Culture perspectives from an organisational point of view

The world is full of conflicts among people, groups and countries, who think, behave and talk either similarly or differently. This is commonly known as culture. Culture is a concept that in general it summarises the ways of living which were built by a number of people and inherited by their generation (Gurevitch et al, 1982). A variety of scholars have questioned whether culture means the same to people. In general culture correspond to Tylor (1981, p. 1) as he has defined it as a complex concept which include many patterns such as beliefs, habits, behaviours, religions, arts, laws, traditions any other attitude acquired a member of society. Additionally, culture has also existed in business in the late 1970s as a result of number of challenges started to face Western management practitioners and theories (Knights, 2007). Hofstede (2005) claimed that form an organisational perspective culture is mainly about the way that an organisation organises and formalises itself. Yet, culture can mean different concepts and beliefs for different people within the same organisation (Knights, 2007). Therefore, defining the organisational culture may not be an easy task. Nonetheless, it has been defined by Hofstede (2005) as the way that operations are being done in a company; he also added that companies' strategies, values and the organisational structures will define any company's culture. He also added that culture can be seen in a motto or a slogan but it normally an invisible concept because it in the foundation of organisations and only their employees who actually know it. This essay will diagnose the different perspectives concerning organisational culture which were mentioned by Knights (2007) and investigates whether create, manage and change an organisational culture from each perspective can be achievable.

Culture has been seen as one of the most important terms for both including individuals and companies, whose indeed want to be conscious and methodical about their culture. The simplest definition of organisational culture might be the way operations are being done in a certain organisation (Hofstede, 2005). It has been agreed that explaining an organisation's culture to outsiders is hard, if those outsiders were concerned about knowing an organisation's culture they have to be in this organisation for a great deal of time before they start to understand the company's observations (Hofstede, 2005). Based on Smith (1992) belief any human organisation develops its own culture over time including a smallest family business or global multi-national companies operating in many countries and time zones over time these corporations develop their own unique identity. The study of organizational culture mainly focuses on the shared of values, beliefs and behavioural norms (Kegan, 2001). Besides, it also put emphases to identify the most important aspect as well as the way that missions should be done in a particular organisation (Kegan, 2001).

According to Knights (2007) organisational culture has a number of levels as Schein in Knight (2007) had put forward a model that represents culture when he drew an iceberg and separate it into three levels. The first level in terms of organisational culture refers to norms, observable behaviours and artefacts which he believed are the most obvious aspects of an organisational culture. According to Schein's model this level represents only like 10 % of the overall size of the iceberg. This 10 % of the culture manifestations is being visible and tangible because it is above the water. This level may be able to be spotted by simply just walking into an

organisation and analyses it, whether this organisation is an open plan, space seating or even its CEO might be sitting on an open plan very communicative that ultimately resulting in very empowering and communicative set of culture or values. Whereas, other organisations can be very hierarchal for example the office of the company's CEO might be in the top floor and he only gets involve in just formal meeting. The second layer of the iceberg refers to espoused values or as it has been stated in Knights (2007) personal values and attitudes; this layer has less visibility than the previous level but still can be observed just if the mission statement of an organisation was examined, also by understanding this level an idea of what the organisation stands for may become clearer. The final layer in Schein's iceberg represents the culture values and the basic assumptions or the organisation's beliefs. Usually this level cannot be seen at all as it is the values in which are in the heart of organisations because it might be built on previous experience that the organisation had and only this organisation can learn from its past; therefore, the most important lessons may be passed toward next generations in order to help them dealing with similar cases that the organisation might face in the future. These past experiences can be put forward as driving a vehicle and looking at the mirror at the same time, the vehicle is not going backward but the route can be seen; likewise, when an organisation look back to its past experiences that may help it to improve better.

Organisational culture existed in the late 1970s and it has undergone many changes (Knights, 2007). These changes were mainly on the way that how organisational culture should be understood as. Many academics have

asserted on that there are two main perspectives that have explained the organisational culture. These perspectives are the mainstream view and the critical view (Knights, 2007). Essentially, some scholars believe that the mainstream culture is a concept that companies have, while the critical views of culture refers to organisations are being the culture.

