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A qualitative exploration of organizational culture and workplace stressors:

A competing values approach

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Running head: Organizational culture and work stressors

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate the extent to which differing organizational cultures might be associated with different types of work stressors, and whether manifestations and perceptions of work stressors varied as a function of organizational culture. Researchers have not yet extensively considered this question in the context of a theoretical framework of organizational culture. Interviews were conducted with 77 employees representing the four Competing Values Framework culture types. Results revealed that work stressors within organizational cultures were manifested as a function of the primary organizational values, and that human relations culture stressors were additionally related to others not abiding by the primary workplace values. Further, results revealed that several employees (within the flexible-type cultures especially) described workplace events more as a challenge than stressful, and that these employees tended to report a similarity between themselves and the organization. These findings suggested that a person's fit with the organizational culture has importance in the investigation of organizational culture and perceptions of work stressors.

A qualitative exploration of organizational culture and workplace stressors:

A competing values approach

Occupational stress is costly; having implications for employees, organizations, and ultimately the economy (Atkinson, 2000; Siegrist, 1998). There is substantial empirical evidence to show that psychosocial risk factors at work predict undesirable physiological conditions (e.g., gastrointestinal malfunction, muscular-skeletal problems, and cardiovascular morbidity and mortality; see Van der Doef & Maes, 1998) and psychological responses (e.g., anxiety, depression, somatization, and burnout; see Van der Doef & Maes, 1999) among employees. In addition to the negative implications for physiological and psychological health, occupational stressors also have been shown to influence employee attitudes (such as job dissatisfaction and less organizational commitment) and employee behaviors that have implications for organizational effectiveness (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, and reduced job performance; see Kahn & Byosiére, 1992).

Research investigating the transactional work stressor-adjustment relationship has described many main effects between work stressors and employee outcomes. A considerable amount of literature, theoretical and empirical, also describes potential moderators of this relationship. Inspection of literature relating to organizational culture reveals only limited research with respect to the manifestations and perceptions of work stressors within differing culture types (e.g., Lansisalmi et al., 2000; Pool, 2000). This study represents an exploratory investigation designed to explore organizational culture as assessed by the Competing Values Framework (CVF) and identify workplace stressors as they relate to organizational culture type. Indeed, this is a particularly important line of investigation as researchers have not yet extensively considered this question; especially in the context of the CVF approach to the categorization of organizational cultures.

Organizational Culture: The Competing Values Framework

A number of different models of organizational culture have been identified throughout the literature. Broadly, these models can be defined based on their assessment of organizational norms or behavioral values (Rousseau, 1990). For instance, values-orientated approaches to understanding organizational culture include the Organizational Beliefs Questionnaire (Sashkin, 1984) which measures beliefs, and the Corporate Culture Survey (Glaser, 1983) which measures values, heroes, traditions, rituals, and cultural networks. From another perspective, Cooke and Lafferty's (1989) Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI), and Kilman and Saxton's (1983) Culture Gap Survey (CGS) are both based on behavioral norms or styles that identify shared beliefs and expectations that guide the way organization members interact and approach their work.

Another model, and the model adopted in the present study, is the Competing Values Framework (CVF) of organizational culture (see Quinn, 1988; Quinn & Hall, 1983; Quinn & Kimberly, 1984; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981, 1983). Several instruments have been developed to assess organizational culture according to the CVF (e.g., Cameron & Freeman, 1991; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1991; Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). Howard (1998) demonstrated that the CVF, in general, provides a comprehensive representation of the organizational culture construct. The CVF addresses three critical issues involved in the analysis of organizational culture. It specifies a descriptive content of organizational culture, identifies dimensions whereby similarities and differences across cultures can be evaluated, and suggests tools and techniques for organizational analysis that enable measurement and representation of organizational culture (Howard, 1998).

The CVF combines the (1) flexibility to control and (2) environmental orientation continua. These two primary dimensions reflect preferences for either flexible or structural control, and whether an organization focuses its attention inward towards its

internal dynamics (concern for the human and technical systems inside the organization) or outwards towards its external environment (responding to outside change and producing in a competitive market). The CVF describes the organizational content, identifies the components of culture that might be similar or different to other cultures, and provides analysis tools and techniques for investigating cultures.

The CVF dimensions (structure and focus) intersect to create four culture types: human relations, open systems, rational goal, and internal process. The human relations culture is dominated by employee consultation, participation, and openness, with belonging and trust as core values. Leaders in such organizations have shown tendencies towards being considerate and supportive, and facilitating interaction and ownership of work (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Quinn, 1988). The open systems culture is characterised flexibility with an external focus (i.e., open to change; Howard, 1998; Quinn, 1988). This culture type is characterised by roles and processes that exist to keep the organization in touch with the outside world, placing high value on the innovativeness of their employees and also resource acquisition (Howard, 1998). As such, leaders tend to be entrepreneurial, willing to take risks, and able to develop and communicate a vision of the future. (Howard, 1998; Quinn, 1988; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1991).

A rational goal culture essentially values productivity and the achievement of goals with an emphasis on an external focus and structural control (Howard, 1998; Quinn, 1988). Planning, goal clarification, direction, and decisiveness are characteristics of this type of culture type (Quinn, 1988). Given this value orientation, performance indicators tend to relate to productivity and profitability and leaders tend to be directive, goal-orientated, and instrumental (Quinn, 1988). Lastly, the internal process culture tends to be internally focused and reliant on structural control (Quinn, 1988; Howard, 1998). Characteristically, this culture strongly values rules, regulations, and formal procedures with well-developed managerial control systems, with leaders tending to manage by

report (indicating an internal focus on measuring inputs) and tending to be cautious and conservative in decision-making (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Howard, 1998).

