), were used to identify and reach a consensus on the main cultural trait listed in the OCP tool that define each non profit organization. Rituals and norms create an organizational coherency around the vision and role of the organization. Symbols carry the shared vision and act as shortcuts to recall the organization's purpose (Pfeffer, 1981). In the first organization, organizational culture change, through one symbolic action (Johnson, 1990), terminated the conflict sequence. In this context, a symbolic action refers to a powerful action that changes the cognitive bases of the conflict handling style (Rahim, 1983) embedded in the organizational culture and declares the new shared way to handle conflicts within the organization. In the second organization, the organizational culture change process failed due to poor support from the Board. Five new, consecutive, intense, interpersonal conflicts were then observed within the six months following the initial organizational culture assessment, despite the conflict resolution protocol in place and an ombudsman being asked to dialog with the conflicting parties. The research team and the board of directors then set up a complete culture change management process rooted in strong management enforcement (Cinite *et al.*, 2009; Johnson, 1990). The change initiative, associated with one key cultural trait, was finally accepted by the employees and no new conflict was observed during the next three months.

The new individual attitudes shaped by the collective organizational culture change succeeded when that cultural change was strongly supported by senior management.

The authors had observed that the symbolic change selected, and the readiness for culture change (Cinite *et al.*, 2009) were two key and complex prerequisites to any conflict sequence resolution. It was up to the management team to decide whether the complexity of the organizational culture change and the risk for unexpected outcomes (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002) were worth the challenge for the organization.

This research intends to contribute to one current research question, that is to say “(the) need to explore the underlying mechanisms of action and explicate how culture is formed” (Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016) in a context of workplace conflict handling. Our research also explores another issue in organizational culture: “identifying the major enablers and obstacles to changing culture” (Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016) in particular in a high-conflict situation.

In the first section, we will give a theoretical insight, firstly, on the link between organizational culture and conflict resolution, then on how organizational culture is changed. The empirical study, grounded on two case studies will show how organizational culture shapes attitudes and behavior in such a strong way that only a culture change could solve a conflict sequence. Our case studies will also show that even strong agreement from a large majority of the employees on the benefits of the cultural change will not be sufficient for a successful cultural change: organization leaders must also strongly enforce the new norms at least at the start of the change.

1. Organizational culture and conflict resolution

Three sets of factors, namely, situational, personal and organizational, influence the way conflicts are handled (Lawless and Trif 2016). Organizational culture, although clearly listed by Lawless and Trif as the third set of factors, is nevertheless scarcely considered as a key factor in conflict handling. We set out to analyze this particular organizational factor among the other factors in conflict handling as this factor can be linked to personal factors, especially in intensive organizational cultures (Burt *et al.*, 1994; Sorensen 2002). Indeed, intensive culture can actually shape behaviors at work even if that behavior is not the employee’s preferred behavior. Taking organizational culture into consideration could open up a new dispute resolution mechanism based on culture change. This complementary method may enrich the existing individual dispute resolution mechanisms listed by Teague and Roche (2012): open-door policy, employee hotlines, ombudsman, peer-review panels, management review boards and arbitration. While there is an extensive quantity of results on many aspects of conflict handling and resolution, notably in the non profit sector, studies on conflict resolution and organizational culture are still scarce (Kudonoo *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, the research results available on both topics can lead to interesting partial conclusions on how organizational culture shapes attitudes and behaviors and, in particular, shapes interpersonal conflicts handling in the workplace; and how an organizational culture can be changed in the non profit sector in a high-conflict situation.

Conflicts in the non profit sector

Workplace conflict refers to “a process in which one party perceives its interests to be opposed or negatively affected by another party’s” (Wall and Callister, 1995, p. 517). We review, below, several explanatory factors linked with conflict development and management in the workplace such as sectoral factors and psychological factors.

The non profit sector represents a relevant arena for the study of conflicts because conflicts there are frankly voiced, especially in the decision-making phases (Schwenk, 1990), managers and directors in non-governmental organization (NGO) are more permissive which tends to suggest a more dominant behavior from the employees when reacting to superiors (de Reuver, 2006; Saundry, Jones and Wibberley, 2015), and employees display high loyalty due to their

profound agreement on the organization's values and are more likely to include "voice" among the ways they would resolve workplace problems rather than "exit" the organization (Vigoda and Cohen, 2003; Hoffmann, 2006; Unal and Turgut, 2015).

Non profit sector employees have different motivational factors than those working in most for-profit sectors. The public service motivation measurement tool (Perry, 1996) highlights the motivational gaps between for-profit and non profit sectors. In this respect, subsequent field studies have shown how the societal mission of people undermines the desire for employee alignment with their management, as is summarized in the following quote from a non profit sector worker (Brewer *et al.*, 2000, p. 257): "The public should come before people who are above you in office." Moreover, the appearance of discrepancy between the symbolic image of a non profit organization and the reality of the "hands-on" methods in the field can lead to disillusionment that will in turn fuel conflict situations.

Work on the sources of conflict (Rahim, 1983; Van de Vliert and Kabanoff, 1990; Mayer, 1995) has shown that conflict development and resolution are rooted in the psychological state of conflict handling of each participant rather than in perceived reasons for the conflict (such as conflicts of interest). The combination of two basic dimensions related to the psychological state of participants, namely, the concern for oneself and the concern for others, appeared to be an effective base to describe conflict management styles (Rahim, 1983): integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. Subsequent work has shown the stability of this explanatory axis, whatever managerial role any participant holds in the conflict (Rahim and Magner, 1995; Thomas *et al.*, 2008). The psychological state of a participant in a conflict, thus better explains conflict development and resolution, rather than organizational factors such as participants' hierarchical level within the organization (Munduate *et al.*, 1999; Lawless and Trif, 2016).

Research on conflict evolution has been focused on the analysis of interpersonal conflict at various stages (Coleman and Kugler, 2014; Ng *et al.*, 2007). Mayer (2000, pp. 164-176) introduces a conflict sequential re-framing method to track participants' dynamic readjustments, according to conflict evolution and encountered deadlocks. Ombudsmen and managers should thus propose an adaptation to the manner in which communication and conflicts are managed along with conflict changes (Mayer, 1974; Mayer, 1995).

Interpersonal conflicts within organizations are either linked to work organization or to tasks that have negative and costly impacts, such as absenteeism, deteriorate involvement at work (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). An organization can then call upon a conflict management ombudsman. In an interpersonal approach to conflicts, dispute resolution mechanisms first identify conflictual, psychological sources, on a case-by-case basis, before attempting a dispute resolution procedure (Young, 1982; Arnold and O'Connor, 1999).

Researchers have proposed deploying conflict management systems (Ury *et al.*, 1988; Lipsky *et al.*, 2003; Le Flanchec and Rojot, 2009). However, field surveys have not been able to confirm any real benefits of such systems in terms of the organizations' outcomes (Roche and Teague, 2012).

We conclude from these researches that interpersonal conflict resolution methods should focus on the individual level rather than the organizational level; several conflict resolution methods should target a change in the psychological representation of the conflicting situation from both parties; and collective conflict management systems have not brought real benefits to organizations. These results thus call for a new conflict analysis and resolution method based on shared attitudes and behaviors embedded in organizational culture.

Organizational culture and conflict sequence

There is no one definition of organizational culture (Chatman and O'Reilly, 2016). Numerous definitions range from a sociocultural system to sets of symbols, from language, cognitive schema to shared corporate practices. Schein (2004), in his founding work on organizational

culture, considers that organizational culture is forged precisely in response to conflicts that an organization overcomes. He defines organizational culture as, “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17). This organizational culture definition helped us anchor our clinical research and interviews on “shared professional habits,” and to find individual dissonances toward habits considered as “not working well enough,” by group members. Organizational culture then synthesizes a part of the psychological states of the participants in conflict within an organization, and, “we can draw on the analogy that culture is to the organization as character is to the individual” (Schein, 2004, p. 212). Following this same approach, the researchers also sought, in particular, recurring interactions, in order to analyze an organization and to explain the operating modes (Bériot, 2006), that constitute their default conflict handling mode.

