CULTURAL CHANGE:
AN INTEGRATION OF THREE DIFFERENT VIEWS[1]

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ABSTRACT

In this article we integrate three disparate views of culture and cultural change. With each view comes a distinct set of implications about the nature, scope, source(s), and consequences of culture change. Each view also suggests distinct implications for those who wish to manage cultural change in organizations. We argue that to understand how organizations change, in general, it is important to understand these disparate, yet interrelated processes of cultural change. We present these three views of culture and cultural change processes in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational cultures are resistant to change, incrementally adaptive, and continually in flux. In this article we explain these seemingly contradictory statements about cultural change. Underlying our argument is the premise that cultures are socially constructed realities (Berger and Luckman, 1966) and, as such, the definition of what culture is and how *cultures change* depends on how one perceives and enacts culture. Stated differently, what we notice and experience as cultural change depends directly on how we conceptualize culture. In accord with our opening statement, we will offer three very different ways – we believe equally compelling – of thinking about and enacting culture and cultural change.

   We take the position that organizations *are* cultures. That is, we will treat culture as a metaphor of organization, not just as a discrete variable to be manipulated at will (Smircich, 1983a). We view organizations, then, as patterns of meaning, values, and behaviour. *(e.g.* Morgan, Frost and Pondy 1983; Weick, 1979)[2] By emphasizing different kinds *of* patterns, the three views of culture that we will describe shed light on different aspects of organizational change.

Because we see organizations as cultures, our approach to organizational change emphasizes changes in patterns of behaviour, values, and meanings. We do not mean to imply that these are the only facets of organizational change, however. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss other critical approaches to organizational change – for example, changes in strategy, structure, and leadership – these other approaches are intimately connected to cultural change. We believe, for instance, that structure *is* both a manifestation of and constraint on organizational cognitions, values, and behaviour **(e.g.** Giddens, 1979; Goffman, 1967). Similarly, strategy can be viewed as an outcome as well as a determinant of interactions and ideas **(e.g.** Burgleman, 1983). Leadership at once shapes and is shaped by the organization of belief and meaning **(e.g.** Calder, 1977; Smircich and Morgan, 1982). We hope that, by presenting three different views of cultural change, with differing implications for managerial control, we will raise questions of relevance to researchers working on these approaches to the change process. Full exploration of the relationships among cultural and 'non-cultural' approaches to organizational change, however, must remain outside the scope of this article.

Because the three views of culture and cultural change are so different, we will refer to them as 'paradigms'. Paradigms, as we will use the term, are alternative points of view that members and researchers bring to their experience of culture. Paradigms serve **as** theoretical blinders for researchers and as perceptual and behavioural maps for cultural members. Paradigms determine the criteria and content of what we attend to, and as such, they determine what we notice and enact as cultural change. Below, these paradigms of culture and cultural change are described.

PARADIGM 1: INTEGRATION

Culture is often defined as that which is shared by and/or unique to a given organization or group **(e.g.** Clark, 1970; Schein, 1985; Smircich, 1983b). Culture, according to this definition, is an integrating mechanism (Geertz, 1973; Schein, 1983), the social or normative glue that holds together a potentially diverse group of organizational members. Given this definition of culture, paradigm 1 researchers use 'shared' as a codebreaker for identifying relevant manifestations of a culture, seeking, for example, a common language, shared values, or an agreed-upon set of appropriate behaviours. Paradigm 1 culture researchers differ in the types of cultural manifestations they study. Some paradigm 1 researchers focus on the espoused values of top management **(e.g.** Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Other paradigm 1 researchers focus primarily on formal or informal practices, such as communication or decision-making norms **(e.g.** Ouchi, 1981; Schall, 1983), or the more obviously symbolic aspects of cultural life, such as rituals (Pettigrew, 1979; Trice and Beyer, 1984) or stories **(e.g.** Martin, 1982; Wilkins, 1983). Still others

mend to deeper products of culture: basic assumptions (Schein, 1983, 1985), codes of meaning (Barley, 1983), or shared understandings (Smircich, 1983b). Paradigm 1 portrayals of culture may emphasize different kinds and levels of cultural manifestations. Yet three characteristics are central in all these paradigm 1 portrayals of culture: consistency across cultural manifestations, consensus among cultural members, and — usually — a focus on leaders as culture creators.

An impression of consistency emerges because paradigm 1 views of culture focus only on manifestations that are consistent with each other. For example, Pettigrew (1979) examined the values and goals of school headmasters and then recounted ways in which these values and goals were reinforced by rituals. The second defining characteristic of a paradigm 1 view of culture is an emphasis on consensus. It is tacitly assumed, asserted, **or** (more occasionally) empirically demonstrated that cultural members drawn from various levels and divisions of an organizational hierarchy share a similar viewpoint. For example, Schein (1983) examined a top executive's commitment **to** the value of confronting conflicts and then cited evidence from fiercely argumentative group decision-making meetings to demonstrate that the leader's values were shared and enacted by lower level employees. Often, the ideas, values, and behavioural norms that apparently generate consensus are highly abstract (see, for example, Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985, on the interpretation of organizational histories or Schein, 1983, on shared assumptions).

The third characteristic is that many, but by no means all, paradigm 1 portrayals focus on a leader as the primary source of cultural content **(e.g.** Clark, 1970; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1983, 1985). Cultural manifestations that reflect the leader's own personal value system are stressed, offering the possibility that the charisma of a particularly effective leader might be institutionalized, giving that leader an organizational form of immortality **(e.g.** Bennis, 1983; Hackman, 1984; Trice and Beyer, 1984).

As a final defining feature, paradigm 1 portrayals of culture deny ambiguity. Such portrayals recognize only those cultural manifestations that are consistent with each other, and only those interpretations and values that are shared, 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, Hunter, Bergesen and Kurzweil, 1984, p. 26). In its quest for lucidity, paradigm 1 defines culture in a way that excludes ambiguity.

because ambiguity will become an increasingly important concept in this article, a brief digression about its meaning is appropriate. By ambiguity we mean that which is unclear, inexplicable, and perhaps capable of two or more meanings (Webster, 1985). Ambiguity is an internal state that may feel like confusion; individuals become confused when information that is expected is absent. This type of ambiguity is resolved when and if information becomes available. Another type of ambiguity from inherently irresolvable conflict or

irreducible paradox may be inherently unsolvable. When individuals simultaneously embrace two or more irreconcilable meanings, they experience ambiguity.

