

Managing Ambiguity and Change

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CHAPTER 6

Organizational Cultures and the Denial, Channeling and Acknowledgment of Ambiguity

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Organizational culture researchers have done no better than our anthropological colleagues in developing a universally acceptable approach to the study of culture. We disagree vehemently about such fundamental issues as: What is organizational culture? How should culture be studied? Should we focus only on that which is apparently shared by all (or most) cultural members? What about cultural boundaries, contradictions, and conflicts of interest?

The relationship between culture and ambiguity is also unclear. Does culture exist only where ambiguity is absent, so that culture becomes that which is clear in a world otherwise full of confusion and meaninglessness? Or, is ambiguity unavoidable, to be reluctantly tolerated as an inevitable part of cultural life? Or, should ambiguity be fully embraced, perhaps as a key to innovation?

PARADIGMS AND CULTURES

The lack of consensus reflected in these questions becomes apparent only when a spectrum of cultural studies is examined. Within any one study, a researcher tends to use an internally consistent set of simplifying heuristics, a paradigm, for thinking about culture. We refer to a set of simplifying heuristics as a paradigm because each set serves as a comprehensive 'world view', defining what culture is, and by implication what it is not. Thus, at the risk of using one difficult term to explain another, we will define a cultural paradigm as a subjective point of view that determines what a person perceives, conceives, and enacts as culture.¹ In this way, paradigms act as blinders,

¹Terms such as 'paradigm' and 'a view of culture' are used because they are more succinct than 'culture, perceived and enacted from the perspective of a (particular) paradigm'. It is important, however, to acknowledge that such brief phrases are potentially misleading. Culture is not reified—out there—to be seen, studied, or interpreted either by a cultural member or by a researcher. It is enacted, not observed. Researchers and cultural members enact what they perceive and fail to enact what they fail to perceive. Furthermore, cultural members and researchers may be unconscious or preconscious of some aspects of a culture that have been repressed, simply forgotten, or taken for granted (e.g. Schein's (1985) basic assumptions). Thus, a view of a culture from a particular paradigmatic perspective is not an objective or distanced observation of a reified object; it is subjective, participative, and only partially self-aware.

focusing attention on certain aspects of culture and eliminating other aspects from view.

Whereas Kuhn (1962) used the term paradigm to refer solely to the perspectives of researchers, we will use the term to refer to the points of view of both researchers and cultural members. Although most of the discussion below will focus on researchers' paradigms, excerpts from a case study will make it clear that cultural members use these paradigms as well. This chapter delineates the major conceptual differences among the paradigms that have dominated organizational culture research. Because of space limitations, we will not be able to discuss other important underlying differences among these paradigms (political and methodological, for example) that justify the use of this term.

Given how deeply these paradigms differ, most researchers and many (but by no means all) cultural members tend to use primarily one paradigm to guide the development of their knowledge about a culture. This creates predictable blindspots in understanding and an inability to appreciate the insights of those who view culture through other paradigms. Such paradigmatic specialization has unfortunate effects on theory and practice.

The ability of organizational culture researchers to challenge and advance organizational theory is constrained by these deep-seated paradigmatic differences. One culture researcher's assumptions are, to a researcher from another paradigm, evidence of epistemological naivete, methodological sloppiness, or inexcusable political bias. Such disagreements make it clear that the definition of culture itself is deeply problematic. For these reasons, organizational culture researchers are currently unable to engage in constructive discourse and consolidate what has been learned from the recent proliferation of interest in cultural phenomena.

This chapter assumes that such discourse and theoretical advancement are feasible and worthwhile. Otherwise, organizational culture research will be unable to follow through on its initial promise to critique and enrich mainstream organizational theory (cf. Calas and Smircich, 1987). It will be deservedly liable for dismissal as 'old wine in new skins'—a theoretical dead end.

These theory development difficulties are not just pedantic arguments, with implications only for scholars. Our paradigms guide our investigations, diverting our attention from, or weakening our abilities to interpret, some aspects of cultural life. If we as researchers exclude aspects or interpretations that are of central importance to cultural members, then our portraits of cultures will be unnecessarily incomplete—perhaps misleadingly so.

This is poor scholarship and it presents a potential danger to those who seek practical insights or applications from our work. Managers are bombarded with easy cultural promises: 'You, too, can create a cultural legacy, cast in the image of your personal values'; 'You, too, can engineer values to increase loyalty, commitment, productivity, and even profits in your organization.' Without some efforts to make theoretical sense out of the cacophony of paradigmatic disputes, cultural researchers will be offering no usable alternative to these seductive promises.

Unfortunately, grappling with paradigmatic differences is easier said than done. Any valid treatment must retain a sensitivity to the internal integrity and complexity of each paradigm, eschewing abstractions that reduce important differences to a lowest common denominator. At the same time, a useful treatment must offer some kind of a metalevel framework that permits insightful understandings about fundamental differences. The trick, of course, is to do this without mixing or trading 'off incommensurables lightly or with verbal pyrotechnics' (Roethlisberger, 1977, p. 472). This we will try to do in the pages that follow. First, however, a brief overview may be helpful.

This chapter explores the relationship between ambiguity and the ambiguous concept of culture. We begin by presenting a matrix framework for understanding different approaches to thinking about culture. The matrix framework is used to contrast two paradigms that have dominated organizational culture research to date. In the second half of the chapter, ambiguity is shown to be a key to understanding the differences between these first two paradigms. Ambiguity also points to a blindspot, an essential third paradigm as yet relatively unexplored by organizational culture researchers. A way out of the dilemma caused by the existence of these competing paradigms is offered. This resolution acknowledges and builds on apparent paradigmatic incommensurabilities, offering insights unavailable to any paradigm by itself.

This odyssey into ambiguity is impossible without some disambiguating definitions. Thus, at the risk of some initial tedium, we need a conceptual framework for talking about culture. The matrix framework described below is broad enough to encompass the widely divergent ways organizational culture has been defined. At the same time, the framework is specific enough to clarify the differences, as well as the similarities, among these definitions.

A MATRIX FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE

Rather than offering yet another abstract definition of culture, the matrix framework focuses on what organizational culture researchers actually study. Three types of cultural manifestations are most frequently studied: practices, artifacts, and content themes.

Practices can be either formal or informal. Formal practices are explicitly dictated by an organization's rules, procedures, and structures. Formal practices include, for example, an institution's organizational chart, reporting relationships, job descriptions, rules for performance appraisal, explicit criteria for hiring and promotion, and pay distribution policies.

Informal practices are behavioral norms that may or may not be consistent with formal rules and procedures. Informal practices include communication norms, for example about whether conflict should be confronted or smoothed over. Other informal practices include habits of interaction, such as 'binging' overzealous workers on an assembly line or using personal relationships to circumvent official hierarchical channels. Most

mainstream organizational research has focused on formal and/or informal practices. If organizational culture researchers studied only practices, they would indeed be guilty of selling 'old wine in new skins'.²

An artifact (Schein, 1981) is a type of cultural manifestation that offers a new focus for research. Artifacts include rituals and ceremonies (e.g. Trice and Beyer, 1984), organizational stories (e.g. Martin, 1982; Wilkins, 1978), jargon and special language (e.g. Evered, 1983; Hirsch and Andrews, 1983), humor (e.g. Boland and Hoffman, 1983), and physical arrangements such as office space or dress codes (e.g. Pfeffer,

²There is considerable debate among anthropologists about the appropriateness of including formal and informal practices within the domain of what is defined as culture. For example, Keesing takes the position that:

We will restrict the term culture to an ideational system. Cultures in this sense comprise systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that humans live. Culture, so defined, refers to what humans learn, not what they do and make (Keesing, 1981, pp. 68–69)

According to this cognitive definition of culture, the social and material arrangements that we have labeled formal and informal practices belong to a noncultural domain, often labeled 'social structure'. Geertz supports this cognitive point of view, observing that:

Culture is that fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the ... network of social relations. Culture and social structure are ... different abstractions from the same phenomena. (Geertz, 1957, pp. 33–34, quoted in Keesing, 1981, p. 74)

The cognitive approach to the study of culture leads to shortcomings, particularly in the ability to 'conceptualize the processes of cultural transmission and change and to relate them to economic and political realities' (Keesing, 1981, p. 73).