Organizational researchers defined the intensity of a shared attitude or behavior as the “group member (desire) to sanction others for non-compliance and reward them for compliance” (Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016). They identified a key characteristic of organizational culture that differs from individual psychology: high-intensity collective behavior will continue even in low consensus and low content agreement situation (Burt *et al.*, 1994; Sorensen, 2002; Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016). This important result may explain the continuation of a conflicts sequence despite several interpersonal mediations having taken place: an organization may continue an inappropriate but intense behavior despite a large majority of members being unsatisfied with that behavior.

When assessing an organizational culture, consultants involved in clinical research (Schein, 1993) can use both open-ended questions (Schein, 2004; Armenakis *et al.*, 2011), and structured tools such as the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) (O’Reilly *et al.*, 1991). The OCP lists collective habits in place and is consistent with Schein’s (2004) organizational definition. Chatman and O’Reilly (2016) made an extensive review of the OCP method 25 years after its first publication that confirmed the construct validity of the tool. In the OCP’s Q-Sort procedure, an employee is presented with organizational culture traits and asked to sort them according to the relevance of that cultural trait to the organization. This tool allows us to identify potential sources of misalignment and conflict. In particular, person–organization fit research extensively uses the OCP method (Baird *et al.*, 2007; Goldberg *et al.*, 2006; Chatman *et al.*, 2014; Wronka-Pośpiech and Frączkiewicz-Wronka, 2016). But, we used the OCP tool in our context to describe the link between conflict sequence and some cultural traits measured with OCP.

When an organization suffers from troublesome conflicts, in general, the human resource (HR) departments avoid carrying out a global study on organizational culture due to cost constraints and to avoid unexpected impacts on their employees’ motivation (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). Conflicts, and especially sequences of conflicts, are nevertheless detrimentally expensive to organizations, and conflict management procedures, currently in place within organizations, are not entirely satisfactory in the opinion of consultants (Roche and Teague, 2012). These findings can result in exploring conflict resolution on two levels, the interpersonal level and the organizational culture level, to demonstrate the convergence conflict sources and glean a vast array of knowledge before solving conflicts at the interpersonal level (Lawless and Trif, 2016; Ndiaye and Abraham, 2016).

The OCP survey results can be openly presented to the organization’s employees. In a conflict resolution perspective, the general presentation should be completed with employees’ comments on conflicts and cultural traits collected during the survey. A consensus of more than 80 percent on the selected culture traits is very often reached among the employees (O’Reilly *et al.*, 1991). On condition that a consensus is reached among employees, the OCP survey results thus shape a collectively agreed synthesis of their own organizational culture. Moreover, some traits are collectively associated with existing or

recent conflicts (e.g. employees collectively associating one frequently selected OCP trait such as “lack of decisiveness” with some recent conflicts). The collective discussion on organizational culture and its relationship with existing conflicts sequence is an equivalent, in a collective context, to a conflict re-framing (Mayer, 1995).

The collective re-framing opens up a new discussion about the desired culture that may solve the existing conflicts. A desired culture change will compel the employees to view their conflictual organizational culture as part of the problem instead of considering themselves as the conflict source (Boyce *et al.*, 2015) and may, therefore, help accelerate interpersonal conflict re-framing.

We conclude from this sub-part that organizational culture may reflect attitudes and behaviors that are collectively shared among a group, an inefficient conflict handling style embedded in the organizational culture may prolong a conflicts sequence, individual conflicts may come to an end at the interpersonal level but another conflict may occur shortly after due to the default conflict handling style, thus prolonging the conflicts sequence in place; and a group of employees can consciously discuss their organizational culture; that discussion may lead to a conflict re-framing at the organizational level; and the collective re-framing could point out undesired culture traits and new desired culture traits. We therefore put forward the proposition that a conflict sequence could be solved by replacing an inefficient conflict handling style (Rahim, 1983) embedded in the culture (such as dominating or avoiding) by a more efficient conflict handling style (such as integrating or compromising) embedded in the new expected attitudes and behaviors of the new organizational culture.

Organizational culture change

Once the conflict root cause analysis shows that the conflict sequence is embedded in some organizational culture traits, we should consider the conditions under which a nonprofit organizational culture could evolve.

Several authors (Johnson, 1990; Armenakis *et al.*, 2011) suggest driving organizational culture changes through symbolic actions, which often have a powerful, and immediate impact on employees. As Pfeffer (1981) argues, symbols are actions that change the cognitive bases of the current situation and declare new intentions (Johnson, 1990). Fuller (2008) considers “symbols as one of the primary indicators of organizational culture.” Symbolic actions carried out by management are “identifiable actions, objects, or language that convey an abstract meaning” (Fuller, 2008), and in the conflictual context, should demonstrate, with high intensity (Burt *et al.*, 1994; Sorensen, 2002; Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016), to employees, the coveted answers to the organization’s challenges.

In this context of conflict resolution through organizational culture change, management actions will express a new “way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2004) and will tend to reverse habits and conflicts handling styles (Rahim, 1983) that generally induced the conflicts (e.g. from avoiding style to integrating style or from dominating style to compromising style). Examples are: an invitation to the employee representatives to attend an HR salary committee; implementing a set of rules for the enforcement of collective decision making. Bartunek (1984) showed that such action at the organizational culture level, will in turn, have an impact on employees’ interpretation of positive change: “The process of change in interpretive schemes is in a reciprocal relationship with changes in structure. This relationship is not direct, but rather is mediated by the actions of organizational members and their emotional reactions to change” (Bartunek, 1984, p. 355).

The handling of culture change within the organization is a complex process that should take into account several key success factors. In the public sector (Cinite *et al.*, 2009), cultural change management would be accelerated when five important factors are taken into consideration by the change management team: commitment of senior managers to the change, competence of change agents, support of the immediate manager, good communication of

change and its positive impact on work. Directors will thus have to carefully design the organizational culture change project taking account of these five factors: a the wrong perception of any of the factors by employees may put at risk the whole change project.

Several researchers have already considered the specific requirements of organizational culture change management in the non profit sector. The change process should take into account the specific context in at least two areas: symbolic actions should not undermine the organization's desire to work in the public interest (Chen and Bozeman, 2013) and change management should be based not only on employee confidence in the governance chain (Manville and Broad, 2013) but also on the goal of importance congruence between the top management level and the vice-presidents (Colbert *et al.*, 2008).

We conclude from this second set of literature review that the culture change process in the non profit sector should consider several key success factors: search for the public interest, alignment of the governance chain, and strong support by top management to raise the intensity of the new behavior at the start of the culture change.

Previous works have shown the interplay between interpersonal behaviors and organizational culture but have also revealed that culture change success is rooted, to some degrees, in counterintuitive factors: a high-intensity collective behavior can be maintained even in low consensus and low engagement situations. Nevertheless, despite several constraints and limitations when applying this conceptual tool, organizational culture appears to be a powerful concept to adopt for conflict resolution at a collective level.

In the recent debate on organizational culture referred to by Chatman and O'Reilly (2016), namely how culture shapes attitudes and behaviors, and "what are the major enablers (...) to changing culture" (Chatman and O'Reilly 2016), we study in this paper how conflict handling styles can be linked with organizational culture; and how cultural change could resolve a conflict sequence in particular in high-conflict situations. These research questions open up an alternative conflict resolution mechanism through organizational culture change.

2. Two complementary case studies in conflict resolution

We have set out to illustrate how organizational culture change can be used to resolve a conflicts sequence in an organization. We present below two case studies from the non profit sector. One of the authors of this paper has had field experience in this sector. As the two cases share several similarities, they can be presented together: same professional sector and size, both organizations were suffering from a disturbing conflict sequence and both the management teams were willing to solve their ongoing conflicts through a cultural change process.