Based on these descriptions, it can be seen that each culture profile has a polar opposite. Human relations is the polar opposite of rational goal, and open systems opposes internal process. Quinn (1988) also highlights the parallels of the model. For instance, rational goal and open systems cultures have an external focus, whereas rational goal and internal process cultures solidly value structural control. Similarly, human relations and open systems models value structural flexibility, and human relations and internal process cultures have an internal focus. It is important to note, however, that all four cultures can coexist in modern organizations, with some values more dominant than others. As highlighted by Quinn (1988), it would be unrealistic to expect one organization to lie totally within one section of the CVF; there will be differences between groups and between individuals within groups. However, the predominant culture within an organization will be characterised by established structures and norms which reinforce that culture (Quinn, 1988).

Overall, the CVF has been implemented in a number of studies across a variety of different countries. For instance, several Australian studies have indicated the relevance and appropriateness of the CVF to the Australasian work context. For example, Australian research using the CVF has found that: perceptions of a human relations culture was associated with increased readiness for change in a technology implementation project (Jones et al., 2005); market (or open systems) culture values to be related to higher effectiveness of human resources roles in Australian local government organizations (Teo, Ahmad, & Rodwell, 2003); there is a reliance on the internal process models in the public sector agencies, although managers' ideal cultures were not internal process (Bradley & Parker, 2001). Furthermore, Lamond (2003) used the CVF to assess

managers' perceptions of their organization's culture and found it to be both reliable and valid in the Australian context.

The CVF has been utilized in other countries also. For instance, Kalliath, Bluedorn, and Gillespie (1999) and Kalliath, Bluedorn, and Strube (1999) implemented the CVF in American-based workplaces in order to validate and test for CVF value congruence effects. Similarly, Ostroff, Shin, and Kinicki (2005) employed the CVF in a multi-level test of value congruence effects on employee job-related attitudes in 183 bank branches located in the United States. Research using the CVF has also been conducted in the United Kingdom. For instance, Patterson et al. (2005) employed the CVF to develop and assess the validity of a concurrent climate measure in 55 United Kingdom manufacturing companies. Overall, the relevance and appropriateness of the CVF to investigating organizational culture has been established in many industrialized nations, including Australia.

Organizational Culture and Work Stressors

Differential perception of work stressors as a function of organizational culture represents a little-researched area in literature. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest organizational culture is associated with differences in perceptions of work stressors. For instance, Pool (2000) investigated perceptions of three role stressors as a function of perceived organizational culture according to the three cultures types of the OCI (i.e., passive defensive, aggressive defensive, and constructive). This study was based on the premise that an organizational culture that espoused a learning environment would potentially reduce role stressors. The author found that perceptions of role conflict and role ambiguity were higher in aggressive and passive cultures (characterized by following rules and procedures and doing tasks as told, similar to CVF control cultures) compared to constructive cultures (reflecting humanistic-encouraging and affiliation values, similar to CVF's flexible dimension). Analysis of the data revealed an inverse

relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity when compared to the constructive culture, such that conflict and ambiguity were reported at relatively lower levels in constructive cultures compared to passive or aggressive cultures.

Warren and Johnson (1995) provide further evidence for the notion that organizational cultures can be associated with differing perceptions of work stressors among employees. This study was based on 116 working mother's perceptions of their respective organizations' culture. The authors found that employees who perceived the organizational culture to be supportive and family-oriented (with values similar to the human relations culture) reported less work-home role conflict and lower perceptions of pay dissatisfaction. From a similar perspective, Mishra, Das, Mishra, and Das (1990) conducted a study that investigated stress and coping in private and public service- and production-oriented organizations in India. The authors found (in the public sector but not the private sector) that perceived support and work-related values explained almost 36% of the variance in role conflict and role overload. Such results support the notion that perceptions of an organization's culture (or associated values) may be differentially associated with perceptions of work stressors.

Several studies can be cited relating to investigation of organizational culture and work stressors based on groups of similarly-cultured organizations. For instance, Guerra, Martinez, Munduate, and Medina (2005) found evidence to support the influence of organizational culture (in terms of public or private ownership) on employees' perceptions of some work stressors. The results revealed that 360 members of the public service organization (shown to be high on internal process-type cultural values) perceived significantly higher levels of both task and relationship conflict compared to the 169 respondents from the privatized organizations characterized by support, innovation, and goal-orientation (similar to human relations, open systems, and rational goal type cultures, respectively). Similarly, Thompson et al. (1996) found 6 of 21 ratings of various sources

of satisfaction and strain were significantly less favourable in organizations with a negative culture (characterised by compliance, lower recognition and supervision, and lower autonomy) compared to an organizations that were not characterised by elements of a compliance-based (i.e., negative) organisational culture. Indeed, employee ratings of job control, pay satisfaction, recognition for good work, emotional social support, lack of supervision, and supervision support were all more favorably evaluated by employees from the organizational culture that was not termed as negative.

Lansisalmi, Peiro, and Kivimaki (2000) conducted an ethnographic study (63 individual interviews, and 32 group interviews) that investigated perceptions of stressors from an organizational culture perspective in three economically independent divisions of a large multinational metal works company. Whilst several sources of work stress were identified as being common to all three cultures, the manifestations of these sources of work stressors were quite different between each of the cultures. For instance, a culture characterised by 'making money' (similar to rational goal) was associated with stressors relating to changing client needs, shortage of time, dissatisfied clients, and playing the multi-national game. These stressors reflect external issues to the organization which is inherently understandable given the rational goal culture is characterised by an external focus. Conversely, the 'scattered islands' culture (similar to internal process) was associated with stressors relating to social undervaluation, risk of unemployment, and the implementation of a group bonus system. As such, these stressors were more related to internal factors, reflecting the internal focus of this culture (as categorized by the CVF). Lastly, the culture that mapped onto both the internal process and rational goal cultures (jig-saw puzzle) contained stressors relating to external factors (i.e., fluctuation) and internal factors (e.g., social undervaluation). Whilst this study did not examine more flexible-type cultures according to the CVF, it does provide evidence that stressors and perceptions of stressors can indeed differ as a function of organizational culture.