To clarify the relationships between ambiguity and cultural change, we will rely on examples drawn from the same organization: The Peace Corps/Africa. We persist with a single organizational example throughout the paper in order to facilitate comparison and contrast across the cultural paradigms. We selected the Peace Corps/Africa as our case to demonstrate the generality of this argument (most previous cultural research has focused on private sector organizations), rather than to illustrate idiosyncratic relevance to unusual organizations. Case studies of other types of organizations have also been conducted using this three-paradigm approach (see, for example, Martin and Meyerson, 1986, for a study of a large electronics corporation and Johnsen, Weilbach and Williams, 1986 for an analysis of a submarine).

Figure 1 presents a paradigm 1 view of the culture of Peace Corps/Africa, during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. The umbrella symbolizes the single dominant culture that is espoused by Kennedy and Johnson, reinforced by the top Peace Corps staff in Africa, and apparently shared by volunteers across the continent, Central themes in this dominant culture include: idealism, particularly about the value of this kind of voluntary work; altruism, including an obligation to help others; and open-mindedness, especially concerning the excitement of living in new environments. These themes were enthusiastically adopted by Peace **Corps** volunteers who thought that, through these ideals, they could literally change the world:

> an idea, to conquer, must fuse with the will of men and women who are prepared to dedicate their lives to its realization. We had a sense twenty-five years ago at the Peace Corps' conception that there were such men and women in America waiting to be called, impatient to carry the idea of service to mankind. As it turned out I think we underestimated their numbers and their dedication (Shriver, 1986, p. 18).

However, beneath this apparent cultural unity lurked sources of diversity and possible conflict. For example, volunteers were assigned to different countries and projects. As individuals, volunteers brought different backgrounds and perspectives to their work. These sources of difference are given little cultural significance in a paradigm 1 portrayal of the Peace Corps/Africa culture.

According **to** paradigm 1, then, culture is a monolith. Integrating aspects − consistency, consensus, and usually leader-centredness − are emphasized. Ambiguity is denied. A picture of harmony emerges. Because of this promise of clarity and organizational harmony, according to many paradigm 1 researchers, culture offers the key to managerial control, worker commitment, and organizational effectiveness **(e.g.** Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Thus, Peters and Waterman's
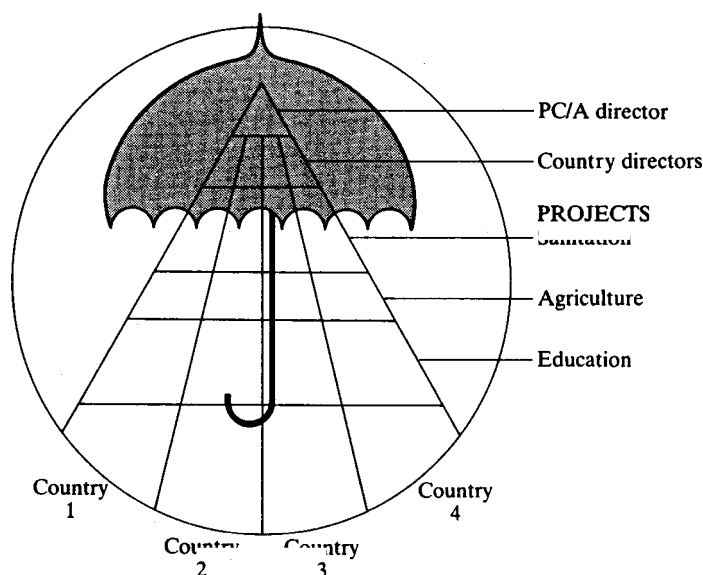
Key: Umbrella=dominant culture

Figure 1. Paradigm 1 view of Peace Corps/Africa (PC/A)

'excellently managed' companies and Ouchi's Theory Z organizations, to name a few, celebrate cultural harmony as the source of organizational effectiveness. Implicit or explicit in such arguments is the managerial imperative of 'engineering', or at least partically controlling culture.

Researchers and cultural members[3] who endorse this paradigm 1 view of cultural change usually restrict their conception of culture to relatively superficial manifestations, such as the espoused values of top management. Those aspects of culture are, almost by definition, easier to control. Moreover, these advocates of cultural engineering usually think of culture as one of many organizational variables to manipulate, another managerial lever, (in contrast to Smircich's view of culture as something an organization is).

Other paradigm 1 researchers focus on deeper manifestations of culture, such as taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings that underlie behavioural norms or artefacts, such as stories (e.g. Barley, 1983; Schein, 1983, 1985; Smircich, 1983b). Cultural persistence (Zucker, 1977) and habit (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) are implied in an approach that conceives of culture in terms of these deeper, taken-for-granted qualities. Thus, researchers who view culture in this institutionalized light accept persistence, inertia and thus resistance to

change as part of their culture conception *(e.g.* Clark, **1970;** Sathay, **1985;** Selznick, **1957).** Yet, regardless of the revolutionary nature of this process, even these researches do admit (and some even advocate) the possibility of cultural change.

A PARADIGM 1 VIEW OF CULTURAL CHANGE

Both sets of paradigm **1** perspectives ‐ those based on relatively superficial manifestations and those rooted in deep assumptions ‐ view cultural change in terms of a monolithic process, as an organization-wide phenomenon. Paradigm 1 researchers usually define cultural change in attitudinal or cognitive terms, to distinguish it from other forms of organizational change. For example, Schein **(1985)** focuses on change in basic assumptions, while Brunsson **(1985)** studies change in organizational ideologies, and Barley **(1983)** defines change in terms of fluctuations in shared meanings. Greenwood and Hinings **(1986)** have proposed patterns of change in 'design archetypes': 'underlying ideas, values, and beliefs *i.e.* provinces of meaning or interpretive schemes. . .' (p. **3).** Perhaps because of their attitudinal or cognitive focus, most paradigm **1** views of cultural change are similar to models of individual learning **(e.g.** Bandura, **1977;** Rogers, **1961).**

Schein, for example, describes individual and cultural change as a three-stage process (Schein, **1968, 1985),** requiring a temporary lapse in denial of ambiguity. First, individuals (and organizations) experience **an** unfreezing stage. The ambiguity of the unknown is acknowledged and disconfirming evidence is recognized. Schein argues that a critical part of this unfreezing stage is the creation of psychological safety. Such safety is essential for disconfirming information, and the resulting ambiguity, to be allowed into consciousness. In stage two change takes place. New behaviours and their meanings are learned. In stage three, which Schein **calls** 'refreezing', ambiguity is again denied and the new ways of behaving and interpreting become internalized. In this model, the acknowledgement of ambiguity is strictly a temporary, albeit necessary, stage in the change process. Schein's change model assumes that leaders can and do affect cultural change in organizations.