Most organizational culture researchers, like many anthropologists, consider these shortcomings of the cognitive approach to be fatal flaws. In a sense, an organization is an explicit attempt to control the behavior of employees in order to produce goods and/or services. Because most organizations are set up for such utilitarian objectives, an understanding of economic and political considerations, and the processes of change, is inseparable from a study of organizational culture. A cognitive approach restricts the culture researcher to the study of ideas and values—aspects of culture that are only indirectly related to the organization's utilitarian objectives. Thus, an exclusively cognitive approach constrains what the study of culture can contribute to an understanding of organizations. For these reasons, most organizational researchers also include formal and informal practices within the domain of culture.

The inclusion of formal and informal practices, as an essential part of culture, is particularly important for those who are concerned with conflicts of interest within an organizational hierarchy. From this (often politically leftist) point of view, organizational cultures do not simply exist in the realm of ideas or values; they constitute a specific, material condition of existence that some consider oppressive and exploitive. It is therefore essential, according to this point of view, that the study of culture include structural, economic, and social specificities. It is misleading to portray an organizational culture as an ungrounded world of ideas and values, disconnected from the practicalities of earning a pay check for doing work, a portion of which is, in any job, distasteful, stressful, and, for some, physically taxing.

The matrix framework can encompass a cognitive approach to the study of culture, as long as formal and informal practices are omitted. However, because of the utilitarian goals of most organizations, and because of the possibility of material forms of oppression, we believe that it is essential to include consideration of practices within the matrix framework. The inclusion of formal and informal practices enables us to examine critically the relationships between actions and structures, on the one hand, and ideas and values, on the other. In other words (and without taking a stand on the old question of primacy), we believe that, whether one terms it culture or not, the interplay between 'base' and 'superstructure' must be a central component of any adequate description of organizational culture.

1981). Artifacts are the cultural manifestations that lend themselves most obviously to symbolic interpretations.

Content themes are abstractions used by researchers and cultural members to organize the interpretation of practices and artifacts. Such content themes can be either ideational (cognitive) or ideological (attitudinal). Ideological content themes focus on values, or more specifically, beliefs (e.g. Martin and Siehl, 1983; Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Pettigrew, 1979; Smith and Simmons, 1983; Wilkins, 1983). Ideational content themes are usually inferred from interpretations, for example, about the meaning of events or the allocation of material goods (e.g. Barley, 1983; Hatch, 1987). Schein (1985) argues that culture researchers should focus on a particular type of ideational or ideological content theme: deep, often preconscious assumptions, such as whether a short- or long-term perspective on time is appropriate to a given organizational context.

Content themes can be inferred by researchers or directly espoused by cultural members. In either case, content themes may be consistent or inconsistent with each other and with particular practices and artifacts. One reason for this is that organizational members may change what they espouse, depending on their audience. It is essential, for example, to distinguish the content themes that organizational members espouse internally to other organizational members and the content themes they espouse to external audiences such as the general public through such media as annual reports. Such externally espoused content themes often represent an attempt to influence what has been called an organization's 'aura' (Christensen and Kreiner, 1984) or 'reputation' (Kreps, 1984); they may bear little relationship to what is espoused or enacted within an organization.

Figure 1 uses the matrix framework to present the first of three partial descriptions of the culture at OZ Company (referred to below as OZCO). For the moment, the structure of the matrix should be considered rather than the content of cell entries. The three types of cultural manifestations—content themes, practices and artifacts—are listed across the top row of the matrix. The left-hand column of the matrix consists of a list of content themes that are related to a subset of observed practices and/or artifacts. Cell entries allude to particular characteristics and interpretations of a cultural manifestation, such as a ritual or an informal practice. This particular matrix presents the practices and artifacts relevant to one content theme of the OZCO culture: egalitarianism. A more complete matrix for OZCO would include other themes, for example a humanitarian concern about the personal well-being of employees.

There are several reasons why it is useful for researchers to place cultural manifestations within the matrix framework. The matrix can be used to compare the ways different researchers approach the study of culture. Without reference to abstract definitions of culture, study of the usage and nonusage of the columns of the matrix makes it easy to contrast which manifestations of culture researchers actually study when they claim to be studying culture. For example, the matrix can be used to represent the work of 'specialist' researchers who focus on one or a very few of these manifestations (e.g. Schall's (1983) study of culture as informal communication norms). Most

(1) Content themes	(2) Practices		(3) Artifacts			
	Formal	Informal	Stories	Rituals	Jargon	Physical arrangements Etc.
External Egalitarian sharing	Participation in United Way stock plan, profit-sharing	MBWA as status equalizer	Strategic planning not the 'OZCO way'	President's behavior at parties, after seminars and award ceremonies	'Retirement village'	Casual dress One cafeteria Open offices No reserved parking
Internal	Answer own telephone 'Perk' distribution based on need, not status Consensual decision-making Lateral promotions					

Figure 1. Integration paradigm: egalitarianism at OZCO

importantly, the use of the matrix framework illuminates in concrete terms what is included and excluded in a particular definition of culture.

For example, the matrix format draws attention to the presence or absence of consistency and consensus within a cultural portrait. Examination of the rows of the matrix reveals consistencies and inconsistencies across various types of cultural manifestations of a particular content theme, for example, between an externally, espoused value and an informal practice.

The matrix format can also encompass individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis, revealing consensus or lack-of-consensus. A different matrix can represent each different viewpoint. For example, the work of a researcher who claims to have found content themes, practices, and artifacts that are shared by all organizational members can be represented within a single matrix. Multiple matrices can represent subcultural or individual differences in perspective.

In a sense, then, the matrix framework defines culture in terms of underlying patterns of relationships (level of consistency and degree of consensus) among interpretations of cultural manifestations. The matrix framework organizes a set of interpretations of the 'surface' manifestations of a culture, going beneath that surface to find patterns that can be, as we shall see, harmonious, full of discord, and/or engulfed in confusion.

The matrix framework can also encompass synchronic and diachronic approaches to the study of culture. A fully or partially completed matrix summarizes a view of a culture at a single point in time. Matrices of the same culture at different times can also be constructed and compared in order to trace the evolution of that culture. Other kinds of comparisons—across levels of analysis within an organization or across types of organizations—can be used to articulate complexities of a single culture or develop generalizations about cultures that might hold across organizational boundaries.

In these ways, the matrix framework can be used to reveal, analyze, and compare highly divergent approaches to the study of culture. At this point, excerpts from a description of a particular culture may be useful in order to clarify distinctions among the various cultural manifestations, illustrate these claims for the versatility of the matrix, and introduce the paradigms. Below, one theme from the culture of the OZ Company is described from the point of view of the first of three paradigms to be discussed: the integration paradigm.

EGALITARIANISM AT OZCO: AN INTEGRATING VIEW

OZCO is a very large multinational firm headquartered in the US. OZCO's culture was selected for analysis because this firm (and other firms with similar characteristics) has been frequently studied, although usually from only one of the three paradigmatic viewpoints to be discussed in this chapter. In addition to considering these previous studies and available archival documentation, we conducted repeated in-depth, open-ended interviews with a sample of past and present employees.

The purpose of presenting these excerpts from a case analysis (Martin and Meyerson, 1986) is to offer a variety of views of OZCO's culture, not to present a systematically

representative cultural description. Our sample of informants is neither stratified nor random. These people were often careful to note that they were speaking only of their own individual experiences of the culture at OZCO. They could not, and usually did not, claim to be representative of OZCO as a whole.

The case material simply quotes or summarizes their points of view, with as little editorial interpretation as possible. It includes various assertions of 'fact' by informants that have been simply recorded rather than checked against possibly more 'authoritative' sources. We do this in an attempt to capture diversity in the perception and interpretation of cultural manifestations. Names and nonessential details have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of these informants.

One of the hallmark concerns of the top management of OZCO has been a desire to institutionalize a relatively egalitarian approach to employee relations. This egalitarian content theme has been espoused to both external and internal audiences. For example, the company's 1985 annual report to its shareholders states:

Central to OZCO's corporate culture and personnel policies is the concept of sharing with its people—sharing the responsibilities for defining and meeting goals, sharing in economic ups and downs, and sharing opportunities for personal and professional development.

