

# Organizational design and culture

[Business](#), [Management](#)



## Organizational Design and Culture

The revolution of change occurring in organizations has been well documented in the extant literature over the past 30 years. The major source of this revolution is the growing realization that strict tight controls, greater work pressure, more clearly defined jobs, and tighter supervision have, in the last number of years, run their course in terms of their ability to give organizations productivity gains.

The development of an organization's structure is integrally related to the evolution of its culture--and vice versa. Structure and culture coevolve: each shapes and is in turn shaped by the other. The emerging role for organization design and organization development (OD) specialists--and for organizational leaders--is to attend to the dynamics of simultaneous structural and cultural change.

The idea that organizational change needs to be coordinated across a number of dimensions--of which structure and culture might be seen as the two most fundamental--is not in itself very new, and has become conventional wisdom in change circles since Peters and Waterman (1982) first aired their excellence truism, "soft is hard." Yet within this literature it is clear that some alignments have generated more interest and debate than others.

Comparatively few studies, however, have analysed the complex relationship between organization structure and culture (Anthony [1990] is a welcome and recommended exception) or sought to elaborate any sort of coherent methodology or process for bringing the two spheres together. Whereas the strategy literature investigates concepts of alignment in some detail, the

literature on change has seldom gone beyond a general appeal to change agents to think in holistic terms and somehow "make" changes in any one dimension reflect and reinforce changes being made in all the others. There is typically little discussion over the issue of how this alignment might be practically realized, and little elaboration of the conceptual tools and methodologies that might assist change leaders in this endeavour.

Culture tends to be presented in the change literature as a variable, which is susceptible to control and available to management for manipulation. Yet sociologists and anthropologists of various persuasions have long argued for a more organic, processual and dynamic approach to questions of culture than the rather narrow managerialist view would suggest. Organizational cultures are continuously constructed and reconstructed through interaction and intervention at the everyday level: they are constantly in process and tend largely to resist central control. This is reflected in the poor track record of many planned corporate culture programmes: while a few mission statements and indoctrination sessions might change senior management's perspective, they are unlikely to lead to sustainable changes in the way organization members work, think and relate to each other.

Culture assumes significance usually because the strategy of the organization, the type of people in power and its structure and systems reflect the dominant managerial ideology or culture. Furthermore, such managerial ideologies may be more important than environmental factors in guiding organizational response. Managerial ideology, in recent years, has focused on the core characteristics associated with the "best run", "achievement oriented", "excellent" organizations. Core dimensions include:

an action focus, high customer awareness; entrepreneurship; and autonomy. Therefore by implication, it is being suggested that a model which assumes low employee commitment simply cannot match the standards of excellence set by world-class manufacturers.

#### Works Cited

Andreas Raps. Strategic Finance Montvale: Jun 2004. Vol. 85, Iss. 12, p. 48-53

Anthony, P. 1990. Managing Culture. Open University Press, Buckingham, UK.

Peters, T. J., R. H. Waterman Jr. 1982. In Search of Excellence. Harper and Row, New York.