> What great leaders and change agents do is to simultaneously create ambiguity and enough psychological safety to induce motivation to change. If either is missing there will be no incentive to change, and the **art** of change-agentry is to balance the two ‐ enough disconfirmation to motivate change and enough psychological safety to feel that one **can** allow the disconfirming information into consciousness. . .(E. Schein, personal communication, June, **1985).**

Other researchers agree that an essential (and possibly the only) function of leaders is the management of meaning in organizations (Clark, **1972;** Pfeffer, **1981).**

Jonsson and Lundin **(1977)** offer a strikingly similar description of the cultural change process. They discuss change as cycles of enthusiasm and discouragement, focused on key ideas or 'myths' about the meaning and necessity of certain organizational behaviours. Enthusiasm for a myth makes action possible. Internal conflict decays the enthusiasm around a given myth until a new 'ghost myth' formulates and crises begin to occur. Crises bring the acknowledgement of ambiguity and its concomitant, anxiety. Action paralysis is often the by-product (Latane and Darley, **1970).** In order to decide how to act, cultural members seek a return to clarity; the new myth is thus substituted for the old. This process recurs. Schein, Jonsson and Lundin, and other paradigm **1** models of change **(e.g.** Brunsson, **1985;** Pettigrew, **1985)** offer a sequential portrayal of the organization-wide collapse and regeneration of a monolithic culture: clarity, the introduction of ambiguity, new clarity.

A paradigm **1** approach to change can be applied to the Peace Corps/Africa example. When Nixon became president, he dismantled many social service programmes, such as the War on Poverty. He was distressed with the overly idealistic and 'revolutionary' (out to change the world) tone of the Peace Corps culture described in figure **1.** He replaced the top staff of the Peace Corps in Washington and in Africa. Instead of seeking liberal arts majors as volunteers, the Peace Corps was ordered to recruit people (including non-students) with technical expertise. These changes in leadership and employee selection procedures were deeply disturbing to many members of the old Peace Corps/Africa culture whose early sentiments are reflected in this statement: 'Peace Corps volunteers must bring more than science and technology. They must touch the idealism of America and bring that to us, too' (Shriver, **1986:** p. **21).** Many staff and volunteers left as soon as they could, and the number of volunteers fell dramatically. After this period of ambiguity, turmoil, and considerable turnover, a new dominant culture for Peace Corps/Africa emerged. In place of idealism and revolutionary fervour, the new culture emphasized pragmatic and conservative values, geared primarily toward technical change in host countries.

In this example, one clarifying and unifying cultural umbrella has been replaced by another. Two aspects of this case are characteristic of paradigm **1** portrayals of cultural change. First, the description of the change process focuses on the actions of a leader. Second, considerable turnover and new selection criteria ⁻ or other internal incidences of turmoil ⁻ are essential precursors to cultural change.

Paradigm 1 descriptions of the cultural change process, such as the Peace Corps/Africa example above, focus attention on organization-wide changes in what is shared. A total world view is collapsed, to be replaced by an equally monolithic perspective. This is revolutionary change, similar in many ways to Kuhn's **(1962)** portrait of scientific revolutions. However, to varying extents, paradigm **1** researchers and practitioners assume that this process can (and several will argue *should)* be intentionally engineered or at least controlled by

top management (Barnard, **1938;** Golding, **1980;** Selznick, **1957).** While important differences exist among paradigm l researchers, they generally emphasize these characteristics and share a common set of blind spots. These blind spots, and their importance, become evident if we look at culture and cultural change from alternative lenses.

PARADIGM 2: DIFFERENTIATION

In constrast to paradigm **1's** emphasis on integration and homogeneity, a paradigm **2** approach to culture is characterized by differentation and diversity (see Martin and Meyerson, forthcoming, for **a** more detailed explanation of these attributes). Paradigm **1's** view of culture as a master blueprint with uniform interpretations is incongruous with **a** paradigm **2** perspective. Paradigm **2** researchers pay attention to inconsistencies, lack of consensus, and non-leader-centred sources of cultural content. This approach emphasizes the importance of various subunits, including g r o u p s and individuals (Louis, **1983; N o r d , 1985)** who represent constituencies based within and outside the organization. In contrast to paradigm **1's** relatively closed-system conception of culture, a paradigm **2** perspective is an open-system perspective; culture is formed by influences from inside and outside the organization.

According to paradigm **2,** organizations are not simply a single, monolithic dominant culture. Instead, a culture is composed of a collection of values and manifestations, some of which may be contradictory. For example, espoused values may be inconsistent with actual practices *(e.g.* Christenson and Kreiner, **1984;** Meyer and Rowan, **1977),** or rituals and stones may reflect contradictions between formal rules and informal norms *(e.g.* Siehl, **1984;** Smith and Simmons, **1983).** Sometimes, the assumption of a common language must be suspended, as it becomes clear that the same words carry contrasting meanings in different contexts *(e.g.* Jamison, **1985).**

In part because of this stress on inconsistency, paradigm 2 portrayals of culture often emphasize disagreement rather than consensus. Complex organizations reflect broader societal cultures and contain elements of occupational, hierarchical, class, racial, ethnic, and gender-based identifications (Beyer, **1981;** Trice and Beyer, **1984;** Van Maanen and Barley, **1984).** These sources of diversity often create overlapping, nested subcultures.