This espoused value is reflected in some of OZCO's formal practices. For example, all employees are given an opportunity to be involved in the United Way charity and many also can participate in a stock plan and a profit-sharing program. Everyone is expected to answer his or her own telephone whenever possible. Informal practices are also seen by some to be consistent with this egalitarian emphasis. For example, OZCO encourages 'management by walking around' (MBWA) in order to facilitate informal interchange, improve the accessibility of high-ranking employees, and reverse the usual hierarchical priorities by having superiors come to their subordinates.

Artifacts such as rituals are also seen by some employees to reflect concern with egalitarianism. During the parties that conclude training programs and award ceremonies, Mike McHugh, the President of OZCO, usually personally greets participants in a manner that seems deliberately to transcend differences in status. For example, at a 'senior sales seminar', where top-performing sales employees were socializing with corporate personnel:

Mike McHugh walked in by himself. He just walked in and personally introduced himself: 'Hi. I'm Mike McHugh.' In no way did his actions communicate any aura of superiority. He was just one of the many bodies in the room. He shook hands, talked to you, and he remembers you. In this, he shows a real appreciation. (Stuart, Marketing Engineer)

In most companies, corporate headquarters is a high-status job assignment. Apparently not at OZCO, where company jargon refers to corporate space as 'retirement village' because:

Time in corporate is like taking time off because you have no profit—loss responsibility. (Sonia, Corporate Staff Recruit)

Some employees feel that physical arrangements also confirm egalitarian values. Employees dress casually; even the President is seen frequently in shirt-sleeves. Everyone usually eats in the same cafeteria. Perhaps most importantly, OZCO has open offices, with relatively low partitions dividing small cubicles. Only employees that have frequent contact with external stakeholders have relatively fancy private offices. This space allocation policy is said to facilitate open, informal communication patterns that reduce status differentials. These physical arrangements make it certain that employees get involved with each other:

People get involved in each other's personal lives simply because they overhear each other on the phone. There is no privacy, so a family atmosphere is fostered. (Denise, Product Marketing)

At OZCO 'perks' are not supposed to be distributed according to status. Instead, need and one's functional responsibilities determine who gets which space, desks, or equipment:

If you have a reason, you get something better. Design people get better terminals. Sales people have cars, but they need them. I have a schlocky desk, but that's OK. I can still do my work. (Stuart, Marketing Engineer)

The way to get a good parking space around here is to be the first one at work in the morning. (Joseph, former member of the Board of Directors)

OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism is reinforced by two formal practices that have been emphasized in organizational culture research on companies like OZCO: bottom-up consensual decision-making and lateral promotion ladders. At OZCO, consensual decision-making procedures are designed to push decisions down to the lowest possible level of the hierarchy. For example, an idea for a new product or product enhancement can originate in any division or functional area. The relevant people from a variety of functional areas, all at the same level in the company hierarchy, meet to determine the idea's worth and relative importance. If they reach consensus that the idea is worthwhile, it becomes a 'project' and the various pieces of the project are assigned to appropriate functional areas. In this way, ideas are generated and evaluated at relatively low levels of the corporate hierarchy. Issues can be escalated upwards, repeatedly if necessary, if bottlenecks occur.

New employees, unfamiliar with OZCO's 'bottom-up' approach, are sometimes told the story of why an attempt to engage in strategic planning was considered by many to be a failure:

Relatively recently, a 'strategy retreat' was held for very senior personnel. This was the first time OZCO had considered instituting a formal, systematic strategic planning effort at the corporate level. No strategy was set during the retreat, but the process was discussed. People objected to a centralized strategy because 'It was not the OZCO way'. (Sally, Human Resources Consultant)

OZCO's lateral promotion policy provides an alternative to the usual, purely vertical promotion ladder. Top performers usually receive horizontal 'promotions' (same level, different functional area) before they are moved up one level of the hierarchy:

Employees are encouraged to move horizontally around the organization. Lateral movements tend to homogenize divisions. Most of the VPs have worked in several divisions. The more divisions you work in, the more highly you are valued, even at the price of not developing expertise in a given area. (Bob, Marketing Planner)

Nobody will think less of you, or think you are fickle if you interview around. One of the benefits of working at OZCO is the emphasis on personal development and the option of broadening yourself in different functional areas. There's not the pressure to specialize. Someone could move from marketing to finance because they want a change. This is accepted. It's not looked at as waffling or a lack of commitment. (Denise, Product Marketing)

According to these employees, OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism is real; it surfaces in a wide variety of cultural manifestations including externally espoused values, formal and informal practices, jargon, rituals, stories, and physical arrangements. This view of the OZCO culture is summarized in Figure 1.

PARADIGM 1: INTEGRATION

This partial portrait of the culture at OZCO is an example of the integration paradigm. This is labeled an integrating view because it emphasizes consistency among cultural manifestations and organization-wide consensus among cultural members. Much of the organizational culture research, particularly that which has been conducted in the US, emphasizes the consistency and consensus characteristics of the integration paradigm.

Cultural descriptions that portray integration exhibit at least one of the following three kinds of consistency: action, symbolic, and content. Action consistency occurs when content themes are consistent with an organization's formal and informal practices. For example, in this first view of OZCO, the espoused value of egalitarianism was congruent with formal and informal practices such as participation in United Way, a stock plan, profit-sharing, answering one's own telephone, MBWA, need-based distribution of 'perks', bottom-up consensual decision-making, and lateral promotions.

Schein's (1983) research on organizational culture also stresses action consistency. For example, at one family-dominated company the founder emphasized the value of conflict. He believed that the best decisions emerge from fierce arguments about alternatives. This value was consistently translated into action according to Schein, for example in the norm that encouraged decision-making meetings to become tumultuous shouting matches.

A second type of consistency is symbolic. It occurs when the symbolic meanings of artifacts, such as stories and jargon, are congruent with a firm's formal and informal practices. For example, in the excerpts above, egalitarian practices were reinforced

by Mike McHugh's behavior at company rituals, 'retirement village' jargon, and the story about the failure of corporate strategic planning. Physical arrangements, such as casual dress codes, a single cafeteria for all employees, open office spaces, and first-come, first-served allocation of parking spaces, were also consistent with these egalitarian practices.

Symbolic consistency is also evident in Pettigrew's (1979) portrayal of the activities of public school headmasters. Whenever these headmasters tried to change formal or informal practices in their schools, they reinforced the desired changes with symbolic artifacts. For example, they created rituals or told organizational stories that expressed approval of the types of behaviors they were seeking to encourage.

Content consistency occurs when content themes are consistent with each other. As only one content theme was described above in the OZCO analysis, consistency across themes cannot be examined. However, OZCO typifies the Theory Z type of corporate culture described by Ouchi (1981). Theory Z cultures exhibit three content themes that are mutually consistent: a holistic concern for the physical and psychological well-being of the employee and his or her family; a long-term perspective on decisions about products and people; and a desire for 'shared values' rather than 'red tape' as ways of controlling deviant behavior. Obviously, such broad-based, personal concern about employees would not be appropriate, and the development of 'shared values' would not be possible, if only a short-term perspective were being taken. Thus, the central content themes of Theory Z cultures reinforce each other, creating an internally consistent ideology. Similar patterns of consistency (including also symbolic consistency) can be seen in the cultural descriptions congruent with the integration paradigm by Barley (1983), Deal and Kennedy (1982), Martin (1982), Pascale and Athos (1981), Peters and Waterman (1982), Pettigrew (1979), and Schein (1985).

Consistency is the first essential characteristic of the integration paradigm. Consensus is the second. Researchers who rely on the integration paradigm generally define culture as that which cultural members share—the glue that holds an organization together. With some disregard for tautology, this definition is then used as a code-breaker: only that which is apparently shared is considered worthy of inclusion in a cultural description. Thus, the integration paradigm focuses upon content themes, practices, and artifacts that are supposedly perceived and interpreted in the same ways by all, or at least most, members of a culture.

Such claims of consensus are usually based on information from selected sources. Integration paradigm researchers tend to extrapolate from a relatively small number of informants, primarily those who have high-ranking positions (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982—see Ouchi, 1981 as an exception). Cultural members tend to base their judgments about consensus on information from those they work with (Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985).