Many contributors as well as Knights (2007) share an agreement that organisational culture from the mainstream perspective has a number of fundamental points. The first point is that organisations' cultures are being created at the top of these organisations by either their managers or owners, and then this culture will be infused downward people who work in these organisations. In other words, whatever is being done by people at the top of an organisation such as managers is generally what the rest of the company is going. The second point is when this type of culture has been created normally it will integrate and stabilise organisations because these cultures certify that every individual in these organisations will have the same beliefs, actions and responses. The third point is the claim that if organisational culture was managed properly it may lead to an excellence in the performance as consequence since organisations' management are the once who are responsible to form the overall organisation's culture; thus, if this culture was followed, the organisation's objectives would be achieved, and for that reason the performance of this organisation is more likely to become excellent.

Conversely, a vast number of contributors disagreed that organisational culture from the mainstream perspective does not apply two important themes. Firstly, they disagreed on whether there is a ' one best culture' that

fits all organisations. This point can be true because if there was one best culture that would fit all organisations none of the organisations in the world might have lost, or yet to loss in the future. In other words, if the term ' one best culture' was true then all organisations would be successful but that is not happening. However, this term may occur in the future and maybe a new culture emerge which may inspire all organisations and employees.

Secondly, contributors and Knights (2007) also disagreed on there is no best way to change, maintain or even build a culture. This point can easily be agreed with since cultures are being created by managers at the top of organisations consequently when those managers want to change the organisational culture, each of them has his own unique style of changing the overall culture so that every manager may believe that their way of changing the organisation's culture is the best one; therefore, agreeing on one best way to change, maintain or build a culture may appear as an impossible to be achieved. However, always there is a possibility that all the contributors disagreements may reach an agreement in the future because managing organisations always change over time so that the current management implications which are used by many organisations may differ from the once that they were being used in the past; hence, they may also change in the future.

There are a number of organisational cultures or culture theories that were identified by Handy in Knights (2007) to support the mainstream perspective. Firstly, power culture is one of these theories (Handy, 1993). It has been claimed by Handy (1993) that in a power culture control is the most important element. This type of culture is mainly found in a small sized

or in a beginner family business so that the owner of the business or the business managers normally put a set of rules that they will control every individual who are involving in this business. Secondly, Knights (2007) mentioned the role culture. Nowadays the term role culture has been created in most organisations (Knights, 2007). Principally role culture divides the organisation processes into a number of mini groups and each individual within one of these groups is given a specific role these roles are usually given to employees in their job description. Knights (2007) believed that role culture will increase the productivity of the company's employees. He also thinks that a culture such as role culture is rather rational to be organised in large organisations. Another culture theory is the task culture. This culture is being believed by Knights (2007) to be one of the most popular cultures in the modern business environment. Meaning that if a culture is being used managers of organisations would institute specific teams which have to be followed in order to complete certain mission. In this way of culture leaders should select carefully the right people and resources to get a project done (Knights, 2007). Knights (2007) believes that the most important key values in this culture are expertise and teamwork, that may be because of finishing a task in a certain time is very necessary; hence, expertise have a high level of performativity and teamwork normally help doing load of work in short time. Also task culture may help employees to be motivated and given the feeling of being empowered since they may have to make decisions within their groups. Besides, they may also feel respected as they may were selected to be responsible of their team; thus, they want their task to be succeeded at the end. Lastly, Handy (1993) argued that person cultures are usually followed by nonprofit organisations. Knights (2007) added that the

emphasis of this culture is either for individuals or freedom. In other words, it may mean that the existence of these organisations is mostly to satisfy their members' needs, for example, some people prefer to share their working space, IT network or even their office because they think it helps them to be motivated or unstressed.