Different types of subcultures can be distinguished (Louis, **1983).** For example, subcultural differences may represent disagreements with an organization's dominant culture, as in a counter-culture (Martin and Siehl, **1983).** Or, subcultural identifications may be orthogonal to a dominant culture, reflecting functional, national. occupational, ethnic, or project affiliations *(e.g.* Gregory, **1983;** Van Maanen and Barley, **1984).** Or still, a subculture might enhance a dominant culture. For example, members of one particular functional area may fanatically support the values espoused by top management *(e.g.* Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, **1985).**

Paradigm **2** emphasizes multiple, rather than leader generated, sources of cultural content. Gregory (1983), representing an extreme paradigm **2** position, argues that organizations are reflections and amalgamations of surrounding cultures, including national, occupational, and ethnic cultures. *An* organization, she argues, is simply an arbitrary boundary around a collection of subcultures. According to Gregory, there is little that is unique about an organization's culture. We argue that the usefulness of a cultural approach is severely constrained if organizational culture is defined as only that which is unique to a given organizational context. This is a relatively small, perhaps minor, part of cultural life in that context (see Martin *et al.,* 1983 for evidence on this point). Instead, we believe it is more informative to define organizational culture as a nexus where broader, societal 'feeder' cultures come together. What is unique, then, is the specific combination of cultures that meet within an organization's boundary (Martin, 1986).

This version **of** the paradigm **2** viewpoint may be clarified by illustration. Figure **2** shows a depiction of the culture of Peace Corps/Africa consistent with Gregory's view: a set of volunteer projects nested within a set of nations under the auspices of the Peace Corps/Africa. This is a somewhat arbitrary choice of organizational boundary that could be replaced, leaving many projects and certainly the relevant nations intact. In this depiction, unlike that of figure 1, no dominant cultural umbrella is salient.

Some researchers combine a paradigm **2** with a paradigm 1 approach. For example, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) argue that an organization's proper mix of integrating and differentiating forces is based, in part, on the nature of its environment. In cultural terms this means that **an** organization would probably be composed of a diverse set of subcultures that share some integrating elements of a dominant culture *(e.g.* Martin, Sitkin and Boehm, 1985). As in formal structure, the mix of cultural integration and differentiation would depend in part on the nature of the organization and its environment. In the Peace **Corps** example, subcultural identifications associated with status within the Peace **Corps** hierarchy, country assignment, and project reponsibility might co-exist with a shared identification with a dominant, Peace Corps/Africa culture. Rather than only focusing on the integrating dominant umbrella, as from a purely paradigm 1 perspective, this hybrid view of culture also draws attention to the differentiated subcultures beneath it.

Some complications, due to the conceptual relationship between paradigms 1 and **2,** merit discussion. Even if a paradigm **2** portrayal of an organizational culture includes an acknowledgement of elements of a dominant culture, the primary focus of attention is on inconsistencies and subcultural differentiation. This focus is complicated by considerations of levels of analysis. Any subculture is a smaller version of paradigm 1 integration, characterized within its boundaries by consistency and consensus. Thus, the contradictions and disagreements, characteristic of paradigm 2, become visible only at higher, organization-wide levels of analysis. In addition, at 'the individual level of
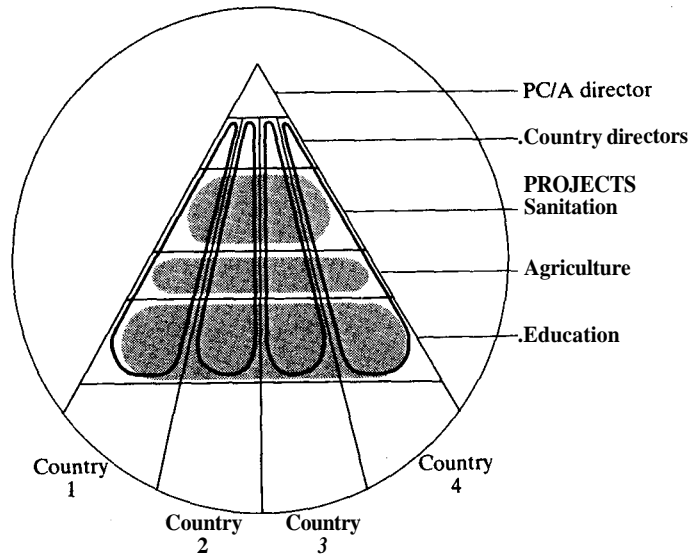
Key:

Subcultural boundaries due to country assignment

Subcultural boundaries due to project assignment

Figure 2. Paradigm 2 view of Peace Corps/Africa (PC/A): time 1

analysis, a single person may be a member of several overlapping, nested subcultures, some of which may hold opposing views. For example, an organizational member may be a divisional manager, an engineer, a Stanford MBA, a New England Yankee, and a female. Each of these individual characteristics may be associated with membership in an organizational subculture, creating psychological inconsistency and conflict at the individual level of analysis. Thus, paradigm 2 has implications for organizational, subcultural, and individual levels of analysis.

Because of its awareness of these levels of analysis and its inclusion of sources of cultural content external to the organization, a paradigm 2 portrayal of cultural content is complicated. Yet these complications are still relatively dear, not ambiguous. Paradigm 2 reduces awareness of ambiguity by channelling it, and and thereby limits its potentially bewildering and paralysing effects. In doing so, paradigm 2 does not completely deny ambiguity and restrict attention to that which is clear. However, paradigm 2 has limits to the amount of ambiguity acknowledged. Paradigm 2 examines inconsistencies as well as consistencies, but attention is restricted to cultural manifestations that either do, or do not, contradict each other. The potential complexities of the cultural domain are

thereby reduced **to** dichotomies. Each subculture is an island of localized lucidity, **so** that ambiguity lies only in the interstices among the subcultures. Paradigm 2 channels ambiguity, as swift currents create channels around islands. This frees each subculture to perceive and respond to only a small part of the complexities and uncertainties of the organization's environment. Environmental complexity and uncertainty is therefore experienced as manageable, rather than **as** overwhelming ambiguity. Figure 3 summarizes **these differences between paradigms 1 and 2.**