Overview of the Present Study

To date, there is only limited research suggesting that manifestations and perceptions of work stressors may differ as a function of organizational cultures. Whilst the notion is somewhat supported by existing (peripheral) literature, there is a clear lack of rigorous investigation that adopts a theoretical framework to investigate potential differences in work stressors as a function of organisational culture. Additionally, there is also a lack of methodological rigor in forming conclusions relating to the relationships between organizational culture and work stressors. Indeed, many existing studies are based on qualitative summations of organizational culture types and do not equate these observed cultures to existing frameworks. This limits the generalisability of the findings of these investigations to some extent. The present study aimed to address these theoretical and methodological caveats in the existing research. Several research questions were subsequently posed in this study. First, we sought to investigate whether different work stressors were described differently by employees from different organizational cultures according to the cultures identified by the CVF. Second, we sought to investigate whether there was a relationship between the values associated with different organizational cultures and the types of stressors identified by employees.

*Method**Participants and Organizations*

Purposeful sampling was employed such that each organization targeted for inclusion in the study was thought to be high on values associated with one of the four CVF quadrants. The researcher monitored the target client- and service-based organizations' advertising and scanned each organization's internet sites in order to inspect language, artifacts, logos, mission statements, and business activities. This was necessary in order to develop initial expectations relating to predicted a priori CVF

culture typologies. Organizations were approached to take part in the study, receiving a letter requesting participation, and a 1-page project summary and information sheet.

Demographics relating to each organizational sample appear in Table 1. In all, 38 male and 39 female ($N = 77$) employees from six organizations (aged from 19.25 to 54.82, $M = 30.94$, $SD = 8.94$) took part in the interview process. Within participating organizations, employees were randomly selected and approached by the researcher and asked to participate in the study.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Interview Procedure

A total of 77 approximately 30-minute semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants from these six organizations (referred to as organization A, B, C, D, E, & F respectively). All questions were open-ended in order to avoid bias in participant replies. Using Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski's (1999) facilitation approach, participants were asked to elaborate and clarify all major and ambiguous responses. Understanding of participant responses was checked by the researcher summarizing and reiterating responses immediately after they were stated. Interviews were conducted in a private on-site office to enable confidential interviews with participants.

Interview questions were asked relating to both organizational culture and stressors. First, interviewees were asked what words come to mind when asked to describe the 'feel' of this organization as it is now?; if you had to name this organization's general feel, what would you name it?; can you think of a metaphor to describe the organization's feel?; what are the underlying assumptions of the way things are done in this organization?; how would you like to describe the organization?; what should the culture be?. In order to assess the types of stressors that existed within different organizational cultures, two questions were asked during the interview: Can you

tell me about events that are usually stressful at work for you, and what are the most common things that trigger the experience of stress at work for people around you?

Measures

Organizational culture rank-sum assessment. Two methods of assessing organizational culture were employed. First, organizational culture was assessed using a rank-sum measure designed by Zammuto and Krakower (1991; see also Bradley & Parker, 2001; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1991; Teo et al., 2003). Across five dimensions, the CVF-based instrument asked participants to identify the extent to which their organization possessed characteristics associated with each of the four culture types (i.e., human relations, open systems, rational goal, and internal process). The five dimensions include (1) character (e.g., the organization is a very personal place, like an extended family), (2) leadership (e.g., the managers in the organization are warm, caring, and seek to develop employees' full potential), (3) cohesion (e.g., the glue that holds the organization together is tradition and loyalty), (4) emphases (e.g., the organization emphasizes human resources), (5) rewards (e.g., the organization distributes rewards equally and fairly amongst its members).

Using this instrument, respondents distributed 100 points across each of the four descriptive statements within each of the five dimensions depending on how well they matched their organization. Scores were adjusted in order to correct for any mathematical errors made by respondents ensuring that the total score distributed across each of the four statements totaled 100. Second the procedure developed by Zammuto and Krakower (1991) for devising a competing values profile for each employee was utilised by averaging their rating for each culture type across the five dimensions.

Comparisons were made between two separate methods of assessing organizational culture; rank-sum assessment (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991) and qualitative investigation. This approach allowed checking that the dominant culture

identified by participants in each organization was also identified via quantitative CVF assessment. More specifically, this comparison enabled triangulation of the organizational culture data allowing assessment and diagnosis of the dominant culture type from different perspectives. As can be seen from Table 2, participants' comments about the organizations culture generally mapped onto the values that each culture was espoused to engender according to the CVF.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Results

The qualitative data was analyzed using a multi-stage content analysis approach (Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1969). Initially, responses to culture and stressor description questions were reviewed within each organizational culture. Single complete thoughts represented the unit of analysis in this study. Transcripts were inspected and thoughts (sentences and phrases) identified and represented on a single piece of paper each. Within each organizational culture, culture narratives and stressors were subsequently analyzed using a paper and piles method with each categorized and coded by creating piles representing the emergent and similar themes and concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1984). To determine the themes, categories identified within each organization's dominant culture that had similar themes were collapsed to reduce the total number of categories. Lastly, the remaining categories were labeled with a title that reflected each groups' meaning.

To ensure that bias did not influence the analysis all qualitative data was coded by two raters: the researcher and one person for whom the purpose of the study was unknown. Major initial differences in coding were discussed and rationalized between the raters in order to reach agreement. If agreement could not be reached the narratives in question were excluded from the analysis. Differences in coding were minimal between

the two raters with kappa coefficient greater than .86 (.86 to .95) for all comparisons (Cohen, 1960).

Organizational culture

Interview narratives relating to organizational culture were compiled based on the dominant organizational culture.