Our method mixes clinical and consulting work (Schein, 1993; Yin, 1982) as our involvement was requested to help both organizations overcome their internal conflicts. This type of intervention gave us wide access to primary and secondary data for the study.

In this section, we will introduce each case study and present the intervention method that we used to explore the link age between organizational culture and conflicts sequence. We will then present each organization's culture and the main culture deciphering results on their ongoing conflicts sequence. We will also analyze more precisely the joint dynamics between conflict resolution and the introduction of symbolic culture change in each organization.

Presentation of case studies

We worked with two non profit organizations that we have codenamed NPT1 and NPT2. Both organizations had about 30 employees and 20% of the employees were interviewed in our research. NPT1 is a highly organized associative school and brings together employees who choose this organization for the values enshrined in the institution. The NPT1 case presents a culture of strong organization and the avoidance of conflicts. NPT2 is an affiliate of an International NGO working in humanitarian crises and development projects, in

developing countries. NPT2 has an organizational culture of compromise that favors open expression of dissenting views.

We focused our study on internal conflict sequences involving two employees, or else the general manager and one employee. At NPT1, the study was carried out over six months. Our study at NPT2 was carried out over a period of two years, in order to observe the impact of the organizational culture change decisions on the level of conflict.

Our organizational culture surveys and our interviews used the OCP tool (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991). This tool provided generic descriptions of cultural traits that could be interpreted differently by the respondents. The respondents were asked to illustrate each cultural trait they selected with specific examples. Interviews, using the open-ended of Schein (2004) methodology, helped to describe the link between the OCP traits and the actual conflicts expressed by the employees. Conflicts and organizational culture studies called for qualitative data methods for analyzing talk and interaction (Miller and Crabtree, 1994) as conflicts were rooted in the psychological state of each participant (Rahim, 1983; Van de Vliert and Kabanoff, 1990; Mayer, 1995). Conclusions from analysis of the initial consultation phase were critical to locate the conflicts on particular culture traits. We made extensive use of confirmatory meetings and cross-checking of quotes (Silverman, 1995) to understand which particular habits were not considered any more as the "correct way" to solve "internal integration problems" (Schein, 2004, p. 17).

Data collection

Data collection quality on conflicts and organizational culture deciphering can be measured in terms of two components (Schein, 2004): factual accuracy and interpretative accuracy. Factual accuracy was reached through collection of conflicts cases from interviewees (we interviewed 20 percent of the employees at NPT1 and 22 percent of the employees at NPT2) and cross-checked with secondary data documents, meeting minutes from the people involved in a conflict, and e-mails. The triangulation with secondary data confirmed and showed the evolution amongst participants of both the conflicts themselves and conflict handling style (Rahim, 1993).

OCP interpretative accuracy was controlled through: accuracy of the linkage between conflicts and OCP traits, and effective resolution of conflicts after cultural change. Interviewees associated conflict stories and OCP cultural traits. The interpretative accuracy was controlled through the coherency between the selection of OCP traits and the compilation of quotes. Quotes were presented together with OCP traits during general sessions. The attendees validated the association between conflicts and cultural traits. If there was no full convergence of the group on a cultural trait linkage with a conflict, we iterated the analysis to reach a consensus in a next meeting. Interpretative accuracy was based on the capacity to predict how the observed organization would solve forthcoming difficulties. Managers reviewed the organizational culture description and were asked to set up the desired organizational culture by completing the following statement: "Tomorrow, if we face this kind of issues, we should in most cases react this way." The final conflict resolution control was done in a general review meeting with the employees and unions.

Individuals were asked to select 16 cultural traits among a set of cultural traits, listed in Table I. According to the Q-Sort methodology, each employee selected eight traits that fully described the organization and eight other traits that described the opposite of their organization. For each selected cultural trait, we collected recent significant facts from the interviewees.

As expected, the employees selected the OCP cultural traits with great consistency. We only considered, in our study, the cultural traits that were chosen by a large majority of the respondents: at NPT1, more than 80 percent of the respondents chose the same 16 cultural traits in the organization; at NPT2, 70 percent of the respondents chose the same 16 cultural traits among the OCP traits.

Organizational culture traits

Respondents are asked to select 16 traits among the 40 traits below: two cultural traits that define very well, their organization today, six cultural traits that define their organization well, six other traits that define what is not at all the organization today and six other traits that define what the organization is not

Achievement orientation	Decisiveness
Adaptability	Developing friends at work
An emphasis on quality	Enthusiasm for the job
Autonomy	Fairness
Being aggressive	Having a clear guiding philosophy
Being analytical	Having a good reputation
Being calm	Having high expectations for performance
Being competitive	High pay for good performance
Being distinctive—different from others	Informality
Being highly organized	Not being constrained by many rules
Being innovative	Offers praise for good performance
Being people oriented	Opportunities for professional growth
Being quick to take advantage of opportunities	Paying attention to details
Being reflective	Risk taking
Being results oriented	Security of employment
Being rule oriented	Sharing information freely
Being socially responsible	Stability
Being supportive	Taking individual responsibility
Being team-oriented	Tolerance
Confronting conflicts directly	Working long hours

Source: O'Reilly *et al.* (1991)

Table 1.
List of the
40 organizational
culture traits used
in the study

Our response protocol on conflicts is described below. The same protocol was applied at NPT1 and NPT2. Observations collected from the two organizations are presented afterwards.

Response protocol

Two non profit organizations were each hampered by a high level of internal conflict. The management and the Board of Directors had thus requested researchers to come and exercise a conflict resolution protocol with the parties in conflict. The authors used the same protocol in both organizations:

Step 1: structured interviews. We carried out an organizational culture diagnosis through structured interviews (OCP and Q-sort methodology). This first step had been explained beforehand to the general management and to the employees in a meeting, at the beginning of the assignment.

Step 2: organizational culture. The research team collected significant statements, expressed by the employees, to describe each selected cultural trait. This approach clarified the definition of the cultural traits as understood by the employees. The 16 most selected traits encompassed 70–80 percent of all the responses collected in each culture study, within the same organization, and provided a general perception of the organizational culture.

Step 3: culture deciphering (Schein, 2004, p. 205). Recent accounts of conflicts, associated with selected cultural traits were collected from the employees. We could then identify from the employees which trait was considered the most embarrassing. The consultant could then finally present of synthesis of the culture deciphering study and the organizational culture change recommendations to the Board and the general manager.

Step 4: sponsoring of change from the board. Based on the identified relationships between culture and conflict, and the level of inconvenience that this situation created, the general management and the Board could decide to engage (or not) in actions of change (Johnson, 1990) to modify this cultural trait.

Step 5: feedback to employees. Employees received feedback on the culture survey in the course of one or more plenary meetings. Under the conditions of approval, stipulated by the Board in Step 4, researchers also presented, in the same meeting, the cultural trait identified by employees as a source of conflict, and which needed to be dealt with. We collected the reactions of the employees, expressed either in meetings or within a month after the meetings. Reactions from employees were either a request for clarification on the results or an expression of concern about the planned cultural change.

Step 6: observation of changes in conflicts. Information on the evolution of conflicts and on new conflicts that may have occurred within the organization was collected over a period of several months up to 2 years. This observation helped us detect a possible change of cultural trait at the source of the conflicts. We could thus adapt dispute resolution strategy to the changed culture trait (e.g. confronting conflicts directly in the new culture while this was previously not accepted). Three indications helped to analyze the similarity, or else change, in the newly occurring conflicts: the conflict participants referred to the conflict as being due to the recent culture change decision; change in the conflict handling style of the participants; and how third parties in the conflict were now involved with the participants. Based on these observations, we could determine whether the types of conflict had changed compared to Step 3 or not.

Case 1: associative school (NPT1)

NPT1 is an associative school located in the north of France. This school is managed by a religious order. The school was founded 40 years ago. At the time of the study, the school enrolled 135 junior high school students and 65 primary school students. The school welcomes students from Monday morning to Friday afternoon and offers boarding. The school has a very good reputation among families.