Knights (2007) also declared that from the mainstream perspective managing the organisational culture can be done; nonetheless, it is not an easy process because from within an organisation culture can be different; Knights (2007) named it sub-cultures. Essentially, there are a different ways of thinking within most organisations. The first way is the variety in employees' way of thinking about their organisation; for example some of them think of being improved in order to get to higher level of this organisation, while others are just thinking of getting a rise in their payment. The second way is the society respond. For example, from a consumer point of view they may think of the quality of the organisation's products or their pricing system. This may affect the organisation's reputation and sure every organisation want to gain the best reputation it can get. The final way is employers' culture. Normally employers focus on ways in which they are either maximising their profit or take this company to be one of the leading organisations. A successful management can apply the above three perspectives together. For instance, if workers worked harder to increase the organisation's products quality employers may pay them extra to satisfy their need; thus, customers may increase their demand if products had better quality but they may have pay more for these products; therefore, the company will gain more profit. A clear example of an organisation with a

variety of sub-cultures is Keele University. The university has many international students. They may think that the education system in the UK is more advanced than it is in their home countries. While others may decide on doing their degree in the UK because it takes shorter time than it is in their home countries. In other words, maybe most students have different reasons for choosing studying at keele but the fact that they have similar background in their courses might be seen as the overall culture.

There is another point of view that organisational culture can be seen as, and it has been named critical perspective or organisation " is" a culture (Knights, 2007). This perspective of culture claimed to be interpretive (Knights, 2007). It has been written by Knights (2007) that when a company's culture is being looked at from the critical view point, cultures will appear as if are alive. Additionally, culture can be developed from any level within an organisation (Robbins, 1990). In fact, most people in a certain organisation may have a strong impact on the organisation at large (Robbins, 1990). Therefore, it has been quoted by Knights (2007) that it is rather impossible to controll organisations' culture because these cultures are not stable especially if the organisation was a big sized one. In all organisations managers are attempting to controll the overall culture but since some organisations are enormous they may need assistants; for that reason, most organisations may have a number of departments each of these department has its own head manager or supervisor, who will be in charge of keeping their department's culture stable and under controll so that the culture of an organisation may become manageable to its employers. Dividing an organisation into various departments could lead to

sup-culture. Knights (2007) asserted on that most sub-cultures are not able to be managed. For, every section has its own manager and every manager may have a different managing method; consequently, every section may perhaps have a different sub-culture from it has been required. Controlling an organisation's culture from the critical perspective could be achievable if organisations understood these cultures and their sources then a possibility of controlling culture might be created.

Most managerial discipline such as motivation and human resource may have a significant influence on shaping the overall culture of an organisation from the critical perspective. For instance, Robert (2006) cited that a good manager is who can analyses and understand employees under his authority so that he may make them fell strong and responsible toward their organisation; hence, when these employees' culture start to emerge it may not differ from the managers' culture. There is another belief that human recourse could play an important role on managing the organisational culture from the critical perspective. Irena (2007) claimed that people have to go through an interview in most organisations before they are being offered their jobs. Accordingly, there is an opportunity to evaluate applicants so that their views can be understood and if they match the organisations' views they may consequently offered the job which applied for. Also managers could manage an organisation's culture by observing their employees and whose views do not satisfy the organisation's culture could be replaced. Gurevitch (1982) wrote that there is a very strong co-relation between companies' culture and employee engagement.

The concept of organisational culture has been broken down by Knights (2007) as it may include a number of terms such as missions and goals, Rewards and punishments, or authority and power relation or social culture. An example for social culture can be seen in an ice cream company in St Paul Minnesota, United States named Izzy's. This company is a premium ice cream brand which has a vast number of flavours most of these flavours are not available most of the time; however, they have implemented an innovative notification system known as flavour up. Customers sing up their favourite flavour in the company's website then the system sends notifications to those customers when their favourite flavours become available. The management of Izzy's believe that the system reduce the percentage of customers disappointment when they go the shop and not find their flavour available (Izzy's, 2005). The culture of this business is highly intelligent because it makes customers to get involved in developing their products. Similarly, just in time type of culture which is a technique that has no involvement from customers and it is mostly used by factories in order to make organisational operations more efficient (Knights, 2007). However, Knights (2007) also reported that it requires an increase of flexibility and more commitment from the employees. Regarding Just-In-Time culture employees are being required to do their work right from the first time. For that reason, employees' culture may start to develop. A variety of organisations attempt to develop a foundation that based on corporate values involving communication, respect, integrity and excellence (Pagell, 2005). Nevertheless, those corporate values were also Enron's corporate values just because they were stated that did not mean that they lived them and that had server consequences for the corporation, its people and its