Name	Paradigm 1: integration	Paradigm 2: differentiation	Paradigm 3: ambiguity
Degree of consistency among cultural manifestations	Consistency	Inconsistency and consistency	Lack of clarity (neither clearly consistent nor clearly inconsistent) and irreconcilable inconsistencies
Degree of consensus among members of culture	Organization-wide	Within, not between subcultures	Issue-specific consensus, dissensus, and confusion among individual
Reaction to ambiguity	Denial	Channelling	Acceptance
Metaphor for paradigm	Hologram; Clearing in jungle	Islands of clarity in sea of ambiguity	Web; jungle

Figure 3. Contrasting the paradigms

Perhaps because of the complexity of even presenting a static view of **a** paradigm **2** culture, few if any paradigm 2 researchers have attempted to articulate a systematically dynamic view of culture. Below, we construct a picture of cultural change consistent with a paradigm 2 perspective. Not surprisingly, paradigm **2's** version of cultural change is much more complex than the processes depicted by paradigm **1.**
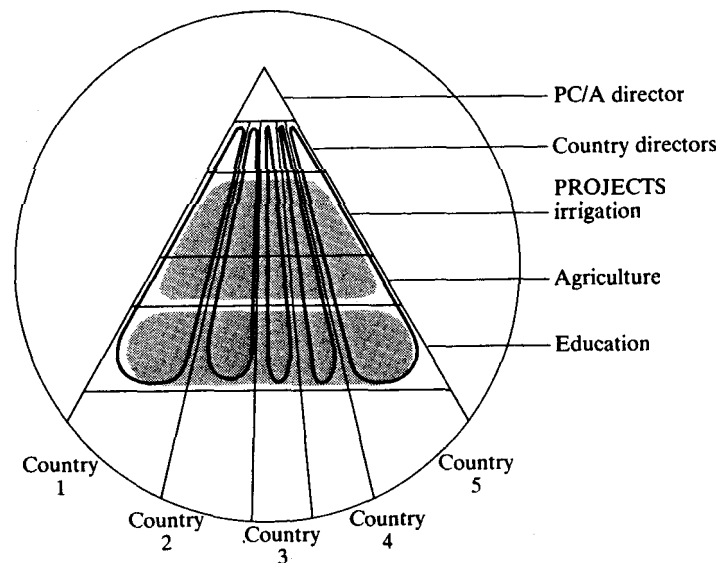
A PARADIGM **2** VIEW OF CULTURAL CHANGE

A paradigm **1** perspective draws attention to cultural changes that are often controlled by top management and shared throughout an organization. With a

paradigm **2** perspective, however, diffuse and unintentional sources of change are more salient. This is an open-system perspective that explicitly links cultural change to other sources and types of change. Due to the prevalence of subcultural differentiation, such cultural changes will be more localized, rather than organization-wide, and more incremental, rather than revolutionary. Thus, paradigm **2** discussions of cultural change emphasize fluctuations in the content and composition of subcultures, variations in the structural and interpersonal relations among subcultures, and changes in the connections between subcultures and the dominant culture. Such localized changes may be loosely coupled to changes occuring within a dominant culture (Weick, **1976).**

For example, consider the relationships among the Peace Corps/Africa subcultures that are diagrammed in figure **2.** An unanticipated change in environmental conditions, such as a drought, could have technological consequences that would mandate changes in the composition of these subcultures. More volunteers would be assigned to countries where drought conditions were worst and new drought-stricken countries might be added. In each of these countries, the nature of projects would also change. Water-dependent sanitation plans will no longer be workable. Crop rotation systems, dependent on plentiful water supplies, will have to be revised, **so** that drought-resistant crops can be grown. Perhaps the volunteers previously assigned to water-dependent sanitation projects can be reassigned **to** irrigation projects that will utilize their pipe-laying skills, and volunteers assigned to education, who usually teach English to children, can help with the adult education component of the new crop rotation and irrigation projects.

These task assignment changes, and resulting changes in country assignments and volunteer recruitment policies, would eventually cause changes in the subcultural alignments in Peace Corps/Africa. For example, the subculture that arose among sanitation project volunteers would disappear, although it might be partially reconstituted among the staff on the irrigation projects. The educational subculture would change, **as** adults rather than children became a **primary** focus. The isolation of the educational subculture might be reduced as educational staff became more involved in irrigation and crop rotation education. Staff levels in the various countries might change, strengthening or weakening country-based subcultures: These changes in the subcultural composition of Peace Corps/Africa are outlined in figure **4.**

Paradigm **2** views of cultural change, like this example, emphasize environmental (or external) catalysts for change that have localized impact on many facets of organizational functioning. These local changes may be loosely coupled to each other and they frequently may be neither planned nor controlled by top management. These emphases on environmental sources of change and external control of organizational functioning are central to mainstream macro-level organizational theory. Thus, paradigm **2** offers a window, a place where cultural research can most obviously benefit from direct integration with work of non-cultural organizational theorists. The next section of this paper focuses

Key:

————Subcultural boundaries due to country assignment

▓▓▓ Subcultural boundaries due to project assignment

Figure 4. Paradigm 2 view of Peace Corps/Africa (PC/A): time 2

on recent work in two traditional non-cultural domains, differentiation and loose coupling, and explores the relevance of these ideas for a paradigm 2 view of change.

Differentiation channels attention so that a single organizational subunit enacts and responds to a small portion of an organization's overall environment. Channelling attention in this manner links subunits more tightly to their immediate environments, yet perhaps more loosely to each other (March and Olsen, **1976**; March and Simon, **1958**). Thus, subcultures in differentiated organizations are often loosely coupled to each other. Loose coupling can buffer the effects of subunits' responses, encouraging localized adaptation and experimentation (Weick, **1976**). Loose coupling dampens the flow of information within an organization across subunits. Subunits can experiment and respond to turbulent environments knowing the effects of actions and interpretations will be localized and the organization, as a whole, will be buffered from the repercussions of their actions. For example, subunits at an organization's periphery may be loosely coupled to subunits as its technical core (Meyer and Rowan, **1977**; Scott, **1981**; Thompson, **1967**; Weick, **1976**). Or, subunits that reflect an organization's dominant ideology may be loosely coupled to subunits that reflect dissent or deviance.