The establishment has 15 associate teachers who are not members of the religious order. They work part-time teaching and supervising the students. In total, 15 members of the religious order, all qualified to teach, are involved in the school. They both teach during the day, and also supervise the boarding school at night from Monday to Friday.

The researchers were called by the school director. The school was suffering from several long and ongoing conflicts involving the director and a few employees. These conflicts related to the decision-making process amongst teachers and between the teachers and the director.

An organizational culture survey of NPT1 (Steps 1 and 2) was conducted in June 2016, with the director, a manager, two professorial members of the religious order and two associate professors. Two members of the religious order and two associate professors were chosen by the school director, together with the teachers, to meet the researchers. Each meeting lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes. A feature of the dominant culture was a very tight organization of tasks and procedures, but also, an aversion to the discussion of management decisions. Table II shows the results of the culture survey for this organization.

The sources of conflict associated with the organizational culture were confirmed by interviews (Step 3). We present, below, excerpts from the interviews associated with two cultural traits: "Being highly organized," and, "Confronting conflicts directly" (inverse). In addition, we noted examples of conflicts, given by employees, and the triangulation data that confirmed the information collected.

Employees associated, "Being highly organized," with several definitions and examples of conflicts:

"Everyone knows what to do. A large table on a poster lists the services per week and per teacher."
 "Culture has changed: work is more focused." "Several people say: I do not take any responsibility without first asking."

We then gathered examples of recent conflicts that employees associated with this cultural trait:

The decision to take part in a class trip was made by the director of the school, without any prior discussion with the head of the primary school classes. This decision displeased the primary class teachers. "We are not a company. We are a religious order community, so decisions need to be made together. The problem is that the collegial atmosphere is not there."

Finally, for this cultural trait, selected by the employees, other sources of evidence were used for triangulation purposes: the conflicts were confirmed during a subsequent mediation interview with the director and the researchers received a copy of a 40-page guide which specifies exactly who does what, within the school.

On the other hand, the cultural trait, "Confronting conflicts directly" (inverse), was illustrated by the following examples:

"Each problem between two people becomes a case where everyone makes his or her comments, alone, and has an opinion." "Tables are well done, but rather reflect a poster communication." "I asked for a meeting to deal with equipment issues and the scope of work, but the Director is reluctant to proceed." "Members of the religious order are not going to put forth their disputes, for public inspection by the associate professors."

The employees listed the standard conflicts associated with this cultural trait. Typical conflicts pertained to the collegial atmosphere:

"Some decisions are made without any collegial atmosphere: I had met a mom who accepted a part-time job at the school. She was nevertheless offered another role in the college without telling me about it."

We were able to confirm this conflict in a subsequent interview and received several direct and confidential phone calls from members of the religious order. The teachers insisted that the content of the exchange should not be shared with anyone in the school.

Following the culture analysis, the school board asked the director to set up a stronger collegial decision-making process (Step 4). These requests had already been made by the Board, prior to the culture survey. A month later, the director resigned from his position. He told the Board that the ongoing conflicts within the school had impacts on his health. A new director was appointed by the Board, the following month, based on the feedback and advice from the employees. The new director was a school teacher, and a member of the religious order.

The Board then made a symbolic gesture to confirm its request for culture change, to the new director. The new professional habit should be to consult with colleagues before taking a decision. Shortly after his appointment, the Board sent the new director his letter of assignment. This letter did not precisely indicate that the

Cultural traits that describe NPT1 well (most selected traits in descending order)	Cultural traits that describe what NPT1 is not (most selected traits in descending order)
Enthusiasm for the work	Opportunities for professional growth (Inverse)
Having a clear guiding philosophy	Being aggressive (inverse)
Being supportive	Offers praise for good performance (inverse)
Developing friends at work	Confronting conflicts directly (inverse)
Being people oriented	Not being constrained by many rules (inverse)
Adaptability	Security of employment (inverse)
Being socially responsible	Being results oriented (inverse)
Being highly organized	Informality (inverse)

Table II.
Organizational
culture survey
results for NPT1

new director should coordinate the entire school as his predecessor used to do. The new director was surprised that the overall coordination role of the school was not mentioned in his assignment letter. The Board replied, that the new director had to, first and foremost, form bonds with his entire team. The Board, therefore, wished to establish a culture of collegiality, and that the newly appointed director should seek advice before making any decisions.

Two meetings (Step 5) brought together 13 employees and then 6 employees, two days apart. Researchers presented the synopsis of the culture survey and excerpts from some of the interviews. We indicated that the cultural trait, "Confronting conflicts directly" (inverse), should be addressed within the organization. The research team also publicly reported how the employees were disillusioned by the lack of collegial decision making, and the difficulty to directly express personal disagreements.

In the same meeting (Step 5), a member of the religious order expressed her fear about the evolution of the culture and the direct handling of conflicts, fearing "a naming and shaming situation." The researchers invited the employees to express their opinions on this particular point and the attendees only expressed neutral reactions. The research team then received, successively, two requests for one-on-one, confidential interviews from two teachers. The two individuals, under the seal of confidentiality, demanded a greater collegial atmosphere.

Changes in the nature of conflict handling style due to the culture change

Two weeks after the presentation to the employees, a new conflict occurred between the head of the primary school and the new director (Step 6). The conflict arose out of decisions taken with regard to the primary level. The two participants reacted according to the old culture: no direct conflict response and an initial top-down reaction from the newly appointed director. The chairman thus forced the organizational culture change (see Table III). The chairman asked the two participants to directly solve the problem and asked the directors to write a formal collegial decision-making protocol. This action was symbolic and helped everyone understand that the organization was entering a new era.

We observed a change in the conflict handling procedure within the school: the style of avoiding conflict changed to a style of integrating conflict (Rahim, 1983). This culture change superseded the former habit of confronting conflicts indirectly and the former practice of setting up very detailed organizations without prior discussion.

Table III presents the timeline of a conflict resolution through organizational culture change. Significant conflict style and cultural traits changes are indicated at each key stage of the conflict. The analysis highlights the reciprocal evolution of cultural traits within the school and the conflict handling style of the Board, the head of the primary school and the establishment's director.

The dispute resolution clauses were extended to the whole school. Indirect conflicts such as those collected during the initial culture survey had disappeared and a contact with the school director six months later confirmed the conflict resolution situation. By application of this highly organized culture, staff members now confronted their conflicts directly in an organized manner.

Case 2: humanitarian organization (NPT2)

NPT2 is the French affiliate of an International NGO working in humanitarian crises and development projects in developing countries. The association has 35 employees and is based in the Paris area.

The Board of the association asked our research team to further define the HR practices in NPT2 and to provide support to the general management relating to conflicts. The organization suffers from a large number of internal conflicts which were discussed at length by e-mail and frequently involving many people.

The NPT2 case was observed over a period of two years. The initial conflict resolution protocol through cultural change was challenged by the employees and failed. New conflicts occurred afterwards. The research team then designed a revised cultural change project that was finally accepted. Symbolic with this initiative was the requirement for front-line managers to participate in the salary committee. We observed no new conflicts in the 3 following months.

The NPT2 culture survey (Steps 1 and 2) was carried out in June 2015. Each meeting lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes. The survey participants were: a member of the Board, the five directors and three union staff members. The dominant culture was characterized by: a very loose formalization of internal tasks and procedures; frequent questioning of management decisions; and the first-line managers' avoidance of HR issues. Table IV gives the results of the culture survey at NPT2 using the OCP tool.

The sources of conflict associated with the organizational culture were confirmed by the interviews (Step 3). We present, below, excerpts from the interviews associated with four cultural traits: "Being highly organized (inverse)," "Informality," "Fairness (inverse)," and "Decisiveness (inverse)." In addition, we noted down examples of conflicts expressed by employees and the triangulation data that confirmed the information collected.