Human relations culture. As per Table 2, the dominant organizational culture of Organization A was human relations as assessed by the rank-sum culture assessment tool (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). As per Table 3, three distinct themes emerged when asking interviewees about their organization's culture. First, interviewees primarily identified the organization's feel as friendly and family-like. For instance, one interviewee described the organization as cohesive and pleasant with employees valuing a family feel within the organization where everyone looks out for each other. Similarly, another interviewee referred to the organization as friendly, close-knit, warm, and supportive.

In response to the same initial question, interviewees also described the 'feel' of the organization as team-like. Within this category of narratives interviewees referred specifically to team-oriented behavior such as helping each other out and sharing information. For instance, an interviewee referred to the importance of operating as a team within the organization where everyone jumps in to give a hand to meet the daily expectations. Another interviewee identified that team behavior was related to 'living the values and visions', indicating that team-playing was a crucial element of this organizations functioning. The importance of this comment was further supported by inspection of the organization's 'Values and Visions' report. This report is collated on a six monthly basis and represents the results of a survey measuring all employees' perceptions of the presence of many human relations related values such as teamwork, cohesion, morale, and training. Access to this report was granted after completion of all

interviews and presentation of the results to the organization. The results of the report further supported the results of the culture assessments conducted within this study.

When asked to comment on the assumptions underlying the way things were done in the organization a very strong theme emerged in relation to flexibility within the workplace. This flexibility was mostly related to the rules that existed within the organization with several interviewees identifying the rules as flexible and that they acted more as guidelines from which employees choose the appropriate course of action. For instance, one employee reported that they were encouraged to deal with their own problems and that they were essentially empowered to do so mostly; doing as much as they can to resolve a situation.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Open systems culture. The dominant organizational culture of Organization B was an open systems culture as assessed by Zammuto and Krakower's (1991) rank-sum culture assessment tool (see Table 2). As per Table 3, three themes were identified following inspection and re-inspection of the data. The most prominent theme to emerge from the data in response to questions relating to the organization's culture was related to innovation and vibrance. Within the category of comments, interviewees described the organizational culture as one that encouraged employees to think innovatively as a normal course of work-related action. Concurrently, interviewees talked about vibrance and being vibrant at work - enjoying the challenge of challenging the system and environment to be able to respond competitively. As one interviewee (and the researcher) noted, there were colorful posters on most walls in this branch of the organization stating 'Vibrant Innovative Business Enterprise'. The meaning of these posters was explained by interviewees. For example, one interviewee described the organization as a completely dynamic place that was characterised by innovation and a desire to stay number one and

be competitive in the marketplace. More specifically, another interviewee reported the need to be constantly looking for ways to improve things around work.

Further supporting the vibrance component of this theme, some interviewees referred to a feeling of excitement and fun within the organization. Several interviewees described the organization as upbeat and alive, representing a place where things happen, making it exciting to be a part of. In a similar vein, some interviewees within the open systems organizational culture described the culture as flexible. Flexibility was expressed in a number of ways mostly relating to an element of autonomy that was necessary to enable employees to respond to a changing environment. For instance, one employee reported how people within the organization generally allowed employees to choose how to conduct work and that employees were also encouraged to choose their attitude. This employee commented that the flexible policy helped to make work more fun. This comment is therefore associated with better employee adjustment.

Rational goal culture. The dominant organizational culture of Organizations C and D was the rational goal culture determined by the CVF rank-sum culture assessment tool (see Table 2). Overall, three main themes were identified following inspection of the data collected from predominantly rational goal cultures (see Table 3.3). With regard to the number of comments in each category, two themes were stronger. First, interviewees described the culture as ‘demanding’. Within this category, interviewees described the organizational culture as exhausting, poorly resourced, and ultimately stressful and demanding. In particular, an interviewee commented that the organization could only be described as stressful as a result of understaffing, unhappy and non-supportive colleagues, and pressures associated with selling products and providing services to clients.

Equally as prevalent in the data was a theme relating to targets and goals. Interviewees described the organizational culture as being primarily concerned with sales targets and goals that were measured on a regular (indeed, daily) basis. One interviewee

described the reliance on selling as a part of the organization's way of functioning, which ultimately resulted in a strong target orientation that influenced all employees in the organization. Another employee described this rational goal organization as a temperature gauge, with each higher degree representing another step closer to meeting the targets for the day or week. Indeed, this description also shares meaning with the 'demanding' theme previously discussed in relation to rational goal organizational culture.

The third theme to emerge from the interviews of rational goal culture employees was related to financial performance. Interviewees made reference to 'accuracy and efficiency', 'making money', and 'maximizing shareholder wealth' in their descriptions of the way things were done in the organization and the assumptions underlying the organizational culture. For example, one employee noted that a big part of the feel of the organization was related to selling and making money. To this extent, working at this (rational goal culture dominated) organization was related to 'maximizing shareholder potential' and working efficiently to achieve the profit-based goal. It should be noted that 'maximizing shareholder wealth' was a phrase that appeared in the organization's mission statement.

Internal process culture. As per Table 2, the dominant organizational culture of Organizations E and F was the internal process culture (as per CVF rank-sum culture assessment). Three distinct themes emerged when asking interviewees about their organization's culture (see Table 3). First, interviewees primarily described the organization as chiefly procedural and process-oriented. Narratives in this category referred to strict time frames for task completion and knowing the rules and procedures. When asked about the feel of the organization, one employee referred to there being a lot of rules to follow and procedures for just about everything. Similarly, another interviewee commented that the strong process orientation of the organization meant that everyone

knew what was expected of them – ‘everyone knows what they should be doing and where they should be’. Interviewees also discussed being a part of a larger process with their individual roles representing a component of an assembly-line type structure to achieving an end result. To this extent, one interviewee commented that the organization could be described as a chain of production, where the success of a day manager was dependent upon the success and task-completion of the night manager.