There is a final characteristic that is exhibited by most, but not all, integrating views of culture: past or present leaders of an organization are seen as the source of most cultural manifestations. The leader, often a current chief executive officer (CEO), is given credit for articulating the central content themes of the culture and initiating

the formal and informal practices that implement those themes. Founders are a favorite focus of attention, getting credit for creating cultures that mirror their own personal value systems, thereby earning an organizational form of proto-immortality (e.g. Clark, 1970; Hackman, 1984; Schein, 1983). In an integrating view of a culture, a leader is viewed as a symbolic center of gravity, often serving as the master of ceremonies at ritual events, playing a starring role in organizational stories, and inventing symbols and special language that capture the essence of core values (e.g. Martin *et al.*, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979).

Given this attribution of cultural centrality to leaders, it is no surprise that many advocates of the integration paradigm claim that culture can (and should) be 'managed' by leaders, thereby encouraging commitment to the 'right' values, loyalty to the company and its management's interests, greater productivity, and perhaps even increased profitability. The integration paradigm has been the breeding ground for the seductive promises that have provided much of the impetus for the recent popularity of corporate culture among practitioners.

In summary, the integration paradigm emphasizes harmony. Consistency and consensus (and sometimes leader-centeredness) are the defining characteristics of this paradigm. In terms of the matrix framework, action and symbolic consistency appear horizontally, across the rows of the matrix. Content consistency appears vertically, in the left-hand column of the matrix. Consensus implies that a single matrix can represent what is known about a culture from an integration paradigm perspective. The picture of culture that emerges, then, is monolithic. Organizations are portrayed as having a single dominant culture that generates shared understanding and commitment from all parts of the hierarchy. Pondy's (1983) metaphor captures the essence of this approach: cultures are portrayed as holograms; any fragment encapsulates the essence of the whole.

Research that takes an integration paradigm perspective has been fiercely criticized. The critics argue that claims of consistency and consensus are misleading oversimplifications. These shortcomings are often attributed to 'inappropriate' methodological strategies, such as over-reliance on high-ranking informants and short-term involvement with an organization. Given the conceptual centrality of the question of what is shared, and by whom, it is indeed an important weakness that integration paradigm research seldom makes a systematic attempt to determine exactly who shares what.

One hundred percent agreement on an issue may, in fact, be a relatively rare phenomenon, particularly in organizational contexts where conflicts of interest are endemic. Organizational culture research would, we believe, be much strengthened by the provision of detailed qualitative or quantitative data concerning the content and intensity of agreement and the parameters of deviance.

As will become evident below, a few studies have taken this direction. Their results undermine the integration paradigm's presumption of organization-wide consensus (e.g. Friedman, 1983; Gregory, 1983; Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985; Wilkins, 1978). These researchers argue that cultures are more accurately characterized by inconsistency

and the development of subcultures that often conflict with each other. The texture of this very different kind of cultural description is illustrated below, with excerpts from a second view of the OZCO culture written from the perspective of the differentiation paradigm.

QUESTIONING EGALITARIANISM AT OZCO: A DIFFERENTIATING VIEW

Some employees question the reality of OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism. Although it is unlikely that any large corporation would be totally egalitarian, some employees feel that OZCO's egalitarian rhetoric masks a hierarchy that is, in the words of one employee, 'more adhered to than anywhere that I have ever seen' (Sally, Human Resources Consultant). In addition, some functional areas are seen as more equal than others. Engineering, in particular, is said to receive preferential treatment.

These apparent inequalities are made visible, according to some employees, in OZCO's physical arrangements. Although employees eat at the same cafeteria, status and functional differences are reflected in self-chosen seating patterns. Engineering and marketing employees are rarely seen eating together. And, although some cross-status interaction is observed, it is limited:

I wouldn't hesitate to sit down with my immediate boss, his boss, or his boss's boss. But I wouldn't sit with anyone higher than that. And, of course, I wouldn't eat with engineers. (Dan, Product Marketing)

Employees who are sceptical about egalitarianism note that although corporate headquarters may be referred to as 'retirement village', it is located 'upstairs', along with engineering and quality control. Engineers work in 'The Labs', a word often referred to with some deference. 'The Labs', like most of the rest of the company, have open office spaces. However, the walls of the engineers' partitions are higher, supposedly to provide 'room for thought'. People in marketing, in contrast, have to go offsite to think.

Rather than being an egalitarian panacea, open office spaces create tension. Some find them a dehumanizing invasion of privacy:

There was one guy I worked with that made me very uncomfortable. I had to go to great lengths to avoid him. I even tried earplugs, so that I wouldn't have to hear his very personal, agonizing phone conversations. (Denise, Product Marketing)

Hoffman (1982) and Hatch (1987) studied the effects of the apparently egalitarian physical arrangements at OZCO using interviews with employees as well as observational methodology. They separately concluded that open office spaces make OZCO employees' behavior very visible. Conversations can be, and are, overheard. Supervisors can literally oversee (by gazing over partitions) the work of their subordinates. From this perspective MBWA can be interpreted as a way of keeping an eye on employees.

Hoffman even suggests that casual dress norms and informalities such as the use of first names give the impression that superiors know their subordinates personally. Those employees who prefer more interpersonal distance feel uncomfortable, particularly when some superiors express concern over their private lives. Thus, these apparently egalitarian practices and physical arrangements can create tensions among levels of the OZCO hierarchy. Rather than being a source of egalitarian harmony, according to Hoffman and Hatch, these cultural manifestations create tension, resentment and occasional overt conflict.

Although 'perks' are supposedly distributed in an egalitarian fashion, based on functional needs or tenure, some believe that, ultimately, who gets what depends on a manager's 'pull':

If my manager has extra money, after everything is taken care of, then we get some perks.
(Stuart, Marketing Engineer)

Although bottom-up consensual decision-making seems an unequivocally egalitarian practice, most important decisions at OZCO require agreement across divisional boundaries. To reach that kind of consensus, some employees feel they have to resort to hierarchical sources of authority:

For example, I was trying to get some guys in third party software to learn about my product before its introduction, so they would be ready to pump it. They had better things to do, so I had to go to their boss to get their help. The problem is you use up social capital when you do this. (Tom, Marketing Engineer)

Status differences among functional areas are also seen by some as influencing the decision-making process. For example:

There are lots of internal competition and status differentials. Product management is more prestigious than sales and purchasing, and purchasing likes to spite the other divisions. In group level meetings there is a lot of finger pointing, rather than coherence into a united force. (Denise, Product Marketing)

Some feel that opportunities for lateral movement are not equal: For example, the lateral promotion policy is apparently implemented using a highly differentiated power structure:

Opportunity to move around and ultimately advance depends on relative power and status of division and division manager. (Dana, Sales)

To summarize, this is a differentiation paradigm view of OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism. It pinpoints inconsistencies and sources of conflict. Although espoused values and formal practices may sound clearly egalitarian, implementation of these policies is described as inconsistent. Some informal practices and jargon reflect hierarchical and functional status inequalities. Similarly, although physical arrangements

appear egalitarian, interpretations of their meaning reflect tensions about these status differences.

Figure 2 uses the matrix format to summarize this differentiation paradigm view of egalitarianism at OZCO. Inconsistencies and a lack of organization-wide consensus are evident in this one matrix. A more complete investigation of these hierarchical and functional differences in perspective might have filled several matrices, each matrix representing the viewpoint of a subculture. For example, a pair of matrices might contrast the views of top management (this might look much like the integration paradigm view presented in Figure 1) with the views of lower-level employees. Another set of matrices might contrast the views of the various functional areas, such as engineering and marketing.

PARADIGM 2: DIFFERENTIATION

Where the integration paradigm emphasizes consistency and consensus, the differentiation paradigm stresses inconsistency and lack of consensus. Three types of inconsistency are found: action, symbolic, and content.

Action inconsistency occurs when espoused ideology is not congruent with actual practices (e.g. Argyris and Schon, 1978; Christensen and Kreiner, 1984; Homans, 1974). There are several examples of action inconsistency in the differentiating view of OZCO's egalitarianism. Espoused egalitarian values are inconsistent with a variety of formal and informal practices, including: the distribution of 'perks' according to a manager's 'pull' and surplus budget; the interpretation of MBWA as a means of maintaining control over subordinate behavior; the hierarchical and functional status differences evident in 'consensual' decision-making; evaluation procedures that reward specialization rather than lateral mobility; and the effects of managerial status on opportunities for lateral movement.