By localizing subunit responses (including behaviours, beliefs, and interpretations), and allowing inconsistencies to persist, loose coupling provides local havens for deviance and change. Indeed, loose coupling may provide the psychological safety that, according to Schein, is necessary to induce change. A paradigm **1** view of cultural change is traumatic because it entails an organization-wide collapse of a world view. In contrast, a paradigm **2** model of cultural change is incremental and localized; abrupt jolts that are caused by subcultures' adaptive responses, experiments, and idiosyncratic actions are dampened by loose coupling.

Although loose coupling has some beneficial effects, such as permitting deviance, providing safety for experimentation, and encouraging localized responses, it may also cause problems. For example, loose coupling may inhibit organization-wide changes. Top down organization-wide planned change efforts would have to cope with loosely coupled information channels and subunits' differential responses to information. Localized responses to environmental contingencies, and lessons from such responses, may not ripple beyond an acting subunit. A loosely coupled organization may not be equipped with the structures or processes which would enable it to transmit and retain the lessons from incremental, localized responses (Weick, 1979).

Change from a paradigm 2 perspective, then, is localized, incremental, and often environmentally stimulated (if not controlled). Those studying or enacting change from a paradigm **2** perspective, but desiring an organization-wide impact, would therefore face a difficult predicament. Because locally based changes are often diffuse and loosely coupled to each other, their organization-wide repercussions are difficult to predict and problematic to control.

Paradigm **2's** focus on locally based change is quite different from paradigm **1's** concern with global patterns of change. When viewing an organization through a paradigm **2** lens, cultural members and researchers may not even be able to recognize changes in organization-wide patterns of consistency and consensus. A shared, integrating vision or common language is often unrecognized from **this** perspective. Moreover, paradigm 2 channels ambiguity. So, in addition **to** missing these paradigm **1** sources of clarity and integration, members and researchers with a paradigm 2 perspective also miss some evidence of people's perceptions of ambiguity.

PARADIGM 3: AMBIGUITY

Paradigm 3 differs from the other two paradigms primarily in its treatment of ambiguity. Paradigms **1** and 2 both minimize the experience of ambiguity. Paradigm 1 denies it by attending to that which is clear, consistent, and shared. When change comes to a paradigm **1** view of culture, that change is revolutionary. A temporary and traumatic acknowledgement of ambiguity is required before retreat into a new, shared, and unambiguous ideological haven becomes

possible. Ambiguity is strictly a temporary, albeit necessary, state of transition in this view of cultural change.

Change, from a paradigm 2 perspective, is not revolutionary, and a traumatic dose of ambiguity awareness is not necessary to catalyse change. Instead, differentiation channels ambiguity so that it is perceived as manageable. Subcultures therefore can avoid the action paralysis that can accompany an overwhelming awareness of ambiguity, and multiple localized changes can occur simultaneously.

There is a third reaction to ambiguity that results in such a different concept of culture (and cultural change) that we have called it paradigm 3. Rather than denying or channelling it, ambiguity could be accepted. Complexity and lack of clarity could be legitimated and even made the focus of attention; from a paradigm **3** perspective, irreconcilable interpretations are simultaneously entertained; paradoxes are embraced. A culture viewed from a paradigm 3 vantage point would have no shared, integrated set of values, save one: an awareness of ambiguity itself.

Unlike paradigm 1, in paradigm 3 awareness of ambiguity is not experienced as a temporary stage in the process of attaining a new vision of clarity. From a paradigm 3 perspective, ambiguitv is thought of as the way things are, as the 'truth', not as a temporary state awaiting the discovery of 'truth'. From this perspective, the clarity of paradigm 1 is viewed as over-simplification. Consistency and consensus are considered abstract illusions created by management (Siehl, **1984)** for the purposes of control.

In paradigm **3,** cultural manifestations are not clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other. Instead, the relationships among manifestations are characterized by a lack of clarity from ignorance or complexity. Differences in meaning, values, and behavioural norms are seen as incommensurable and irreconcilable. Paradigm 2's attempts to achieve reconciliation by channelling attention (and thus differences) to discrete subunits (March and Simon, **1958),** or even attempts to resolve differences through sequential attention (Cyert and March, **1963),** would be seen as inevitably unsuccessful efforts to mask enduring difficulties. Similarly, organizational processes designed to resolve irreconcilable conflict are seen as temporary and superficial smoke screens. From a paradigm **3** perspective, researchers and cultural members see (and even look for) confusion, paradox, and perhaps even hypocrisy – that which is not clear. Rather than being 'a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark, always ominous jungle', a paradigm 3 enacted culture is the jungle itself.

A paradigm **3** portrayal of culture cannot be characterized as generally harmonious or full of conflict. 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 stability and clarity would weaken the impact of these integrating and differentiating

mechanisms. Even the boundary around the organization would be amorphous and permeable, as various 'feeder' cultures from the surrounding environment fade in and out of attention. These attributes of paradigm 3 are summarized, in contrast to the other two paradigms, in figure **5.**

Paradigm **3** accepts ambiguity as an inevitable part of organizational life. Although to date no cultural researchers have used a paradigm **3** perspective in their research, this perspective resembles some non-cultural streams of organizational research. The first stream is exemplified by the work of March and his colleagues in their characterization of some organizations – particularly large public sector bureaucracies and educational institutions – as 'organized anarchies' **(e.g.** Brunsson, **1985;** March and Cohen, **1986;** March and Olsen, **1976;** Sproull, Weiner and Wolf, **1978;** Starbuck, **1983).** New or unusually innovative organizations are often viewed from a paradigm 3 perspective. Subcultures may also be havens from a paradigm 3 perspective. For example, members of research and development laboratories, 'skunk works', and independent business units working within a larger corporate framework often seem to retain an unusual degree of comfort with ambiguity, and may even thrive on it. That kind of comfort is also evident among members of some occupational subcultures, such as academic research, book publishing, social work, and international business development. Finally, personality research indicates that some individuals develop unusually high tolerances for ambiguity **(e.g.** Kahn *et al.,* **1964;** Rokeach, **1960;** Van Sell, Brief and Schuler, **1981).** Thus, the acceptance of ambiguity, characteristic of paradigm **3,** can surface at various levels of analysis.