A second theme identified within the internal process organizational culture interviews was related to rigidity and inflexibility within the organization. Within this category of narratives interviewees described the organizational culture as controlled, inflexible, and bureaucratic with no room for movement from rules and procedures. For example, one employee described the organization as rigid and controlled with employees having no choice in what they do and how they do it.

Lastly, a cultural theme relating to friendliness also emerged from the data. Within these narratives interviewees made reference to an element of friendliness within the organization. Whilst the narratives were not as prevalent or prominent as the friendly category found within the human relations culture, there was nevertheless a distinct theme relating to a level of friendliness within the workplace. For instance, interviewees commented that the organization had a ‘bit of a family feel it’, or that there was a ‘friendly element’ to the culture of the organization where others care enough to help out if it’s needed.

Workplace stressors

Interviewee responses to the workplace stressor questions were collated according to the dominant organizational culture identified by the rank-sum culture assessment tool and qualitative enquiry. Themes relating to groups of stressors were developed for each organizational culture typology.

Human relations culture. As per Table 4, the most prominent stressor theme within the human relations organizational culture related to situations where people did not abide by the organizational values. For example, one employee expressed frustration when her supervisor failed to provide back-up and support with respect to a customer issue. The employee cited that the supervisor's action was against the accepted way of working within the organization which identifies that employees should be ultimately supported. Violation of this support-based value, especially in front of outsiders to the organization (clients), was often expressed as a stressor in this organization. From a similar perspective, others not helping out and following team-based values was also a stressor. For instance, one employee commented that whilst there were people who did help out (as they should in this culture), there were those who did not. As this employee commented '...they don't know the way we work and some of them just don't get it: everyone has to pitch in and help...'

The second major stressor theme found within the human relations culture was related to levels of workload, time pressure, and interruptions. Employees referred to being constantly interrupted. For instance, one interviewee reported frustration associated with having a queue of customers but also having a queue of team members all wanting her help. To further explain, this interviewee commented that she would 'just love to be able to focus on one thing' but the expectation was to help others out. Similarly, in describing frustration, another employee remarked that at any time he could be serving customers, stocking shelves or helping other team members out. Overall, these narratives highlight the time pressures associated with helping other team members in the organization which compounds the pressures associated with concurrently meeting customer needs and completing other duties.

Two less prominent, yet meaningful, themes emerged within the human relations organizational culture with respect to stressors. First, some interviewees reported that

client expectations were a source of stress. Within this category, narratives referred to levels of service expected by clients and difficulty meeting the associated expectations. For instance, one employee reported that clients were stressful because ‘they come in and expect so much information and time and help’. The frustration for this interviewee was that the organization doesn’t require employees to pander overly to client expectations - ‘the customers aren’t everything here but they still think they are’. As a result, clients become upset, thus creating an unfriendly environment and the experience of employee strain.

In a similar vein, some interviewees identified that they get stressed by interpersonal conflict in the workplace. These narratives were related to other team members within the organization being unfriendly. Such situations resulted from events occurring at times when employees had been asked to help out (or had helped out because they were expected to) but were unhappy about it. For instance, an employee expressed frustration associated with others ‘fighting’ with her when she needed assistance. Whilst she admitted that it was not the norm, this interviewee reported strain associated with others not abiding by the value of helping, and also the conflict and ‘nastiness’ that arose when other employees did not want to provide assistance.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Open Systems. As per Table 4, the most prominent stressor theme within the open systems organizational culture was related to interruptions from other staff members, also expressed as multi-tasking. For instance, one employee reported strain associated with interruptions such as phone calls from other branches as well as local staff members. She commented that her ability to plan her day and workload was ultimately inhibited. Another employee referred to ‘multi-tasking fatigue’. Another employee described the frustration associated with completing multiple and different ad hoc tasks such that he could ‘find himself waiting for himself to finish a component of a task’ before he would

normally commence what was routinely his part of that task - 'we just seem to work in so many different ways and on different jobs'.

A second major stressor theme identified within the open systems interview narratives was related to changes in the workplace. These narratives referred to the stress associated with industrial-level changes that frequently occurred externally to the organization. These changes have a follow-on effect such that projects are halted and indefinitely suspended and new products have to be developed, marketed and known to employees in a short period of time. For instance, one interviewee reported frustration relating to expending effort on understanding a new product which is then 'shelved' because of government or industry regulation changes, or that a new better product has made it to the market first. From a similar perspective, another employee reported difficulty associated with adapting to the growth and related changes within the organization such that a new idea or innovation might be superfluous within a few months.

Related to the 'constant changes' theme were narratives describing a lack of training support and direction. Within this group of narratives, interviewees complained of a lack of direction and support as a result of the changing environment. For example, an employee relayed frustration related to a feeling of 'flying by the seat of [her] pants'. More specifically, this interviewee reported attending to many different tasks and that there was no training related to these tasks and also few to refer to in order to get help with the tasks owing to their ad hoc nature.

Rational Goal. As per Table 4, three stressor-related themes were identified within the rational goal organizational culture interview narratives. The most prominent theme was related to workload issues that revolved around meeting targets and goals. For instance, one employee reported frustration related to doing additional work in order to meet the targets. Moreover, it was additionally frustrating given that some of the extra work was akin to 'playing the game'. This meant doing 'useless work' to meet the targets

(such as getting a friend to buy something as a favor) when the time could have been better spent doing other things that might actually result in future sales. Another employee noted that not meeting targets was a source of stress and strain as if it happened in consecutive weeks or months he felt like he was 'on show' as not performing. Similarly, another interviewee noted that it is stressful when the week (target calculation period) was progressing and his sales were not good. This situation meant that the rest of this employee's week would be geared towards working very hard to try to achieve the targets: 'it's always in the back of my mind that I might not get my targets'.