Employees associated, "Being highly organized (inverse)," with several definitions and examples of conflicts:

I welcomed a new employee yesterday and I did not know that Mrs. X had seen him too. We are not strong in organizing ourselves and this causes time wastage with the associated stress. The organization is unstable.

We then gathered examples of recent conflicts that employees associated with this cultural trait:

Several employees complained of a very heavy workload and friction when working between departments, due to projects being conducted in parallel. Front-line managers complained that the employees actually wanted to follow all these projects and requested that the general manager prioritize.

We triangulated with two other sources of confirmation regarding this set of conflicts: the meeting minutes with the unions and e-mail exchanges to decide about additional bonuses to compensate for overtime.

The "Informality" cultural trait was illustrated by the following examples:

"We are able to seize opportunities. We are not very numerous. If we have to reorganize because something incredible happens, we will do it. But it will be difficult to prioritize other tasks." "We work together continuously; we just have to walk cross the corridor." "We're all connected on Skype."

Table IV.
Organizational
culture survey
results for NPT2

Cultural traits that describe NPT2 well (most selected traits in descending order)	Cultural traits that describe what NPT2 is not (most selected traits in descending order)
Enthusiasm for the work	Being highly organized (inverse)
Working long hours	High pay for good performance (inverse)
Having high expectations on performance	Decisiveness (inverse)
Having a good reputation	Opportunities for professional growth (inverse)
Being socially responsible	Offers praise for good performance (inverse)
Being distinctive—different from others	Being aggressive (inverse)
Developing friends at work	Not being constrained by many rules (inverse)
Informality	Fairness (inverse)

Employees defined the “Informality” cultural trait as the fact that a large number of employees were frequently associated with the ongoing conflicts. One typical conflict form is related hereafter:

Following a disagreement between employees about the presence of alcohol during the employees’ annual weekend, the entire staff of NPT2 received copies of e-mails exchanged. A director asked one of the participants to stop sending such e-mails but she did not obey and continued the discussion and copied in the whole organization again.

Employees had voiced many disputed cases associated with the “Inequity” cultural trait: some employees believed that a better salary raise had been given to a certain person because of that person’s relationship with a manager; an employee got the approval of the general management for a negotiated end of contract, while another colleague had to resign without any additional financial benefits.

Employees added some comments about this cultural trait:

“Many things happen outside of the normal decision-making process.” “Backroom negotiations occurred when a rule was not logical, for example an increase in responsibility during the middle of the year which was not reflected in compensation before the following April.”

Employees made many comments about “Decisiveness (inverse):”

“Lengthy decision making timelines strain NPT2’s resources. And when decisions are made, they are occasionally not applied nor even promoted.” “We need to clarify our roles: do I have the right to recruit, set the salary of new recruits, amends contracts, carry out a leaving interview or set the end of a fixed term contract?” “In daily operations, I would rather see ‘to do’ lists, than detailed plans.” “Sometimes, we are getting nowhere fast because we are maintaining the ‘status quo.’ It causes confusion.”

Conflict resolution involves many participants and takes a long time:

When a disagreement emerges about home office work or a part-time work request, all the unionized staff are brought in. The direct supervisor then disengages from the debate and asks the director to take over, who then asks the general manager to decide. A dispute resolution protocol between an employee and his supervisor even ended up with the involvement of the Board Chairperson.

The research team and the NPT2 Board identified that the informal nature of the association leads to conflicts that interfere with the development of NPT2 (Step 4). The Board, therefore, decided to formalize the rules and procedures related to HR management, such as the salary policy or performance assessment policy. The Board asked, for example, to reject any new voluntary redundancy agreements between employers and employees (Clark *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the general manager sets up a team of front-line managers to accelerate the decision-making process on HR issues.

The culture survey results were presented initially to the unions and then to the employees two weeks later (Step 5). New HR policies were also presented during the same meeting. There were no particular reactions from neither the unions or nor the employees.

The new salary policy was rolled out six months after the culture survey (Step 6). Every employee was briefed about his/her salary increase decided upon by the NPT2 Management Committee. Each employee had the opportunity to appeal the decision if he/she felt that they had not been properly assessed. Only one request for an appeal was made, but the employee withdrew her request after a meeting with her manager.

Resistance to change: the general employees’ meeting

A majority of employees, anchored in the old culture, were opposed to the HR policy put in place by the general manager. The opposition sparked an unprecedented divisive debate and outbursts during the following employee staff meetings with the management team.

Two months after communication of the salary increases, all the employees were gathered for a working seminar. Members of the NPT2 Board were present. Employees collectively expressed strong dissatisfaction with the salary decisions. The employees considered that the salary increase process, based on a documented assessment of each jobs' weighting, was conducted unfairly. The Board then involved an ombudsman to listen to the employees' grievances.

The same month, unions gathered all employees including first-line managers in a place outside the company, without the directors' committee members. The purpose of this meeting was to prepare a common set of employee needs before the planned mediation. Employees wrote a manifesto, in which they collected their causes for dissatisfaction, into several chapters, including a chapter on the implementation of a new salary policy, and a chapter on the roles of the newly appointed front-line managers. Reactions from the employees underlined clinging to the old cultural traits within NPT2: the request that there be no difference between the employees and the front-line managers ("Informality"); the request for collective decision-making in HR matters ("Decisiveness" (inverse)).

Re-framing the change management project

One year after the NPT2 culture survey, and three months after failure of the cultural change initiative, the same types of conflicts were recurrent within the organization. The general manager called the researcher to analyze five new interpersonal conflicts within a three-month period. Here are some of the examples of conflicts continually arising: a request for contract termination involving seven participants, a unilateral decision from an employee not to leave on a foreign mission, an uncouth e-mail to management regarding a salary decision for a new recruit. These conflicts were rooted in insubordination and each of them lasted for two months due to the long decision-making process and escalating up to top management and the Board.

The Board asked the director to negotiate and pay the employees some financial compensation. Directors were against this decision. The board chairperson resigned for several reasons including this misalignment.

Meanwhile, the researchers devised an updated cultural change management plan. The plan was presented to the director and the new chairman then to all employees. On the basis of the five Cinite *et al.* (2009) recommendations on organizational change management in the nonprofit sector (commitment of senior managers to the change, competence of change agents, support of the immediate manager, rich communication of change and positive impact of change on work), the updated plan included 5 items: updated salary process including a clear algorithm on the salary setting and decision-making process at the salary committee. All employees to train on salary and performance assessment and front-line managers to undergo an extended training on motivation management. HR department to be available to answer any question on a person's salary and assessment at salary committee meetings. A union representative to be present at salary committee. Managers to be in-charge of informing their team members about salary decision within two weeks after the committee.

The project took five months to set up. Three months after the salary committee, the front-line managers were de facto in-charge of HR questions for their team members. Employees were going directly to the HR support team if needed and conformed to the HR recommendations.

A staff meeting with employees concluded that the new salary process was satisfactory. There were no new identified conflicts in this period.

The conflict handling style evolved from dominating (employee side)/obliging (Board side) (Rahim, 1983) to compromising through the introduction of a team of first-line managers. In parallel, organizational culture evolved to faster decision making while equity was experienced by the employees.

Table V presents the timeline of the organizational culture change at NPT2. Significant cultural traits and conflict style changes are indicated at each key stage of the progress for the Board, the employees and the directors.

3. Discussion

The research questions we address in this section are twofold:

RQ1. How organizational culture shapes attitudes and behaviors and, in particular, shapes interpersonal conflicts handling in the workplace?

RQ2. How an organizational culture can be changed in the non profit sector?

Moreover, we suggested in our first research question that a conflict sequence can be solved by replacing an inefficient conflict handling style (Rahim, 1983), such as dominating or avoiding, embedded in the culture by a more efficient conflict handling style, such as integrating or compromising, embedded in the new expected attitudes and behaviors of the new organizational culture.

We will firstly discuss the outcomes and limits of our observation method before evaluating how our observations contribute to the two research questions and our proposition above.