One metaphor for a paradigm **3** enacted culture is a web. Individuals are nodes in the web, temporarily 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, pockets of ignorance, and hypocrisy. A different issue would draw attention to a different pattern of connections. But from a paradigm **3** perspective, patterns of attention are transient and several issues and interpretations – some of which are irreconcilable – may become salient simultaneously. Thus, at the risk of mixing metaphors, the web itself is a momentary and blurred image, merely a single frame in a high speed motion picture: 'from this standpoint, culture is as much a dynamic, evolving way of thinking and doing as it is a stable set of thoughts and actions' (Van Maanen and Barley, **1984,** p. **307).**

Figure 5 is a depiction of such a web. Peace Corps/Africa is viewed as a loosely linked set of individuals with patterns of connections within and outside the organization. A concern with educational issues, coupled with disagreements about teaching methods, links volunteers in the educational projects, teachers from outside the Peace Corps, volunteers in the irrigation projects who are concerned about public education, and potential 'students' from the surrounding community. Similarly, an involvement with Nigerian concerns links past and present Peace Corps employees who have been involved with that country,
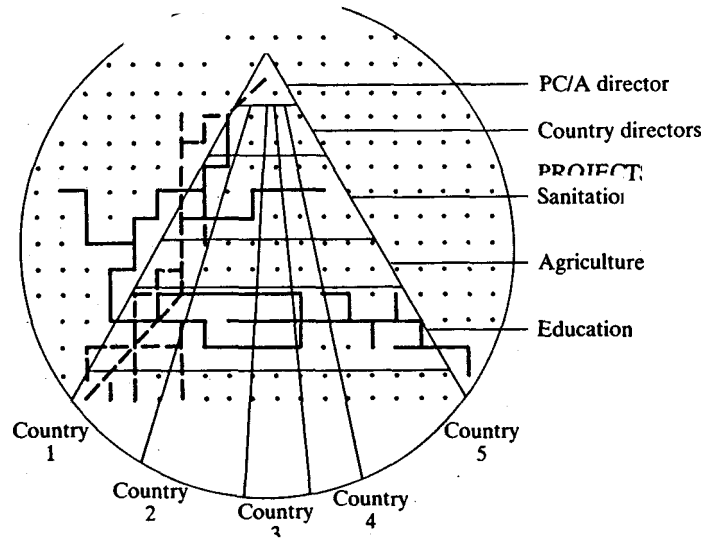
Key
- **Individuals**
- ⸺ **Concern with educational issues**
- ▬ ▬ ▬ **Concern with Nigeria (country 1)**

Figure 5. Paradigm 3 view of Peace Corps/Afnca **(PC/A)**

as well as Nigerians themselves. Other shared concerns that could elicit a pattern of connections include concerns with farming or left wing politics. Thus, an individual's momentary 'place' (or 'places? in a paradigm 3 cultural web depends on which issues are currently salient and how patterns of connection are drawn.

A PARADIGM 3 VIEW OF CULTURAL CHANGE

What does change mean within this context? If culture is enacted or perceived in terms of a 'web' culture, in terms of transient patterns of attention that loosely link an amorphous set of individuals, then culture must be continually changing. Any change among and between individuals, among the patterns of connections and interpretations, is cultural change (at **the** organizational or sub-organizational level). Whereas paradigm **2** focuses our attention on environmental sources of subcultural change, paradigm 3 stresses individual adjustment to environmental fluctuations, including patterns of attention and interpretation.

Culture ... does not itself adapt to environments but is the means **through** **which** *individuals* adapt to their environment ... Culture develops, elaborates,

or stagnates in a process of individual cultural innovation (Salisbury, 1975, p. 145, quoted in Keesing, 1981, p. 167).

The Peace Corps/Africa example can be used to illustrate this form of change. Suppose we notice that several of the volunteers in Senegal are becoming politically active in trying to change the educational opportunities in that country. Also, a disproportionally small amount of volunteer time is spent in the villages educating. A group of new volunteers is trying to become accustomed to village life. The culture of Peace Corps/Africa is continually changing, because the culture is, at any given time, the 'web' of the constantly fluctuating concerns of these individuals. If such changes are considered cultural change, and at the same time culture is the means through which individuals change, then culture, like individuals' attention patterns must be continually changing (cf. March, 1981).

Although cultural change is continual in a paradigm 3 enacted culture, it may go unnoticed. To be salient, change requires a backdrop of clarity. For a change in organizational patterns to be recognized, relatively stable patterns must have been acknowledged. For a subculture to be considered different in some way, members must be aware of their past subcultural connections. For a change in role relationships to be acknowledged, roles had to have been understood. A paradigm 3 portrayal of cultural change is paradoxical: it is continual and obscure. Whereas ambiguity tends to be invisible from the perspectives of paradigms 1 and 2, changes, as well as patterns of stability, become invisible from a paradigm 3 viewpoint. Not surprisingly, cultural change, conceived from such a dynamic and open-system perspective is virtually uncontrollable. Figure 6 summarizes the three paradigms' views of cultural change.

Paradigm 3 offers an approach to psychological safety that is radically different from that of the other two paradigms. That approach to safety has important implications for cultural change. In paradigm 1 psychological safety is provided by a solid foundation of clarity. In paradigm 2 psychological safety is provided by loose coupling between the locus of change − the subculture − and the rest of the organization. In paradigm 3 psychological safety is provided by a heightened awareness and acceptance of ambiguity. Expectations and evaluation criteria are not clear. Means and ends are perceived as connected loosely, if at all. Because it is difficult to connect actions to outcomes, individuals are less at risk when they experiment. Negative consequences of their actions are hard to detect. To the extent that a locus of control exists, it lies within the individual. Thus, a paradigm 3 perspective gives individuals a heightened sense of autonomy, and that autonomy brings safety.