Another theme that emerged from the data was initially related to complaints from customers or others within the organization. Further inspection revealed a more salient theme, however, related to a loss of money, inaccuracy, and inefficiency. The narratives within this category of stressors are deeply-rooted in what some interviewees described as a fear of costly mistakes. The ramifications manifest as angry supervisors, complaining customers, and embarrassment in front of colleagues. For instance, one interviewee reported frustrations related to the pressure of dealing with so many clients. This situation leads to working fast which can be the source of mistakes. As explained, in this organization, some mistakes can lead to financial losses which are directly related to performance assessment. Another interviewee further reported that these mistakes can lead to customer abuse because they have been inconvenienced. This situation was especially 'stressful' as it resulted in supervisor involvement and often reprimand for the commission of the mistake.

A final theme to emerge from the data relating to rational goal stressors concerned a lack of staff support. Employees reported strain experienced from the inability to get any help when they really needed it. As noted by one interviewee, other employees are so busy themselves that they do not really have time to help others.

Internal Process. Three stressor-related themes were identified within narratives relating to the internal process organizational culture (see Table 4). The most prominent theme was related to a lack of control in the workplace which was often initially identified as an issue relating to time pressure, high workloads, and frequent interruptions. For example, an employee reported that trying to plan his workload was frustrating as he wasn't given enough time to fit everything into the day: 'we're just told what to do and when to do it'. Another interviewee similarly commented that the stringent time limits for performing tasks were frustrating as it was hard to comply with them as they do not take into account such aspects as covering for someone or helping others.

The second theme to emanate from the data was associated with rigid and inflexible policy and procedures. This category of narratives was characterised by comments relating to out-of-touch, impractical, and controlling policy with comments indicating that this situation can inhibit innovation and lead to unstable changes. For instance, one employee reported frustration when new policy directives were given but were not suitable to the specific and local workplace context: 'some policies don't work everywhere'. Frustrations were particularly associated with employees changing work behaviors to integrate the policy that was perceived as not better than the previous way of operating. Similarly, interviewees reported frustration associated with organizational bureaucracy and inflexibility: 'everything has to follow the [procedure manual] and if it doesn't it'll get sent back'.

The final theme to emerge from the internal process organizational culture interview data was related to absenteeism of others within the organizational workforce. This category of narratives was characterised by complaints relating to interviewee perceptions of 'a lot' of employees taking sick leave on a frequent basis which had a flow-on effect as the employees at work had to cover for absent employees and still

complete their own tasks. The flow-on effects for those left in the workplace were subsequently compounded by the stringent procedures and processes that already guided each employees' workday.

Emergent themes

In addition to the themes relating to organizational culture and workplace stressors, another genre emerged as the data were analyzed (see Table 5). Several interviews were notable because participants had difficulty expressing events or classes of events that had caused them to feel stressed. Whilst, initially, it was considered that the 'I'm not stressed' responses could have been an example of interviewer bias (Ferber & Wales, 1952), the frequency of cases suggested that this was a bona fide stand-alone theme. Further enquiry was undertaken in order to investigate the reasons these participants could not identify stressors in the workplace. Consequently, additional open-ended probing questions were asked, and included, 'what are the reasons that you don't find workplace events stressful?', and 'why are events not stressful for you at work?'

Inspection of all the narratives relating to non-identification of stressors revealed thematic content associated with enjoyment of being a part of the organization and/or enjoying the work being performed. In particular, narratives within this group indicated that working for the organization was similar to what it is like for the interviewee at home: 'not a lot of difference between here and home'. This statement implies a similarity between one's personal and organizational life in some way - an element or elements of the employee's life were reflected in the organization's life or ways of doing things. This observation was further supported by other statements within this 'nothing's stressful' genre of narratives.

This category of narratives was characterized by comments relating to a respect and liking of some of the values associated with the organization. In particular, one interviewee described the importance of the rules and regulations associated with his

‘internal process’ cultured organization. This employee identified that he felt the rules and routines associated with the organization were important and that he lived his life by following rules: ‘I’m pretty ordered in the way I do things’. This implies a match of order-based values which are also a fundamental value within the internal process organizational culture. This theme was observed in all organizational cultures assessed although the majority of narratives came from the flexible organizational cultures (i.e., human relations and open systems). For instance, an open systems employee described herself and the organization in synonymous terms: the organization valued autonomy of employees and the employee personally valued this autonomy.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Lastly, with respect to themes that emerged within the non-identification of stressors category was content relating to facing up to the challenge of the work. A number of narratives which were also characterised by person-organization value likeness or congruence were found to have references to identification of the challenge associated with workplace events and the enjoyment that comes from facing up to the event that some might consider stressful. For instance, an employee of a human relations organization refuted the term ‘stressful’, commenting that workplace events can be classed as a challenge or challenging, but that they were not stressful.

Discussion

This study is unique methodologically as it represents an in-depth investigation of organizational culture (based on a single theoretical framework) and the associated manifestation of stressors. The employment of qualitative methodology enabled appreciation of how and why stressors were essentially relevant to particular organizational cultures. Such understanding could not be obtained from pure quantitative assessment of stressors which would not indicate, for instance, why interruptions were represented as a stressor in different CVF organizational cultures.

Workplace stressors

Investigation of the workplace stressors as a function of organizational culture revealed a number of overall commonalities and differences. As per Table 4, the results found that human relations culture stressors included others not abiding by the workplace values, interruptions related to helping others, interpersonal conflicts that occurred at work, and meeting client expectations. Open system stressors included interruptions at work that revolved around multi-tasking, adjusting to the many changes in the workplace, and feelings related to a lack of support or direction in dealing with the changes at work. From another perspective, rational goal organizational cultures were associated with stressors including activities associated with meeting targets and goals, fearing the commission of mistakes that cost money, and a perceived lack of staff support. Lastly, the stressors identified with internal process cultures were related to interruptions at work that made it hard to complete set tasks, inflexible policy and procedures that didn't fit the situation, and others not doing their work on time or properly (via absenteeism or temporary re-assignment) to allow the next stage of the work to be completed properly.