Another example of action inconsistency comes from a petroleum refinery in a 'red neck' area of Texas (Siehl, 1984). The refinery's top management team spoke frequently and at length about the importance of combatting the evils of racism and sexism. Inspection of employment records, however, indicated that this affirmative action rhetoric was misleading, as few females and/or blacks were actually hired. The rhetoric protected this predominantly white male preserve from outside interference from affirmative action advocates.

Although the terminology is not the same, studies of loose coupling often draw attention to action inconsistency. For example, Meyer and Rowan's (1977) study of school systems describes inconsistencies between externally espoused rhetoric and actual priorities in the classroom. When addressing external audiences such as school boards and government funding sources, school administrators stressed the importance of 'the numbers': test scores, inventories of textbooks, and the number of classrooms and desks. In contrast, when addressing teachers, administrators made little mention of these quantitative variables, focusing instead on the process of education. Meyer and Rowan conclude that public talk about 'the numbers' was empty rhetoric that buffered the teachers

(1) Content themes		(2) Practices		(3) Artifacts			
External	Internal	Formal	Informal	Stories	Rituals	Jargon	Physical arrangements Etc.
	Egalitarianism is questioned		'Perk' distribution based on managers' pull and surplus budget			'Upstairs' 'The Labs'	Seating in cafeteria segregated by status and function
			MBWA as keeping eye on subordinates				Higher partitions for engineers than marketing personnel
			Hierarchical authority and functional status differences often override consensual decision-making				Open offices cause discomfort
			Opportunity for lateral promotion depends on power and status of manager				Casual dress, etc. cause intrusion into personal lives

Figure 2. Differentiation paradigm: questioning egalitarianism at OZCO

from outside interference so that the work itself, the unquantifiable art of teaching, could continue undisturbed.

Symbolic inconsistency is also characteristic of differentiating views of culture. In some cases, symbolic meanings associated with artifacts pinpoint inconsistencies in a cultural system (e.g. Smircich, 1983; Smith and Simmons, 1983). For example, in the differentiating portrayal of egalitarianism at OZCO, egalitarian rhetoric is inconsistent with a variety of artifacts, including: jargon, ('upstairs' and 'The Labs'); status-stratified seating arrangements in the cafeteria; higher wall partitions for engineers; and discomfort with the invasions of privacy associated with open office space and informal dress codes.

In other cases, symbolic inconsistencies can focus on exceptions that 'prove the rule' (Siehl, 1984). For example, the petroleum refinery described above had a safety record that was quite respectable compared to other refineries in the area. Yet the refinery's most popular organizational story concerned 'the Labor Day explosion', when disregard of safety rules caused an employee's death. It seems plausible that, in situations such as this, symbolic inconsistency may emphasize, rather than question, a core value—in this case the importance of following safety procedures. On the other hand, this story may be interpreted to mean that, in spite of some people's best efforts, this refinery isn't a totally safe place to work.

The third form of inconsistency occurs when content themes conflict with each other. For example, a study of 100 randomly selected Fortune 500 companies isolated a subset of firms that placed significantly more emphasis on the value of taking financial risks, such as divestitures, mergers, and acquisitions. Such risks can threaten employee job security. This subset of firms was also significantly more likely to espouse humanitarian content themes, such as caring for employees' personal well-being (Martin, AnterAsian and Siehl, 1988). It is possible that such content inconsistencies are intentional. For example, humanitarian value rhetoric may serve as a smokescreen, deflecting attention from the less humane implications of financial risk-taking.

These examples of action, symbolic, and content inconsistency draw attention to the issue of intentionality. Most of the explanations discussed above offer interpretations of inconsistency that assume intentionality. For example, when companies try to legitimate financial practices that threaten employees' job security, using value rhetoric about caring for the personal well-being of those employees, this may well be an intentionally misleading attempt to enhance the firm's public image.

It is also possible, however, that the company's management sincerely does have humanitarian values but is forced to react differently because of economic forces beyond its control. Or, the value placed on maximizing firm profits may coexist with humanitarian concerns about individual employees' personal well-being, resulting in inconsistent practices or artifacts. Making attributions about intentionality is a difficult task. When cultural members and researchers work within the differentiation paradigm, they often devote much effort to justifying their judgments about whether inconsistencies are intentional.

Lack of organization-wide consensus is the second defining characteristic of the

differentiation paradigm. The differentiation paradigm emphasizes subcultures, and usually does not even acknowledge sources of organization-wide agreement. Organizational subcultures may have positive (enhancing), negative (conflicting), or orthogonal (unvalenced difference) relationships to each other or to a dominant organizational culture (Louis, 1983).

For example, a top management team may fanatically support a CEO's perspective (e.g. Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985). Or, a counterculture may arise in opposition to a dominant culture, as in John DeLorean's division of General Motors (Martin and Siehl, 1983). In contrast to these clear alliances and conflicts, orthogonal subcultures simply represent different, nonconflicting perspectives. Many orthogonal subcultures reflect occupational (e.g. Gregory, 1983; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984) or tenure-related (Louis, 1980) differences.

The differentiation paradigm is not leader-centered. Instead, differentiating views of culture stress nonleader-centered sources of cultural content, such as national, industrial, and occupational influences, demographics, technology, and even the role of cognitive processes (such as attribution biases and the effects of salience). When such nonleader-centered sources are fully considered, it is more difficult to overestimate a leader's influence. For example, a study of a small start-up company concluded that the founder had been given retrospective credit for creating aspects of the culture that were, in fact, due to external forces beyond his control (Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985).

In summary, the differentiation paradigm stresses inconsistencies, delineates the absence of organization-wide consensus (usually in the form of overlapping, nested subcultures), and stresses nonleader-centered sources of cultural content. In terms of the matrix framework, action and symbolic inconsistencies appear across rows, and content inconsistencies appear vertically within the left-hand column of the matrix. Lack of consensus can be represented in one matrix or, in more detail, by constructing multiple matrices where each matrix represents a separate subculture. Although each subcultural matrix might include some internal consistency and consensus, the fragmentation characteristic of the differentiation paradigm would become evident when the various subcultural matrices were compared.

HARMONY AND CONFLICT

Each of the paradigms has a characteristic way of dealing with harmony and conflict. Given the integration paradigm's emphasis on homogeneity, it is not surprising that most integration paradigm portrayals of culture offer an image of harmony rather than conflict. Just as Benedict (1934) portrayed Indian tribal societies as unified by a single harmonious theme, such as Apollonian detachment, so the integration paradigm presents pictures of organization-wide congruence. For example, Ouchi (1980) offers a vision of cultural harmony in his description of clan-type organizations, where members are bound together (and controlled) by common goals, values, and understandings.

Voluntary organizations, worker democracies, social movements, and other interest-based organizations are usually described from an integrating perspective, where harmony arises from a single shared ideological commitment. Large corporate bureaucracies are also often described from the perspective of the integration paradigm. Indeed, harmony is often celebrated in integration paradigm accounts as the key to improved organizational effectiveness (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kilmann, 1985; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982). In integrating accounts, conflicts between management's interests and the interests of lower-level employees are generally absent.

Only occasionally does an integrating view of a culture include a mention of the dark side of the moon: the conflict that can be hidden by an emphasis on harmony. Strong pressures towards consistency and consensus have negative effects, particularly on deviants. Ouchi (1981), for example, speculates that minority members and women may find it more difficult to 'fit' into well-integrated cultures dominated by white males, such as those that are described in much of the integration paradigm research.

Because the second paradigm emphasizes differentiation, one might expect an emphasis on conflict rather than harmony. This is not necessarily so. Although most differentiating views of culture emphasize conflict, some do not. For example, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) offer a harmonious portrait of organizational differentiation. Functional differences (such as those between financial administration, production, or marketing) often serve as organizational subcultures, each essential for organizational survival. According to Lawrence and Lorsch, effective organizations use integrating mechanisms such as task forces and liaison roles to create harmony out of this diversity.