Acceptance of ambiguity allows individuals greater freedom to act, to play, and to experiment (March and Olsen, 1976; Rogers, 1961; Weick, 1979). With this freedom, preferences and interpretations can be allowed to emerge from actions, rather than prospectively guide behaviours (Brunsson, 1985;

Characteristics of cultural change	Paradigm 1	Paradigm 2	Paradigm 3
Nature of process	Revolutionary	Incremental	Continual
Scope	Organization-wide	Localized and loosely coupled	Issue-specific changes among individuals
Source	Often leader-centred	External and internal catalysts	Individual adjustments attention interpretation
Implications for managing process	If superficial. then controllable; if deeper. then difficult but possible. to control	Predictable and unpredictable sources and consequences of change	Relatively uncontrollable due to continual change

Figure 6. Contrasting the approaches to cultural change

March, 1981; March and Olsen, 1976; Starbuck, 1983; Weick, 1979, 1985).
For these reasons, a paradigm 3 perspective should be most likely to be adopted
in settings where creativity and constant experimentation are valued
(classrooms, research laboratories, innovative industries, *etc.*); in contexts where
ambiguity is unavoidably salient (large public bureaucracies and political
organizations); in occupations where technology is unclear (social work and
book publishing); and in work where ideological and cognitive openness is
required (such as cross-cultural business and inter-organizational negotiations).
In these situations, change is constant; indeed, change is the business of many
of these kinds of organizations and occupations. Ironically then, paradigm 3's
acceptance of ambiguity simultaneously fosters and obscures continual change
— the very prevalence of that change makes it difficult to control.

CONCLUSION

Each cultural paradigm draws attention to a distinct set of organizational
processes and simultaneously blinds others. With each set of processes comes a

distinct view of how cultures change. Each of these views has implications about inter-related facets of organizational change; we have only hinted at these. For example, a paradigm **1** perspective draws attention to monolithic and revolution-*ary* changes in what is shared. Such changes often are attributed to the actions of a leader, frequently as concomitants (or consequences) of changes in leadership or organizational strategy. Whether such revolutionary change can actually be controlled by the actions of a leader is a separate question, as yet unresolved. The response to this question would largely depend on how culture is viewed. Is culture seen strictly in terms of surface level manifestations and espoused values, managerial levers to be manipulated at will? Or, does culture include those deeper-level assumptions that make behaviours and understandings taken-for-granted or habitualized, inertial forces that resist change?

A paradigm **2** perspective draws attention to localized, incremental changes − deviances, adaptations, and experiments − among and within subunits. Change may be catalysed from inside and/or outside the organization. Thus, paradigm **2** focuses our attention on how an organization enacts, responds to, and ultimately reflects its environment.

From a paradigm 3 perspective, it is difficult to notice discrete fluctuations. Ironically, the ambiguity and continual change that characterize this perspective obscure change. A paradigm 3 enacted culture *is* dynamic, paradoxical, confusing. This perspective draws attention to irreconcilable meanings. Pockets of ignorance and confusion, and actions that precede preferences *are* made salient. Paradigm **3** makes possible play, serendipitous outcomes (Miner, **1985),** and ambiguity in decision-making procedures − the importance of temporal patterns of attention and decision opportunities (Cohen, March and Olsen, **1972).** Janus-faced thinking − the ability to see and interpret in opposite directions − which has been associated with creativity (Rothenberg, **1976)** also becomes possible with a paradigm 3 view. Thus, paradigm 3 draws attention to those changes, by definition uncontrollable, that may underlie processes of innovation.

These three paradigmatic views have quite different implications for those who wish to manage the cultural change process. Paradigm **1** carries the hope, and often the promise, that organization-wide cultural changes can be success-fully initiated and controlled by those who hold leadership positions. It is of little surprise, then, that researchers and practitioners who write about the possibility and pragmatics of managing cultural change, usually do **so** from a paradigm 1 view **(e.g.** Kilmann, Saxton and Serpa, **1985;** Pascale and Athos, **1981;** Pettigrew, **1985;** Schein, **1985;** Tichy, **1983;** Wilkins, **1983).** Paradigm **2** offers a more constricted view, suggesting that efforts to manage cultural change have localized impact − both intentional and unintentional − but that predictable, organization-wide control will be unlikely. Paradigm 3 suggests that all cultural members, not just leaders, inevitably and constantly change and **are** changed by the cultures they live in. Thus, beliefs about cultural control are determined and reflected by a person's choice.or paradigmatic viewpoints.

The predicament of would-be 'value engineers' is further complicated if we are correct in our belief that, at any given time, a culture can be described and enacted from any and all three paradigms. To varying degrees, the processes of change suggested by each paradigm may be simultaneously occuring within a single organization. Thus, it is crucially important, for full understanding, to view any one organizational setting from all three paradigmatic viewpoints. This three-paradigm perspective draws attention to those aspects of cultural change that are, and more importantly perhaps, are not amenable to managerial control.

However, since paradigms serve as blinders for researchers and organizational members, it is likely that any one individual will find it easiest to view culture from only one paradigmatic perspective. This causes blind spots. If cultural change is perceived and enacted from only one paradigmatic perspective, then other sources and types of change may not be considered. If researchers and members focus on 'top-down' organizational-level processes, they will miss 'bottom-up' sources of change. If they attend only to locally based changes, they **will** miss global patterns and masked ambiguities. And, if ambiguities are ignored or hidden, experimentation and 'playfulness' may be inhibited. But by maintaining a constant awareness of ambiguity, individuals may not be able **to** notice change. Or, if their acknowledgement of ambiguity is sudden, they risk trauma and action paralysis.

An awareness of all three paradigms simultaneously would avoid the usual blind spots associated with any single perspective. However, a paradigm comprises a set of assumptions about culture, and thus, about organization. It determines the cultural 'reality' that members and researchers socially construct. As such, holding all three paradigms simultaneously − enacting multiple realities (and understanding their dynamic inter-relationships) − is extremely difficult. Yet to develop a better understanding of how organizations change, we must consider the complex dynamics of culture as well as those inter-related change processes from such a multi-paradigm approach.

NOTES

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[2] Unlike many researchers who take a cognitive approach to culture (e.g. Geertz, 1973), we believe behaviours, as reflected in informal and formal organizational practices, must be included as part of culture. Because practices reflect specific, material conditions of existence that often are not reflected in the world of beliefs or ideas, it is essential that the study of culture includes these structural, economic, and social realities (Martin and Meyerson, forthcoming, p. 24).

[3] Paradigms are viewpoints, not objective attributes of a culture. Thus, both researchers and cultural members may or may not adopt the same paradigmatic perspective on a specific cultural context.

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