A number of overall points can be made with respect to the stressors found to be present within each organizational culture. First, this study has established that different organizational cultures are associated with different stressors and different manifestations of what makes something stressful. Whilst it may be shown that interruptions were expressed as a stressor within several cultures, this study enabled a more fine-tuned identification of the true nature of the stressor. For instance, within an open systems culture, interruptions were stressful for some interviewees because they were often associated with completing tasks that were relatively new and had no set way of being completed yet. In an internal process culture, on the other hand, interruptions were seen as stressful as they acted as a barrier to the timely and adequate completion of tasks for the person or department that was next in the chain of workflow. This identification of

different stressors in different organizational cultures is a simple but important point as it furthers understanding of stress literature which as yet has only preliminarily identified the concept of differing manifestations of stressors within differing organizational cultures.

A second point that can be noted relating to the assessment of stressors as a function of organizational cultures relates to the way that stressors seemed to reflect the values endorsed by the organization. It can be shown for three of the CVF organizational cultures that the sources of the stressors identified were often related to the values within that organizational culture. For instance, an internal process culture is characterised by values associated with hierarchy, order, processes, and rule-orientation. Similarly, interviewees identified that the main stressors within their internal process organization were related to inflexible policy, interruptions that make it hard to maintain stability of the workflow, and others not doing what they should in their part of the work flow. As such, it can be seen that the issues that caused interviewees to experience stress were also very similar to the dominant values upheld within the organization. This values-stressor pattern is also duplicated in open systems and rational goal organizational cultures. For example, in goal-oriented (i.e., rational goal) cultures, targets and goals were cited as stressors, and in cultures that adapt to the external environment (i.e., open systems), frequent changes at work were cited as a source of stress.

However, the values-stressors link within the human relations culture was different. In line with the other three CVF organizational cultures, evidence was found suggesting that the values upheld within an organization can be a stressor. The team value concept was expressed as a source of stress as interviewees identified that 'helping others' was sometimes stressful. Specifically, interviewees reported that having to help others out all the time was sometimes stressful. Interestingly, however, for other stressors, it was not the values that were the source of stress but rather an ignorance and disregard

of the values that was considered stressful. Within the human relations culture (characterised by employee concerns and cohesion) it was found that others not abiding by the workplace values (that is, by not helping/working as a team) and also engaging in interpersonal conflict were both sources of stress. Indeed, not working as a team contravenes the value associated with working as a team, and similarly, arguing with others at work contravenes the organizational values associated with cohesion and friendliness.

Person-Organization Fit Theme

The identification of an additional theme related to not getting “stressed” also raises some important issues that require discussion. This theme is related to the fact that quite a number of interviewees were unable to describe anything as particularly stressful. These interviewees had a number of ways of expressing what has been labeled the ‘fit’ hypothesis. Indeed, this thematic discovery is similar to P-E fit theory which essentially purports that a match between the person and the environment has positive outcomes for the person (see Pervin, 1989).

First, the discovery of this theme is meaningful as it highlights that interviewees who related with and in some way personally admired the dominant values that existed within the organization did not regard workplace events as stressful. The complexity of this theme was further explored and it was found that these interviewees regarded seemingly ‘ill-labeled’ stressors as more a source of challenge and ultimately satisfaction. Many interviewees within this thematic category described relative likenesses between themselves and the activities of the organization and the organization itself. An additional point to note from the fit theme that emerged from the data involves the fact that more comments relating to not getting stressed were found to originate from interviews that occurred within the flexible organizational cultures compared to the control cultures. Specifically, more interviewees within the human relations and open systems

organizational cultures tended to describe high demand workplace events as sources of challenge rather than describing them as stressful. As highlighted by LePine et al. (2005), some stressors can represent challenges for employees and therefore are not characterised by a typical negative relationship with employee adjustment. Indeed, challenge stressors have been negatively related to employee strain and positively related to performance and employee motivation.

This discovery has additional meaning for the investigation of organizational culture and occupational stress, suggesting that people who have personal values that are relatively congruent with the organization might be immune from the impacts of stressors. To this end, it may be as much organizational culture as perceptions of fit or congruence with the culture that is important in the relationships between work stressors and employee adjustment.

Methodological Implications for the CVF

It can be seen from Table 3 that the quantitative (rank-sum) and qualitative assessments of organizational culture within each culture sat well together. That is, where a dominant organizational culture was obtained via quantitative assessment, the qualitative themes derived from interviewing the same participants were similar to the values of that CVF culture. This result further validates the use and appropriateness of the CVF in the assessment of organizational culture within Australian organizations and further supports the findings of Lamond (2003) that the CVF is valid and reliable in the Australian context. More specifically, the results of this study demonstrate that the rank-sum assessment of organizational culture is useful for determining and categorising dominant organizational culture types.

It should be additionally noted, however, that strong themes to emerge from the qualitative assessment of organizational culture were related to flexibility and control/inflexibility. Commonalities existed between those organizational cultures that

shared the same structural dimension within the CVF. For example, human relations and open systems cultures (characterised as flexible on the structural dimension of the CVF) were both qualitatively described as flexible in terms of guiding rules and employee autonomy. Similarly, those organizational cultures within the control-structured dimension (i.e., internal process and rational goal) were described as inflexible and controlling. The presence of these commonalities requires further investigation. It may be that the biggest groups of difference in an assessment of all the CVF organizational cultures might lie between the flexible and control type cultures.

