

Wickramasinghe, D. Hopper, T. (2005). A cultural political economy of management accounting controls: a case study of a textile Mill in a traditional Sinhalese village. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 16, 473-503.

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## Moving Beyond the Metaphoric Views of Organizational Culture to Understand the Managerial Practice: Some Critical Insights

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### Background and Purpose

Organizational culture (OC) is identified as an influential factor for the success or failure of innovation efforts in organizations (Stahl & Grigsby, 1997). However, culture<sup>64</sup> is a very complex concept, and there are many controversies in both defining and applying it. As a result, mostly, not only business managers, but also business researchers tend to misunderstand the concept of OC and its connection with managerial practice (Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Wilkinson & Willmott, 1996). But most scholars think of the concept of OC as a symbol or a metaphor directed at practicing organizational change efforts. The prominence of these metaphoric views of OC (e.g., Hofstede, 1991, 1997; Schein, 1985; Johnson, 1988; Robbins, 2005; Peters & Waterman, 1982) has undoubtedly added new knowledge to the OC literature. Some authors (e.g., Smircich, 1983; Tayeb, 1988; Burrell & Morgan, 1979) have gone so far to imply that culture analysis in organizations should be carried out within their assumptive contexts.

It is important to challenge these narrow perspectives in understanding OC and a phenomenon behind it, as narrow perspectives decrease the chances of coming out with useful findings or ideas. Consequently, it seems important to highlight that OC need not merely be metaphoric or instrumental, as it is one of the major issues in academic research as well as in managerial practice because OC features are central to all aspects of organizational life (Alvesson, 2002).

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<sup>64</sup> In this paper, the words 'culture' and 'organizational culture' are used interchangeably.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to more complete understanding of the concept of OC and its connection with managerial practice. The paper elaborates and critiques on five metaphoric<sup>65</sup> research themes of OC (comparative management, corporate culture, organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organization) vis-à-vis to managerial practice and describes needs and opportunities for further research and for comprehension of work already done.

## Methodology

Five metaphoric themes related to OC namely; comparative management, corporate culture, organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organization vis-à-vis to managerial practice are articulated, and the literatures related to each are described and critiqued. Examination of the literature indicates that the metaphoric views of OC that assume culture of an organization can easily be changed at the stake of managerial practice are seen as ill suit to understand the connection between OC and managerial practice. Following this examination, the needs and opportunities for further research and for comprehension of work already done on the topic is discussed as contributing to the literature.

## Result

It is said that organizational leaders are responsible to handle the power and political actions of the participants who face the uncertain situations in the organization (e.g. Pfeffer, 1981, 1992; Lawrence et al., 2005; Fairholm, 2009). Developing a common vision is difficult due to organizational politics (Pfeffer, 1992) and overcoming dynamism within the organization towards its common vision is the key intervention strategy of the leader who actively involves in the change management process (Lawrence et al., 2005). As a Sri Lankan case example in a public hospital, the intervention strategies behind the new managerial practice adopted by the CEO were successful in long-term. This was mainly because of his systematic approach employed within informal relations between different employee categories (i.e. different cultural layers of the hospital) holding different degrees of power (Wickramasinghe & Hopper, 2005) was effective at the stake of integrating

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<sup>65</sup> The metaphoric views of OC considered in this paper refer to the views or perspectives that tend to conceptualize OC as a symbolic or a holistic variable behind the managerial practice of an organization. Hence, such views are reluctant to treat managerial practice as an individual or a subgroup process in an organization, namely how different individuals and subgroups in an organization engage in the managerial practice in different manner.

different mindsets of employees towards its managerial practice. In other words, the CEO was effective in employing the intervention strategies: interpretation, integration, institutionalization, and intuition as a whole which enabled him to overcome power and political influences of the participating groups/different employee categories (i.e. divisional heads, doctors, nursing sisters and nurses, paramedical staff, midwifery staff, clerical staff, and support staff) coming as different cultural layers of the hospital. In other words, institutionalization and OC maintenance at later stage was the key feature behind the long-term success of the managerial practice. The role of leadership in the process of managerial practice and OC change mattered as installation, change, and maintenance of OC went right with the practice. The CEO's leadership style appeared to be democratic as distributing responsibility among different employee categories, empowering employees through managerial practice oriented activities, and aiding employees to engage in the decision-making process in long-term (key features of democratic leadership according to Gastil, 1994 and also supported by Anderson, 1959; Bass, 1990). Using divisional heads as intermediaries of the change management, the CEO could maintain the integrity (Schein, 1985) of the managerial practice for a long period. The following key points based on the empirical evidence highlight the above phenomenon convincingly.

- Monitoring progress of the change effort through divisional heads
- Continue training programs and other continuous improvement activities in long-term
- Developing intimacy, friendship, and love with both medical and non-medical staffs (coming from different cultural layers of the hospital) mainly through capitalizing personal values of the CEO (the CEO had teamwork, openness, responsiveness, forgiveness, practical orientation, and continuation values as a whole)
- Rewarding employees who display high performance and motivating other staff members to behave so mainly through a personal file system and recognition
- Explaining unexplainable through ideological and religious activities such as “Annual Pirith Ceremony”, celebrating extraordinary baby deliveries, celebrating the quality awards won by the hospital, and teaching the learning points and experience to other hospitals and industry

All these points are some empirical evidence to illustrate how cultural dynamism/internal dynamism<sup>66</sup> of an organization matters at greater extent to successful managerial practice in long-term. This could then warrant adopting a view that goes beyond ‘metaphorical’ view of OC, which allow recognizing different cultural layers (in this paper, different employee categories of the organization as its cultural layers) may be helpful to come out with new findings behind the connection between OC and managerial practice.

### Conclusions and Implications

Two conclusions are drawn from this examination. One is that the present understanding on OC and managerial practice, namely managerial practice that contributes to change OC can be numerous and varied than what most existing literature suggests. A second conclusion is that there is little in the way of more complete literature concerning OC and managerial practice to fill the research gap.

The paper suggests that the metaphoric views of OC that tend to recognize managerial practice as a holistic organizational process, rather than considering it as an individual and/or a subgroup process in an organization, namely how different individuals and/or subgroups in an organization (different cultural layers) engage in the managerial practice in different manner require more empirical research work for further advancement. The connection between OC and managerial practice is found to be much in need of systematic investigation using more comprehensive culture framework which recognizes different cultural layers of an organization.

In line with the role of leadership in managing power and politics in organizations, it was indicated that the intervention strategies employed by the leadership to integrate the participating groups coming from different cultural layers of the organization mattered greatly to the success of its managerial practice in long-term. Thus, adopting a view that goes beyond ‘metaphorical’ view of OC may be helpful to recognize different cultural layers (in this paper different employee categories of the organization) and to come out with new findings behind the connection between OC and managerial practice. Such a view may also be useful managers of organizations to understand the complicated nature of OC and its dynamism (this paper illustrated this with power and political actions of different participating groups/different employee categories: divisional heads, doctors,

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<sup>66</sup> In this paper, OC dynamism is illustrated and described in line with power and political actions of different employee categories towards the managerial practice.

nursing sisters and nurses, paramedical staff, midwifery staff, clerical staff, and support staff of the said hospital) in line with different cultural layers within which new managerial practices are subject to implement in achieving organizational goals.

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The Motivational Pattern of Attitude Formation within the Functional Approach: With reference to first time voters in the University of Colombo<sup>67</sup>

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ABSTRACT

While attitude formation and change remains a significant element in the pursuit of marketing, today's political marketers are successfully driving various markets of target voters towards favourable attitude change. The first time voter group is an important target

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