In contrast, other differentiating portrayals of culture offer a Hobbesian or Marxian vision of deep and enduring conflict (e.g. Abravanel, 1983; Riley, 1983). For example, Smircich (1983) describes conflict between a top executive and his employees, who pay lip service to the executive's espoused values while behaving in accord with their own interests. Similar clashes of interest often occur between management and lower-level employees such as assembly-line workers. Thus, the differentiation paradigm can include both conflict and harmony, while the integration paradigm portrays primarily a harmonious side of organizational life.

THE DENIAL, CHANNELING, AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF AMBIGUITY

Harmony is a kind of clarity. The integration paradigm restricts attention to those cultural manifestations that are clear enough to seem consistent and to engender interpretations that cultural members can agree upon. As a result, culture becomes that which is clear, 'an area of meaning cut out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle' (Berger, 1967, p. 23, quoted in Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984, p. 26). In its quest for lucidity, the integration paradigm denies ambiguity.

In this chapter, ambiguity refers to that which seems unclear. It has proven helpful to us to distinguish three types of ambiguity: uncertainty, contradiction, and confusion. Uncertainty refers to a lack of predictability in, for example, the organization's environment or technology. Contradiction refers to cultural manifestations and interpretations that are capable of double meanings, as in, for example, a paradox or an irreconcilable conflict. Confusion is caused by ignorance or lack of information, rather than awareness of contradiction.³

The integration paradigm denies ambiguity. There is considerable evidence that, under many circumstances, people find the experience of ambiguity unpleasant. When stimuli cannot be channeled and anticipated, discomforting information overload can occur. Similarly, when emotions cannot be identified, free-floating anxiety can be overwhelming.

The experience of ambiguity can also bring behavioral paralysis. As bystander intervention research has demonstrated (e.g. Latane and Darley, 1970), people usually do not intervene in an emergency as long as the situation is ambiguously defined. Once the ambiguity is clarified, then, and only then, will bystanders help. When a situation is ambiguous, it is difficult to know if action is called for, which actions would be appropriate, and what their consequences might be. The frequent result is inaction.

However unpleasant it may be, people in organizations can endure information overload and free-floating anxiety. In the long run, however, an organization cannot sacrifice its ability to act. Of all the effects of ambiguity, it is behavioral paralysis that may present the greatest danger to organizations.

When people are faced with these negative effects of ambiguity, they often react by denying its existence. For example, Bruner and Postman (1949) reversed the color of some playing cards. After being shown a red ace of spades, subjects would insist the card they saw was black or was an ace of hearts or diamonds. In a similar fashion, those who adopt an integration paradigm view of culture react to ambiguity by denying it.

There are other, less drastic alternatives. Rather than denying ambiguity, it can be channeled, thereby limiting its potentially bewildering and paralyzing effects. The differentiation paradigm views culture as either harmonious or conflictful. Either way, a kind of clarity is present because differences are localized and bounded. Even when conflicts are present, things are clear enough that cultural members know that they disagree on particular issues or interpretations.

Subcultural differentiation 'fences in' these clear differences in perspective. Each subculture becomes an island of localized lucidity; ambiguities lie only in the interstices among the subcultures. The differentiation paradigm channels ambiguity as swift currents create channels around islands. This frees subcultural members to perceive and respond to only a small part of the complexities and uncertainties of the organization's environment, thus avoiding action paralysis.

³Portions of this discussion of ambiguity and the third paradigm are presented in Meyerson and Martin (1987).

A third reaction to ambiguity is possible. Rather than denying or channeling it, ambiguity could be acknowledged and even made the focus of attention. A view of culture that incorporates the acknowledgment of ambiguity is so different that it is reasonable to argue that it represents a third paradigm. It is even possible that cultural members might revel in ambiguity and researchers might legitimate it, for example as a source of innovation, creativity, or productive change—perhaps as a concomitant of the chaos and excitement of a new venture or rapid organizational growth.

However, this level of comfort with ambiguity is probably unusual. Because of its unpleasant effects, ambiguity may more often be accepted with reluctance, as an inevitable part of life. It is difficult to imagine members of a Fortune 500 company overjoyed to admit the existence of widespread confusion. Below we offer excerpts from a description of a culture where ambiguity is acknowledged, in accord with the third paradigm—albeit with some reluctance and dismay.

CONFUSION ABOUT EGALITARIANISM AT OZCO: AN AMBIGUOUS VIEW

Resources and nonfinancial rewards are supposed to be distributed at OZCO in a relatively egalitarian fashion. However, how one actually obtains a better office space, a nicer desk, or a newer computer (or any other physical object that can have status connotations) is not clear to some employees. Need, status, power, and tenure all come into play, but there certainly does not seem to be a formula, even within each division.

Confusion also surrounds OZCO's much-touted commitment to open office spaces. There has long been much private discussion about whether or not open office spaces are 'a good thing'. This has become such a hot topic that a formal meeting was held so that the costs and benefits of the open plan (as well as the financial costs of changing to a closed plan) could be publicly debated.

During this meeting, two kinds of confusion emerged. It was not clear whether the open offices were achieving the stated objectives of promoting informal communication and equalizing status differences. Perhaps more importantly, it was not at all clear the employees agreed that these objectives were a top priority, or even appropriate. Some employees were concerned about privacy or work efficiency, while others put greater priority on minimizing status differentials. No consensus about priorities emerged and employees remained confused about how these conflicting objectives should be, and would be, prioritized. Possibly these objectives are incommensurable or irreconcilable.

Awareness of ambiguity pervades employee discussions about the difficulties of getting things done within the OZCO bureaucracy:

There are a number of layers. The charters of different divisions often overlap. If you are going to impact other divisions then it's very difficult. Because rules and procedures differ across divisions, much confusion results when policies have to move across divisional boundaries. (Dan, Product Marketing)

This ambiguity about means for getting things done is apparently exacerbated by the company's emphasis on low-level, consensual decision-making practices. One problem is that, given the size of the company, some employees feel that it is difficult to know what's going on outside one's own level of the hierarchy and division:

Products have to work together. (They) can't work in isolation. They're not set up to do this. OZCO is a lot of little companies. (Bob, Marketing Planner)

As a result, some employees feel that decisions are based on little (and often erroneous) information. In addition, 'no one' can make a decision because decisions are supposed to be pushed to the lowest level possible. And, if a decision involves other divisions, the decision must move up and across the hierarchy. Getting decisions moved around in this way seems, to some, to be a very ambiguous process:

It seems that when one moves beyond the division level to the group level there is a problem. When there is no way the divisions can coordinate on their own, then a group manager is called in to 'fix it'. How far up to coordinate a project is unclear. These things come to people's attention where we choose to measure our results. When divisions are having trouble, when they've lost some sales because of lack of links, then they go to the group level to 'fix it'. (Stuart, Marketing Engineer)

Similar confusion surrounds OZCO's lateral promotion policy. Lateral movement is often encouraged, but there is considerable confusion about how you go about moving around, how you get interviews with other divisions, and how you get the support of your own boss for a transfer:

(Employees) can move around, although I really don't know how one does this. During a hiring freeze especially, I don't know how to get support for a transfer. (Bob, Marketing Planner)

Organizational stories at OZCO suggest that not all employees are even aware that lateral, rather than vertical, promotions are the norm. For example:

A very competent woman for two and a half years had been working in corporate personnel on the workforce restructuring project. She was passed over for a job that she would have been a natural for. Later, she was told that if she wanted to move ahead she had to come up (laterally) through the divisions. This was the first she had heard of this policy, even though she had been working on workforce issues for two and a half years. It wasn't clear to her. (Sally, Human Resources Consultant)

In addition to portraying the ignorance of a single employee, this story pinpoints a number of sources of the ambiguity that apparently surrounds the company's lateral promotion policy. Was this apparently competent woman never told of the policy because her chances of promotion were nil? Or, were her chances of promotion nil because she was not smart enough to realize the importance and personal relevance of the lateral promotion policy when she heard about it? Or, are females and other minorities less

likely to be coached by the informal 'old boy' network of line managers who watch for 'promotable' subordinates? Or, was the woman in the story not seen as having the skills or experiences that make a person 'promotable'? At OZCO, line managers almost always seem to have engineering, rather than personnel backgrounds.