customers. The lesson that should be learnt from Enron's case is organisations should not only have to spire values and principles that they at the core of the organisation but also these ideas should be put into action (Gibney, 2005). Enron had a strong organisational culture and most businesses who have had used Enron's culture are successful. Enron was successful for several years; however, it could not keep its success as it has gone bankruptcy in the new millennium. There might be dozens of reason beyond Enron's bankruptcy but the most obvious reason according to Sim (2003) was not Enron's management that means Enron did not have to change its leaders in order to gain success. Enron's issue was that its management did not live its culture. In other words, its culture was not applied into practice and as consequence they failed. The success of any company is resulted from the culture of the company itself (Nastase, 2009). However, if the success was not presented that does not mean that the company's culture is not the right one, it may need some time. For example, the Japanese culture as it has been stated by Choy (1987) usually focuses on the long term profitability. Thus, their success may not appear until it has been a number of years from the existence of the organisation. While the American culture according to Choy (1987) is more concern about making profit in a short time that might have been one of the issues that caused Enron to go bankrupt.

It has been written by Knights (2007) that creating a culture is not easy. While Willcoxson (2000) argued that by saying that any organisation can have its own culture but developing this culture on the way that organisations want is the difficult task; and this difficulty may occur because

developing a culture is being done over time. Many academics have suggested a number of ways that can help to create a strong organisational culture. Indeed, the most important way claimed to be communication (Kegan, 2001). Irena (2007) declared that communication with people is important in both before and after they are being hired, and interview them to understand their views and values and compare their views and values with the once that the organisation has then that may help organisations to find the best employees that they can possibly get. Another important aspect that Knights (2007) had pointed out was getting the culture right is resulted from a great level of performance. However, he started questioning whether there is a one culture that fits in all organisations and lead to the highest level of performance. The term of one best culture sure did not exist otherwise not a single organisation would have yet to be succeed. Nevertheless, it may become true in the future.

There might be a possibility to change an organisation's culture. The argument that was mentioned in Knights (2007) specified that culture from the mainstream perspective indeed can be changed but there is not one best way to do this change; therefore, it is rather difficult to be put into practice (Knights, 2007). Whereas, Knights (2007) has been quoted that organisational culture from the critical perspective cannot be changed. There is that unique characteristic of every organisation that hard to imitate, it develops over time to give a unique identity to an organisation. Or organisational culture can be seen as the code, the core logic, the software of the mind that organises the behaviour of the employees. It is mainly about the mindset, until this mindset has yet to be owned employees cannot take

new actions, plans and structures that the company needs to put its strategy into action. In other words, first comes the mindset then it will be followed by behaviour and structure together they create a system that guides the company.

In conclusion, the concept of organisational culture is changing over time which had led to the two main perspectives that are known globally which are the mainstream and the critical perspectives. Both of these views have its unique theories that if they were put into practice they could lead to a remarkable success. Furthermore, the mainstream view was declared to be managed, changeable and maintained because it is being created by organisations' managers and it has been disagreed on whether one best culture that fits all organisations is possible, while the critical view sees that organisations' culture cannot be controlled, maintained or changed but it sees it as if organisations' come alive and every individual can play enormous role in forming an organisation's overall culture. Also it has been demonstrated above that culture can be rather easy to form and shape if some managerial discipline such as motivation were studied in depth. Also, human resource if they were in a high level of their performance may have a significant influence on any organisations' culture because they normally interview their employees before offer them a job and also they can develop an organisations' current employees and make them act in a way that their organisation want. Besides, it has been illustrated that having a strong culture is very important; yet, putting this culture into practice is the most important; otherwise, organisations may fall apart. Just like in Enron's case

they had a very strong culture but it has never been in action; hence,

bankruptcy might have not its faith.