Organizational culture and conflicts sequence—how culture shapes conflicts handling style

In line with the studies of conflicts in the non profit sector (Vigoda and Cohen, 2003; Unal and Turgut, 2015), both NPT1 and NPT2 showed a high level of conflict together with a high level of employee implication. NPT2 suffered from many recurring conflicts. Approximately ten significant interpersonal conflicts had been recorded during the period of observation, covering an organization numbering 35 people. In a conflict situation, NPT2 employees' dedication to their values was therefore higher than the execution of the request

Observed conflict dynamics and timeline	Conflict styles	Correlation with culture change		
		Board	Employees	Directors
In the next 6 months after the change failure, 5 strong dyadic conflicts emerged. Conflicts were rooted in insubordination. The Board asked the director to negotiate and pay a financial compensation to the employees. Directors opposed to t his decision No culture change is observed at this stage The president of the board resigned	Employees following dominating style Board pushing to: avoiding style	Enthusiasm for the work and not being aggressive should be kept Misalignment with desired cultural change from the Directors	Complaints about unfairness Informality is observed	Being highly organized is desired Fast decision taking is desired Lack of decisiveness is observed
Meanwhile, the consultant setup an updated cultural change management plan: the front-line managers now decide salary raises in salary committee through a fair process and present the decision to their team member Leadership is shared with front-line managers	Forcing integrating style	Forcing decisiveness and fairness through symbolic Salary Committee	Fairness is experienced Enforcement of the front-line managers	Being highly organized is forced Fast decision taking is forced
3 month later, a general meeting with employees concluded that the new salary process was satisfactory. There were no new identified conflicts in this period	Dyad followed a compromising style	Decisiveness is enforced Fairness is enforced	Fairness is enforced	Fast decision taking is enforced

Table V.
Cultural traits evolution and conflict resolution timeline at NPT2

from the NPT2 management (Perry, 1996; Brewer *et al.*, 2000). Employees showed a clear option to “voice” their disagreement individually or in a collective manifesto rather than taking the “exit” option from the NPT2 organization as observed by Hoffmann (2006). The high frequency of observed conflicts in sequence at NPT2 before the cultural change points out the positive impact of the cultural change on the conflict level at both organizations only after three months.

The organizational culture survey identified recurring causes of conflicts within NPT1 and NPT2. A combination of the OCP tool (O’Reilly *et al.*, 1991) and the use of deciphering culture techniques (Schein, 2004, p. 203) identified the typical conflict handling styles (Rahim, 1983) in recurring conflicts and associate them with several OCP culture traits. General presentations of the OCP results and the conflicts sequence to the employees and the Board resulted in a common desire for a cultural change to solve the conflicts sequence. Employees were easily able to sum up the organizational sources of conflict through the selection of two or three cultural traits. The selection of organizational culture traits was very consistent among employees (from 70 to 84 percent of identical cultural traits selection among survey participants).

The consistency or the inconsistency of new conflicts observed in Step 6 compared to the conflicts collected in Step 3 was analyzed in particular by the mention by the participants of the recent change made by the management of the organization; the identification of differences or similarities in the conflict handling style (Rahim, 1983) of the participants; and the manner in which third parties were associated in the conflict. An additional method of control could have been a second culture survey with the OCP tool to assess the culture change at the end of the observation period. We could have checked that the definitions of cultural traits made by the employees during Step 2, were consistent with the definition used afterwards (Steps 5 and 6) during the general presentation, in order to confirm the joint evolution of organizational culture and conflict handling style.

At NPT1 (see Table II), the conflicts arose out of demands for a collegial decision-making process (“Being team-oriented”) that was considered impossible to combine with another cultural trait valued by the former director: that of “Being highly organized.” The participants avoided direct conflict resolution (“Confronting conflicts directly (inverse)”) by making one-to-one and confidential contacts with the researchers. These cultural traits were easily associated with the Rahim’s (1983) “Avoiding” style. The conflict handling style changed to “Integrating” after the “Confronting conflicts directly (inverse)” cultural traits was changed and one new desired cultural trait was put in place through the coordination protocol: “Being team-oriented.” It is worth noting that the cultural trait “Being highly organized” did not disappear after the cultural change, as shown by the symbolic five-page long coordination protocol between the newly appointed director and the other school supervisors (see Table III).

At NPT2 (see Table IV), the employees considered that their conflicts were rooted in their informal organization (“Being highly organized (inverse)” and “Informality”). The informality could then result in unfair decisions (“Fairness (inverse)”). However, some influential NPT2 employees preferred to maintain a high level of “Informality.” NPT2’s unions thus simultaneously requested the commencement of individual negotiations with management and the application of clear collective rules for all. These behaviors were easily associated with the Rahim’s “Dominating” style on the employees’ side (see Table V).

Several psychological factors could explain the conflict dynamics at NPT2: front-line managers avoided conflict; conflict avoidance made things worse, as shown by Bhalerao and Kumar (2015); and the employees highlighted the most efficient dimensions identified by Friedman *et al.* (2004) to improve their chances of winning their case: threatening the employer over financial compensation and consequently, threatening the reputation of the management team. Typical behaviors from the union representative reinforced the employee’s conflict handling style (dominating): the employees remained focused on large

decision-making committees (“Decisiveness (inverse)”) and *ad hoc* decision making (“Informality”) to resolve their disputes.

After the cultural change at NPT2 through salary committees, the conflict management style changed to Rahim’s “compromising” style. This new conflict handling behavior occurred because the salary committee symbol carried three different desired meanings for directors, employees and first-line managers: the committee represented a fair decision process on salary raise to employees (“Equity”); gathering the first-line managers in the same room was combining the “Informality” trait with the “Decisiveness” desired trait; and the directors experienced a “Fast decision taking” attitude as the salary committee was considered the one and only session to decide on salary raise for the whole year and the “Decisiveness” desired trait as the first-line managers were in-charge of the announcement of the salary decisions to their employees. The salary committee also played a conflict prevention role (Ury *et al.*, 1988; Lipsky *et al.*, 2003; Le Flanhec and Rojot, 2009): we noted that ten additional rules on salary raises were also discussed and decided during the first salary committee. One month after the committee, unions and first-line managers considered that the committee was the new norm to decide important HR management rules. No new interpersonal conflicts occurred during the last three months of our observation period.

As a conclusion on our first research question, our observations validated the link between an inappropriate organizational culture and a conflict sequence. Individual mediations could not put an end to the conflicts sequence at both organizations and confirmed our alternative dispute resolution mechanism. But a change in the organizational culture led to an evolution in the collective conflict handling style. New symbols were prototypes of new accepted behaviors that, in turn, shaped the conflict handling style. In our two case studies, inefficient conflict handling styles (Rahim, 1983), avoiding and dominating, embedded in the culture were replaced by more efficient conflict handling styles, integrating and compromising, embedded in the new enforced attitudes and behaviors of the new organizational culture.

However, according to Willmott (1993), there is no perfect organizational culture. Our procedure does not guarantee that new conflicts will not reappear in the long term but they may hopefully be solved through a lighter interpersonal conflict resolution protocol.

Organizational culture change in the non profit sector

Our conflict resolution method was able to reveal the causes of recurring conflicts within NPT1 and NPT2 and finally bring an end to the conflicts sequence. However, management of the first cultural change at NPT2 was not a success. Such changes are very risky and can fail, as observed at NPT2. A fully operational method should not only diagnose the organizational culture change in the organization, but also precisely identify an efficient action plan (Johnson, 1990). The organization culture change plan must be built on the preserved cultural traits as much as possible. This idea employs Bartunek’s (1984) works on the interplay between organizational culture and the representation of the organization by the employees.