One central aspect of any promotion policy is performance evaluation, and here too, there is considerable ambiguity about the process itself, as well as the criteria used. Theoretically, employees are evaluated on their own performance. However, employees are apparently ranked using different salary curves, depending on their level in the OZCO hierarchy. Employees often don't know who they are being compared to and what the criteria for ranking are:

I'm not well versed in the ranking process because it's done by first-line managers and up. I know pay increases are based on merit, but merit really depends on your job . . . Since different jobs are compared to each other it's difficult. It's difficult to compare apples to oranges here and I don't know how they do it . . . I'm a marketing engineer here and I'm ranked against a lab engineer. (Tom, Marketing Engineer)

I think we are ranked based on the power of the divisions. Managers of each division argue for rank criteria that will favor their own division. The managers don't know what other division members even do. One product manager says evaluation is based on new product development, another says they don't know, another says growth. (Denise, Product Marketing)

In summary, these employees are confused about OZCO's commitment to egalitarianism. They hear relatively egalitarian rhetoric about the distribution of resources and nonfinancial rewards, open office spaces, consensual decision-making, and lateral promotions. However, their own experiences, and those of other employees, leave them confused about what the purposes of these policies are, whether these policies are desirable, how these policies are implemented, and why.

Figure 3 summarizes the main elements of this ambiguity paradigm view of egalitarianism at OZCO. As in the two previous portraits of the culture at OZCO, an ambiguity-acknowledging view isolates and traces content themes as they surface in practices and artifacts. Although cell entries in the matrix can be made, distinguishing consistency and inconsistency is not possible within this paradigm. Instead, any cultural manifestation is an equivocal stimulus, open to multiple interpretations, not clearly consistent or inconsistent with other cultural manifestations, not fully understood by either researchers or cultural members.

PARADIGM 3: AMBIGUITY

In the ambiguity paradigm, cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or clearly inconsistent with each other. Instead, the relationships among manifestations are characterized by a lack of clarity. Differences in interpretation are seen as incommensurable, irreconcilable, and unavoidable. From this perspective, the clarity of the

(1) Content themes		(2) Practices				(3) Artifacts			
External	Internal	Formal	Informal	Stories	Rituals	Jargon	Physical arrangements	Etc.	
	Confusion about egalitarianism	Performance evaluation criteria and process unclear, lateral moves don't seem to count	'Perk' distribution norms hard to figure out	Competent woman never heard of lateral promotion policy			Open office spaces debated, goal priorities and effects unclear		
			Confusion about how to implement policies, particularly in different divisions						
			Consensual decision-making produces confusion and poor-quality decisions						
			Ignorance and confusion about how lateral promotion policy works						

Figure 3. Ambiguity paradigm: confusion about egalitarianism at OZCO

integration paradigm or even the clear inconsistencies and conflicts characteristic of the differentiation paradigm would be viewed as oversimplifications, perhaps created or reinforced by management for purposes of control (Siehl, 1984).

A culture viewed from an ambiguity paradigm perspective cannot be characterized as harmonious or as conflictful. Instead, individuals share some viewpoints, disagree about some, and are ignorant of or indifferent to others. Consensus, dissensus, and confusion coexist, making it difficult to draw cultural and subcultural boundaries. Certainly those boundaries would not coincide with structural divisions or permanent linking roles, as an absence of clarity would undermine the apparent impact of these integrating and differentiating mechanisms.

One metaphor for a culture viewed from an ambiguity paradigm perspective is a web. Individuals are nodes in the web, connected by shared concerns to some but not all the surrounding nodes. When a particular issue becomes salient, one pattern of connections becomes relevant. That pattern would include a unique array of agreements, disagreements, and domains of ignorance. A different issue would draw attention to a different pattern of connections—and different sources of confusion. Whenever a new issue becomes salient to cultural members or researchers, a new pattern of connections would become significant.

An ambiguity paradigm view of a culture, then, would have no universally shared, integrating set of values, save one: an awareness of ambiguity itself. From an ambiguity paradigm perspective, researchers and cultural members see (and perhaps even look for) complexity, confusion, and irreconcilable contradictions—that which is not clear. Rather than being 'a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle', this third paradigm views culture as the jungle itself. The defining characteristics of this third paradigm are summarized and contrasted with the characteristics of the other two paradigms in Table 1.

Table 1. Contrasting the paradigms

Defining characteristics	Paradigm name		
	1. Integration	2. Differentiation	3. Ambiguity
Level of consistency	Only consistent elements mentioned	Some inconsistency	Lack of clarity
Degree of consensus	Organization-wide consensus	Consensus within, not between, subcultures	Issue-specific consensus, dissensus, or confusion
Orientation to ambiguity	Denial	Channeling	Acknowledgment
Metaphors	Hologram	Islands of clarity	Web, jungle

The ambiguity paradigm raises a set of serious questions about the nature of culture itself. Would a culture that fully acknowledged ambiguity deteriorate into chaos and anarchy? If so, would such a culture represent a third cultural paradigm or would it be more accurate to say that full acknowledgment of ambiguity means an absence of culture? What is the essence of culture, without which culture cannot be said to exist? Does a minimum of consistency and consensus have to be present, in order to stave off the forces of chaos and anarchy? Does the existence of culture necessitate the denial or channeling of ambiguity?

Answers to these questions are hard to come by because culture research has seldom used an ambiguity-acknowledging perspective (for exceptions see below and Calas and Smircich, 1987; Golding, 1987; Grafton-Small and Linstead, 1987). The research of March and his colleagues on 'organized anarchies' (e.g. Brunsson, 1985; Hedberg, 1981; March and Olsen, 1976), although not specifically focused on cultural issues, does provide insight into these questions. This research often focuses on decision-making in large public bureaucracies or educational institutions. In these 'organized anarchies', complexities and lack of clarity are the rule rather than the exception. Ambiguities are seen as unavoidable and in some cases desirable aspects of organizational functioning.

Many of these 'organized anarchies' exist in order to reflect the diversity of the multiple constituencies they represent. Thus, patterns of connection are diffuse, membership is fluid, and consensus is hard to come by. When it occurs, it often does so on one level (perhaps agreement on a policy) but not on another (how to implement that policy or why that policy is desirable). Action paralysis is often the norm (e.g. Brunsson, 1985), and when it is not, action is often generated without full comprehension or consensus concerning its meaning or intended effects (e.g. Starbuck, 1983).

This literature, like most organizational literature outside the domain of cultural studies, tends to focus on formal and informal practices, such as decision-making procedures, overlapping work roles, informal communication, and evolving job definitions. Thus, relatively little is known about the symbolic interpretation of artifacts in cultures portrayed from an ambiguity-acknowledging perspective. One exception is Feldman's (1983) study of a large federal agency. At that agency organizational stories often describe the experience of ambiguity, as for example in 'The New Administration Effect':

A new employee at the agency reluctantly accustomed himself to the absence of hot water, air conditioning, and adequate hall lighting in the agency's office building. One morning, when he went to work, the lights were switched on, the soft whirr of the air conditioner could be heard, and the faucets once more gushed hot water upon request. An old timer laughed at the new employee's puzzlement, observing 'It's no mystery. The new administration has just taken over.'

The bewilderment of the new employee and the overwhelming sense of confusion that permeate this story may be characteristic of the symbolic aspects of culture viewed

from an ambiguity-acknowledging perspective. Clearly, this is an intriguing and largely unexplored domain for future research.

This research suggests some answers to the questions raised above concerning the relationships between the ambiguity paradigm, chaos, and the 'absence of culture'. Although March and his colleagues label these organizations 'anarchies', the descriptions they offer do not portray chaos. Although these organizational descriptions often include evidence of behavioral paralysis, the organizations continue to function, and organizational members continue to be associated with them.

We do not think that organizational cultures portrayed from an ambiguity-acknowledging perspective have an absence of culture. Instead, the ambiguity paradigm offers a distinctive view of culture, one that is centered on ambiguity itself. If this is correct, culture may not necessarily involve the denial or channeling of ambiguity. It could also include the acknowledgment of ambiguity, an acknowledgment that may be either reluctant or enthusiastic.

AMBIGUITY AND INNOVATION

This variation in attitudes about ambiguity raises a question. The new agency employee apparently reacted to ambiguity with puzzlement and a feeling of powerlessness. OZCO employees accepted ambiguity with reluctance and dismay; they saw it as a problem. In other settings, such as 'start-up' firms, research and development laboratories, and 'skunk works', cultural members are often quite comfortable with ambiguity.