Limitations

Several limitations are pertinent for discussion with respect to this study. An inherent issue with qualitative data is that it is limited in its generalisability (Becker, 1998). Indeed, this study is based on the opinions and thoughts of a relatively small sample of employees. It will be necessary for further quantitative research to be conducted with a much larger sample of employees to investigate the predominance and the strength of the organizational culture-work stressor relationships identified in this study. Further, longitudinal surveying and analyses should be conducted in order to reduce common method variance and examine the stability of the relationships over time.

It should also be noted that the employees in this study were all sampled from similar organizational levels (e.g., semi-skilled, skilled, or lower-level managers) within similar organizations (i.e., service- and client-based). Future investigations, therefore, will need to assess the organizational culture-work stressors relationships across of a variety of organizational types and within a variety of different hierarchical levels. As such, future research might consider applying the design of this study to middle- and senior-level management employees and across industry types (e.g., manufacturing.)

Conclusion

Overall, interview data was collected from six organizations representing the four CVF organizational cultures ($N = 77$). The results of this study revealed that work stressors within organizational cultures were generally manifested as a function of the primary organizational values and, further, that human relations culture stressors were additionally related to others not abiding by the primary workplace values. These results add clarity to our understanding of the ways in which stressors manifest in the workplace. Further these results suggest that adapting human relations-type values in an organization does not necessarily lead to a reduction in the experience of workplace stressors as these employee-related values can also act as a source of stressors for employees. Lastly, this study has supported the notion that a similarity between employees and the organization might be an important facet of the investigation of organizational culture and workplace stressors. Taken together these results suggest a complex relationship between organisational culture and work stressors that requires a great deal of research to fully understand its implications.

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Table 1

Descriptive statistics of participating organizations

Organization	Business Activity	Interviewees Per Organization	Employee Age Range (Mean, SD)	Employee Gender	Employee Tenure (Mean Years)
A	Hardware Sales	13	19.25 – 51.25 (34.00, 10.85)	M: 5 F: 8	3.52
B	Mobile Phone Sales	24	22.25 – 54.84 (30.97, 10.33)	M: 12 F: 12	2.81
C	Advertising	9	21.25 – 32.00 (27.33, 3.80)	M: 4 F: 5	1.93
D	Financial Services	11	21.98 – 29.75 (27.48, 3.14)	M: 6 F: 5	6.30
E	Grocery Sales	14	20.00 – 49.25 (31.58, 9.45)	M: 8 F: 6	6.51
F	Education Institution	6	27.56 – 52.32 (36.86, 9.84)	M: 3 F: 3	3.86
Overall Statistics		Total: 77	Mean: 30.94 SD: 8.94	M: 38 F: 39	4.30

M = male; F = female

Table 2

Organizational culture results from interviews and quantitative assessments

Organization and domain	Dominant culture – Rank Sum (RS) Mean (Standard deviation)	Values identified by the CVF	Qualitative organizational culture themes
<i>Human relations</i> Organization A	HR	37.62 (14.17)	Teamwork
	OS	22.23 (5.49)	Morale and cohesion
	RG	22.38 (10.85)	Participation
	IP	17.77 (7.33)	Employee concerns
<i>Open systems</i> Organization B	HR	26.23 (7.15)	Innovation and change
	OS	38.56 (11.23)	Creativity
	RG	19.23 (7.56)	Decentralisation
	IP	15.98 (6.42)	Respond to environment
<i>Rational goal*</i> Organizations C and D	HR	20.64 (8.94)	Productivity and profitability
	OS	18.07 (8.02)	Outcome excellence
	RG	36.00 (12.05)	Getting the job done
	IP	25.29 (7.48)	Goal achievement
<i>Internal process*</i> Organizations E and F	HR	18.62 (8.68)	Predictable outcomes
	OS	16.92 (6.41)	Stability and order
	RG	27.19 (7.93)	Dependability and equilibrium
	IP	37.40 (11.26)	Processes

Note. HR = human relations; OS = open systems; RG = rational goal; IP = internal process.

* Data from organisations with the same dominant CVF culture-type were combined as the primary focus of this investigation was related to organisational culture and not the organisations themselves.

Table 3
Thematic summary of organizational culture narratives

Theme	Sample Size	Frequency of Narrative (Frequency of individuals stating narrative)
<i>Human relations</i>	13	
Friendly, family-like		20 (11)
Team-like		19 (8)
Flexible		10 (6)
<i>Open systems</i>	24	
Vibrant, innovative		25 (16)
Work hard and have fun		22 (10)
Flexible		14 (8)
<i>Rational goal</i>	20	
Demanding		22 (9)
Target and goal oriented		20 (16)
Profit-making		16 (12)
<i>Internal process</i>	20	
Procedural		33 (17)
Inflexible/bureaucratic		21 (14)
Friendly		12 (9)

Note. Inclusion of themes was based on identification by more than one interviewee within each organisational culture.

Table 4
Thematic summary of work stressor narratives within organizational cultures

Theme	Sample Size	Frequency of narrative (Frequency of individuals stating narrative)
<i>Human relations</i>	13	
Others not abiding helping values		14 (9)
Interruptions, helping others		16 (8)
Interpersonal conflict		5 (4)
Client expectations		7 (4)
<i>Open systems</i>	24	
Interruptions/multi-tasking		31 (16)
Changes at work		18 (16)
Lack of training support/direction		11 (9)
<i>Rational goal</i>	20	
Meeting targets and goals		32 (18)
Fear of costly mistakes		20 (11)
Lack of staff support		18 (11)
<i>Internal process</i>	20	
Interruptions		19 (15)
Inflexible policy		25 (16)
Absenteeism		16 (12)

Note. Inclusion of themes was based on identification by more than one interviewee within each organisational culture.

Table 5

Summary of emergent themes

Narrative theme	Frequency of narrative (frequency of individuals stating narrative)
Challenge	3 (3)
Autonomy	2 (2)
Similarity with values	5 (5)

Note. Inclusion of themes was based on identification by more than one interviewee within each organisational culture.