The change at NPT1 was therefore greatly accelerated by the culture of discipline already in place. NPT1’s culture encouraged respect for the Board’s decision to make the appointment letter conditional upon the protocol. This additional request accelerated the culture change as the new director had an interest in getting his appointment letter quickly and in managing the entire establishment. At NPT1, the five-page protocol was the key action. It was intended to build up consensus and to manage any conflicts between employees. NPT1 showed two important cultural change readiness factors for the non profit sector identified in previous research: respect for the organization’s social purpose (Chen and Bozeman, 2013), and the confidence in the Board (Manville and Broad, 2013). Enforcement of the protocol by the Board stressed the intensity of the new norm.

At NPT2, the general management and the authors initiated a first cultural change action without first obtaining firm agreement from the Board. The new salary raise process was the key action aiming to change the informal culture in place and speed up decisiveness in the organization. The initial NPT2 failed cultural shift, opposed the interests of some of the employees, who maintained their appreciation of the established culture of informality among employees. Just as in NPT1 (see Table III), the unsatisfied employees of NPT2, appealed directly the undesired decision before the Board (See Table V). The Board of NPT2 maintained their “avoiding” conflict handling style by challenging the general manager’s decision about the new HR salary process in place which led halting the change project (Colbert *et al.*, 2008). When the significant symbolic change resistance action occurred, the Board decided to launch collective mediation, involving the whole organization (a typical behavior aligned with the “Decisiveness (inverse)” trait). Change of the chairperson at NPT2 opened a new opportunity to set up a complete cultural change management process that finally succeeded. The organizational change forced a more formal management relationship with front-line managers and a delegation of HR decisions to them. The salary committee symbol created a strong community of managers who shared leadership with the directors’ committee and symbolized fairness in HR decisions. This second cultural change management project at NPT2 was thus refined to include the five important culture change readiness factors for the public sector (Cinite *et al.*, 2009): commitment of senior management, competence of change agents, support after the change, communication and positive impact on work.

The first cultural change failed at NPT2 while it benefited from a high consensus and high-content agreement from the employees, good support from the directors but weak support from the Board chairperson. NPT2 employees understood the benefit of the new norm but none of them actually followed the new behavior and produced the manifesto against the new salary policy for different reasons: a minority of employees still had a personal interest in the old behaviors; difficulty to confront group pressure by implementing the new instructions without being told to do so; or difficulty to evaluate all the unwanted consequences that the new norm could create.

As a conclusion on our second research question, our observations confirmed the importance of carrying out a cultural change based on a new but intense norm, i.e. in our contexts, being strongly enforced by the management team and the board. As a consequence, a cultural change occurs when the management team is ready to conduct the change under tough balance of power constraints. This change resistance is *per se* the reciprocal consequence of the organization culture strength itself. As observed in several studies on culture strength (Burt *et al.*, 1994; Sorensen, 2002; Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016), organization members will follow norms with a high intensity despite a low consensus and a low content agreement on that norm.

Implications for research and practice

Our study contributes to two research questions recalled by Chatman and O’Reilly (2016), namely how culture shapes attitudes and behaviors and “identifying the major enablers and obstacles to changing culture” (Chatman and O’Reilly, 2016). A conflict style handling in two different non profit organizations could be embedded in the organizational culture: a culture shift could lead to a conflict style modification, then to conflicts sequence resolution, provided that new symbols are applied with high intensity and enforced by the management team (Johnson, 1990; Burt *et al.*, 1994; Sorensen, 2002; Cinite *et al.*, 2009).

Cultural change projects are complex: our research pointed out that organizational culture change should be rooted in deep and shared analysis and conducted with strong enforcement by the management team.

Cultural change projects can also be risky, in particular in the nonprofit sector conflicts arise where the “voice” option is often preferred to the “exit” option (Hoffmann, 2006): a cultural change project should use the culture readiness factors (Cinite *et al.*, 2009) and in particular a very tight alignment among the top management team.

Moreover, cultural change can lead to unexpected outcomes (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002) and should be carefully planned to minimize cultural change failure. Cultural change studies need long observation timeframes, typically over three years, to confirm the outcomes of organizational culture. Our research was only conducted over a period of 1 or 2 years. Research on a longer timeframe on conflict schemes and organizational culture measurement could bring confirmation of our study results.

4. Conclusion

This study tends to complete research studies on how organizational culture shapes attitudes and behaviors and shows how a cultural change can resolve a conflict sequence. On a more empirical aspect, this study also presents a conflict resolution method when the roots of conflicts are embedded in shared organizational norms. In such conflict situations, interpersonal conflict resolution techniques may not solve the conflict sequence but a cultural change could finally put an end to the sequence.

We have shown that the combination of the OCP survey (O’Reilly *et al.*, 1991) and open culture deciphering interview (Schein, 2004, p. 217) helped understand the sources of interpersonal conflicts embedded in an organizational culture. We have also shown that cultural change, through key action and careful change management, resolved the conflict sequence by shifting the psychological factors (Rahim, 1983) of the conflicting parties to a more integrating or compromising style.

Our work showed how organizational culture can be an important element in the explanation of conflict sources and conflict handling in cases of high and repeated conflict situations. It could thus be possible to resolve conflict sequence by changing a carefully chosen cultural trait. Nevertheless, the culture change management program is complex and risky. In a high-conflict situation, we identified four key conflict resolution factors: careful identification of the organizational culture traits dictating conflict handling style (O’Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Schein, 2004); alignment of the management team on the cultural change plan (Colbert *et al.*, 2008; Manville and Broad, 2013) to intensify the new set of behaviors (Burt *et al.*, 1994; Sorensen, 2002); selection of the most efficient symbolic change decision (Pfeffer, 1981; Johnson, 1990); and careful implementation of the change management project (Cinite *et al.*, 2009).

References

- Armenakis, A., Brown, S. and Mehta, A. (2011), “Organizational culture: assessment and transformation”, *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 305-328.
- Arnold, J.A. and O’Connor, K.M. (1999), “Ombudspersons or peers? The effect of third-party expertise and recommendations on negotiation”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 84 No. 5, pp. 776-785.
- Baird, K., Harrison, G. and Reeve, R. (2007), “The culture of Australian organizations and its relation with strategy”, *International Journal of Business Studies*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 15-41.
- Bartunek, J.M. (1984), “Changing interpretive schemes and organizational restructuring: the example of a religious order”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 29, February, pp. 355-372.
- Bériot, D. (2006), *Manager par l’approche systémique*, Editions d’Organisation, Paris.
- Boyce, A.S., Nieminen, L.R.G., Gillespie, M.A., Ryan, A.M. and Denison, D.R. (2015), “Which comes first, organizational culture or performance? A longitudinal study of causal priority with automobile dealerships”, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 36, pp. 339-359.