This kind of comfort might also be prevalent among members of some occupational subcultures, such as social workers, academic researchers, and teachers. Finally, personality research indicates that some individuals develop unusually high levels of tolerance for ambiguity (Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Rokeach, 1960). In some contexts, then, the experience of ambiguity is not considered noxious. Indeed, if some academics, innovators, and entrepreneurs are to be believed, sometimes the experience of ambiguity can be a delight. Why?

These are peculiar contexts. New ventures, research laboratories, and members of the helping professions are in the business of innovation—creating a new product or idea, running a new business, or solving an indeterminate or previously insoluble problem. When innovation is an objective, people may be more willing to accept ambiguity. Thus, in its emphasis on ambiguity, this third paradigm may provide a key to understanding the processes of innovation.

There are a variety of sources of ambiguity: unclear expectations, preferences, and evaluation criteria; loosely coupled actions and outcomes; and rapid change, to name a few. These sources of ambiguity suggest several reasons why ambiguity and innovation may be linked. When expectations, preferences, and evaluation criteria are unclear, there is no apparent right or wrong outcome. Because there is no risk of being 'wrong', experimentation, and thus creativity, is encouraged. And if objectives are not clear *a priori* they can be permitted to emerge. This may be why ambiguity may be salient in such occupations as academic research and social work.

When the source of ambiguity is loose coupling between actions and outcomes, innovation may be encouraged for slightly different reasons. For example, entrepreneurs often observe and experience outcomes that seem to be out of their control. In spite of extreme dedication and hard work, their new ventures may fail; or, a venture may succeed for no apparent or foreseeable reason beyond pure luck. Under these kinds of uncertain conditions, negative consequences of actions, as well as their causes, are difficult to detect and evaluate. As a result, this kind of ambiguity brings individuals a sense of safety, and with that safety autonomy for acting, playing, and experimenting (McCall, 1977; McCaskey, 1982; March and Olsen, 1976; Rogers, 1961; Weick, 1979, 1985).

With this freedom, interpretations, causal explanations, and preferences can be allowed to emerge retrospectively, after actions have occurred (Brunsson, 1985; March, 1976, 1981; Starbuck, 1983). Without the constraints of prospective planning and rationalization, it becomes easier to innovate:

An organization can learn new things about itself and about its environment when ambiguity is present. If an organization continues to act even though it doesn't know for certain what it is doing, there is a chance that the organization will emerge from its confrontation with ambiguity in slightly different shape than when it started to cope. In this way ambiguity can produce innovation and greater utilization of resources. (Weick, 1985, p. 125)

If ambiguity does provide a key to innovation, then does the denial or channeling of ambiguity impede the process of innovation? In other words, are cultures whose members are more likely to share an integrating or differentiating viewpoint less capable of innovating when innovation is called for? The phrasing of these questions presumes that people can adopt only one paradigm at a time. The final section of this chapter suggests that a single-paradigm perspective (any single paradigm) may be less informative and useful than a perspective that includes insights from all three paradigms.

ENCOMPASSING THE THREE PARADIGMS

Paradigms are subjective perspectives that researchers and cultural members adopt when they perceive, conceive, and enact a culture. Researchers and cultural members tend to view a given culture from one paradigmatic perspective at a time. Some contexts have characteristics that are more easily seen as fitting one paradigm rather than another. For example, ambiguity may be particularly salient in a rapidly growing company in the innovative 'high-technology' industry. Ambiguity acknowledgment may be unavoidable during traumatic changes such as a merger or an unexpected financial crisis. The ambiguity paradigm, therefore, may be the most likely perspective from which to view organizations in these circumstances. Although space limitations prohibit the development of the idea within this chapter, we believe that the ambiguity paradigm is a key to moving beyond a synchronic view to an understanding of cultural change (see Meyerson and Martin, 1987).

Different contexts may encourage researchers and cultural members to adopt the other paradigms. For example, entrepreneurial organizations, where employees are all supposedly committed to a common vision, or worker democracies, where members are united by a common purpose or ideology, may lend themselves to an integrating perspective. Similarly, a differentiating viewpoint may be easier to use in highly differentiated contexts, such as a multinational firm, a conglomerate, or a corporation with a multidivisional structure. The differentiation paradigm may also seem to fit steeply hierarchical organizations, such as a manufacturing operation with a clear, and perhaps embittered, split between labor and management.

There are other factors that might influence paradigmatic preferences. For example, top executives and some organizational behavior teachers and consultants might find the harmony, unity, and leader-centeredness of the integration paradigm comforting in its implications for managerial control and employee satisfaction. Middle managers and research scientists might be more drawn to the ambiguity paradigm, as they cope with ambiguities caused by conflicting multiple roles or complex problems. Labor activists and researchers with Marxist leanings may be more at ease with the differentiation paradigm's view of subcultures struggling with conflicts of interest.

It is a misleading oversimplification to rely on a single-paradigm view of a culture. Instead, any culture can usefully be regarded from all three paradigmatic viewpoints. This point is illustrated well by the results of a recent study of a small, new electronics firm (Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985). In such a firm the leader could 'handpick' employees. Furthermore, the leader had a relatively small realm to control. These features, we thought, would facilitate the development of organization-wide consensus characteristic of the integration paradigm.

The founder of the firm and a stratified, random sample of employees were interviewed. They were asked, using a structured, open-ended interview format, to recount and interpret the meaning of whichever events in the company's history they personally considered important. These interview protocols were systematically content analyzed. Any element of an event history or its interpretation mentioned by two or more individuals was coded.

In accord with the integration paradigm, some evidence of leader-centered, organization-wide consensus was found. Almost all the employees and the founder spontaneously chose the same events in the organization's history to recount. They agreed that the leader was a central actor in all of these events. They frequently stressed the fact of the company's growth in their interpretations of the meanings of these events.

The differentiation paradigm, however, would predict that subcultural differences would emerge in the content and interpretations of these event histories, even in such a small, new organization. The remainder of the results of the content-analysis was consistent with a differentiating viewpoint. Subcultures had already begun to emerge. The content of the employees' event histories differed significantly according to level in the hierarchy and functional responsibility.

For example, one of the most frequently cited events concerned the quality control problems that had plagued the company: products would be 'DOA'—dead on arrival—at

clients' doorsteps. Production engineers attributed the resolution of these problems to changes they had made in the production process. Marketing personnel took credit for the same success, attributing it to their having soothed angry customers. Almost every functional area of the organization constructed accounts of the quality control crises that featured members of its subculture in the roles of heroes and heroines.

Expressions of confusion and uncertainty could also be found in the interview data from this study. However, we did not include this type of information in the content analysis system because, at the time we conducted this study, we had not yet included ambiguity within our conceptualization of cultural life in organizations. Had we not had this blindspot, this study would have provided evidence of the coexistence of all three paradigms.

Any cultural context is more fully understood—in its current complexity and in its potential for innovation—when it is viewed, sequentially and repeatedly, from each of the three paradigmatic perspectives. Paradigms should not be blinders. Instead, they should be thought of as a set of three lenses, each one to be used in turn, again and again, in order to defocus and refocus, capturing a full view of all three aspects of any one cultural context. While it is not easy to adopt a multiple-paradigm viewpoint, it is not impossible. It is possible for researchers to do it, otherwise this chapter could not have been written. It is also possible for cultural members to use a multiple-paradigm perspective. For example, some OZCO employees are quoted above in two or even three of the paradigmatic views of egalitarianism at their company.

Paradigms are points of view. At any time, in any context, elements of all three paradigms are present. Each should be acknowledged. If this were done by cultural researchers, our descriptions of cultures would be richer and more complete, hopefully generating fuller comprehension of cultural phenomena. If cultural members could regularly use a multiple-paradigm perspective, this might facilitate the innovation that accompanies an acknowledgment of ambiguity. When a multiple-paradigm perspective is adopted, the experience of ambiguity is neither unaccustomed nor overwhelming. Instead, some awareness of ambiguity is always present. That awareness might wax, perhaps during times of crisis, and wane, perhaps during times of stability or prosperity. At no time, however, would ambiguity be denied, and so at no time would innovation be impeded. Ambiguity would be acknowledged so it could flourish openly, without bringing the usual dangers of action paralysis.

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