- Brewer, G.A., Selden, S.C. and Facer, R.L. II (2000), "Individual conceptions of public service motivation", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 60 No. 3, pp. 254-264.
- Burt, R.S., Gabbay, S.M., Holt, G. and Moran, P. (1994), "Contingent organization as a network theory: the culture-performance contingency function", *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 345-370.
- Chatman, J.A. and O'Reilly, C.A. (2016), "Paradigm lost: reinvigorating the study of organizational culture", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 36, pp. 199-224.
- Chatman, J.A., Caldwell, D.F., O'reilly, C.A. and Doerr, B. (2014), "Parsing organizational culture: how the norm for adaptability influences the relationship between culture consensus and financial performance in high-technology firms", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 785-808.
- Chen, C.-A. and Bozeman, B. (2013), "Understanding public and nonprofit managers' motivation through the lens of self-determination", *Public Management Review*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 584-607.
- Cinite, I., Duxbury, L.E. and Higgins, C. (2009), "Measurement of perceived organizational readiness for change in the public sector", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 265-277.
- Clark, N., Contrepois, S. and Jefferys, S. (2012), "Collective and individual alternative dispute resolution in France and Britain", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 550-566.
- Colbert, A.E., Kristof-brown, A.L., Bradley, B.H. and Barrick, M.R. (2008), "CEO transformational leadership: the role of goal importance congruence in top management teams individual outcomes", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 81-96.
- Coleman, P.T. and Kugler, K.G. (2014), "Tracking managerial conflict adaptivity: introducing a dynamic measure of adaptive conflict management in organizations", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 35, pp. 945-968.
- De Dreu, C.K.W., Evers, A., Beersma, B., Kluwer, E.S. and Nauta, A. (2001), "A theory based measure of conflict management strategies in the workplace", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 22 No. 6, pp. 645 -668.
- De Dreu, C.K.W. and Weingart, L.R. (2003), "Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: a meta-analysis", *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88 No. 4, pp. 741-749.
- de Reuver, R. (2006), "The influence of organizational power on conflict dynamics", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 35 No. 5, pp. 589-603.
- Friedman, R., Anderson, C., Brett, J., Olekalns, M., Goates, N. and Lisco, C.C. (2004), "The positive and negative effects of anger on dispute resolution: evidence from electronically mediated disputes", *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 89 No. 2, pp. 369-376.
- Fuller, S.R. (2008), "Organizational symbolism: a multi-dimensional conceptualization", *Journal of Global Business Management*, Vol. 4 No. 1978, pp. 1-7.
- Goldberg, A., Srivastava, S.B., Manian, V.G., Monroe, W. and Potts, C. (2006), "Fitting in or standing out? The tradeoffs of structural and cultural embeddedness", *Nursing Research*, Vol. 55 No. 6, pp. 373-380.
- Harris, L.C. and Ogbonna, E. (2002), "The unintended consequences of culture interventions: a study of unexpected outcomes", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 13, pp. 31-49.
- Hoffmann, E. (2006), "Exit and voice: organizational loyalty and dispute resolution strategies", *Social Forces*, Vol. 84 No. 4, pp. 2313-2330.
- Hunter, W. and Renwick, D. (2009), "Involving British line managers in HRM in a small non-profit work organisation", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 398 -411.
- Johnson, G. (1990), "Managing strategic change: the role of symbolic action", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 1, pp. 183-200.
- Kudonoo, E., Schroeder, K. and Boysen-Rotelli, S. (2012), "An Olympic transformation: creating an organizational culture that promotes healthy conflict", *Organizational Development Journal*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 51-65.

- Lawless, J. and Trif, A. (2016), "Managing interpersonal conflicts at work by line managers", *Irish Journal of Management*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 74-87.
- Le Flanchec, A. and Rojot, J. (2009), "La 'porte ouverte d'IBM' au service de la gestion des ressources humaines", *Relations Industrielles (Industrial Relations)*, Vol. 64 No. 2, pp. 270-285.
- Lipsky, D.B., Seeber, R. and Fincher, R.B. (2003), *Emerging Systems for Managing Workplace Conflict: Lessons from American Corporations for Managers and Dispute Resolution Professionals*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Manville, G. and Broad, M. (2013), "Changing time for charity. Performance management in a third sector housing association", *Public Management Review*, Vol. 15 No. 7, pp. 992-1010.
- Mayer, B. (2000), *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Mayer, R.J. (1974), "Communication and conflict in organizations", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 2-10.
- Mayer, R.J. (1995), *Conflict Management: The Courage to Confront*, 2nd ed., Battelle Press, Columbus.
- Miller, W.L. and Crabtree, B.F. (1994), "Clinical research", in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds), *Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 340-352.
- Munduate, L., Ganaza, J., Peiro, J.M. and Euwema, M. (1999), "Patterns of styles in conflict management and effectiveness", *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 5-24.
- Ndiaye, A. and Abraham, J. (2016), "Les leviers de régulation des conflits interpersonnels dans trois organisations sociales et médico-sociales", *Revue Interdisciplinaire Management, Homme & Entreprise*, Vol. 3 No. 22, pp. 29-43.
- Ng, H.S., Peña-Mora, F. and Tamaki, T. (2007), "Dynamic conflict management in large-scale design and construction projects", *Journal of Management in Engineering*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 52-67.
- O'Reilly, C.A., Chatman, J. and Caldwell, D.F. (1991), "People and organizational culture: a profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 487-516.
- Perry, J.L. (1996), "Measuring public service motivation: an assessment of construct reliability and validity", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 5-22.
- Pfeffer, J. (1981), "Management as symbolic action: the creation and maintenance of organizational paradigms", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-52.
- Rahim, M.A. (1983), "A measure of style handling interpersonal conflict", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 26, pp. 368-376.
- Rahim, M.A. and Magner, N.R. (1995), "Confirmatory factor analysis of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: first-order factor model and its invariance across groups", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 80, pp. 122-132.
- Roche, W. and Teague, P. (2012), "Do conflict management systems matter?", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 51 No. 2, pp. 231-258.
- Saundry, R., Jones, C. and Wibberley, G. (2015), "The challenge of managing informally", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 428-441.
- Schein, E.H. (1993), "Legitimizing clinical research in the study of organizational culture", *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Vol. 71, July/August, pp. 703-708.
- Schein, E.H. (2004), *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd ed., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Schwenk, C.R. (1990), "Conflict in organizational decision making: an exploratory study of its effects in for-profit and not-for-profit organizations", *Management Science*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 436-449.
- Silverman, D. (1995), *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 3rd ed., Sage Publications, London.
- Sorensen, J.B. (2002), "The strength of corporate culture and the reliability of firm performance", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47 No. 1, pp. 70-91.
- Thomas, K.W., Thomas, G.F. and Schaubhut, N. (2008), "Conflict styles of men and women at six organization levels", *International Journal of Conflict Management*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 1-38.

- Unal, Z.M. and Turgut, T. (2015), "The buzzword: employee engagement. Does person–organization fit contribute to employee engagement?", *Iranian Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 157-179.
- Ury, W.L., Brett, J.M. and Goldberg, S.B. (1988), *Getting Disputes Resolved: Designing Systems to Cut the Costs of Conflict*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- van de Vliert, E. and Kabanoff, B. (1990), "Toward theory-based measures of conflict management", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 199-209.
- van de Vliert, E., Euwema, M.C. and Huismans, S.E. (1995), "Managing conflict with a subordinate or superior: effectiveness of conglomerated behavior", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 80 No. 2, pp. 271-281.
- Vigoda, E. and Cohen, A. (2003), "Work congruence and excellence in human resource management: empirical evidence from the Israeli nonprofit sector", *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 192-216.
- Wall, J.A. and Callister, R.R. (1995), "Conflict and its management", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 515-558.
- Willmott, H. (1993), "Strength is ignorance, slavery is freedom: managing culture in modern organizations", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 515-552.
- Wronka-Pośpiech, M. and Frączkiewicz-Wronka, A. (2016), "Strategic orientation and organisational culture in Polish public organisations: insights from the miles and snow typology", *Management*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 126-142.
- Yin, R.K. (1982), *Case Study Research—Design and Methods*, Sage Publications, London.
- Young, H.A. (1982), "The causes of industrial peace re-revisited: the case for RBO", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 50-57.

About the authors

Alexis Louis Roy is Associate Researcher in Management Science at Institut Supérieur de Management (ISM)—Versailles Saint Quentin University (UVSQ), and Consultant in Human Resources, specialized in the non-profit sector. After a 20+ years as Human Resources Director in the for-profit and non-profit sectors in international organizations, his research works focus on human resources policies tailored to the specific needs of the voluntary sector and non-governmental organizations. Within the ISM laboratory, he is responsible for several human resources management courses at master's level. Alexis Louis Roy is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: Alexis.Roy.78@gmail.com

Christelle Perrin is Assistant Professor in Management Science at Institut Supérieur de Management (ISM)—Versailles Saint Quentin University (UVSQ). Her works focus on public management and non-profit management (third sector). She is interested in the problems of management, governance, social utility and partnerships. She has published in various journals and is involved in networks linked to public and non-profit management. Within the ISM, she is responsible for the "public management" specialty and she is in-charge of "local public management" Master II for the local government managers. She also leads the Master II "management of organizations." She is Member of the ISM Council.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com