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Contrasting perspectives on organizational culture change in schools

Introduction

The concept of organizational culture continues to excite interest among academics, policymakers, and managers, and its widespread use entails an ongoing engagement with its meaning (Alvesson, 1993). The concept has analytic value (Martin, 2002) and is a substantive consideration in management matters such as inter-organizational collaboration (Beugelsdijk, Koen, & Norderhaven, 2006), mergers in the public sector (Riad, 2005), and restructuring in education (Hannay, Ross, & Seller, 2006).

Importantly, it is deemed to be an essential ingredient for superior organizational performance (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). For over 30 years, organizational culture has been linked to school performance (Deal & Kennedy, 1983), and having the “right culture” is still considered central in improving school and staff performance (Connolly & James, 2009; Fullan, 2006; James, Connolly, Dunning, & Elliott, 2006; Stoll, 2009).

Not surprisingly, a substantial organizational culture literature has developed, but this body of work interprets the concept in a range of ways. Over 25 years ago, Smircich (1983) asserted that "organizational analysts [hold] varying conceptions of culture" (p. 339), a point reiterated more recently by other theorists (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Jung et al., 2009; Martin, 2002). The importance of the concept for theorists and practitioners and the varied definitions of it have direct implications for managing and understanding culture change in educational and other organizations.

The range of different ontological underpinnings of organizational culture is central to the complexity of the notion, with the further complication that these underpinnings are not fixed: Theoreticians and practitioners both have a tendency to drift between them (Bate, 1994). The implications of these different conceptions of culture have not been contrasted analytically in the culture change literature, and it is our intention to do so here, thereby “filling a gap” in the literature. To illuminate our argument, we have used a case study of the change processes in a school over an 8-year period. School culture is highly complex (Firestone & Louis, 1999), so we have limited our analysis to the changes in the organizational culture of the staff group. Many commentators (e.g., Shachar, Suss, & Shlomo, 2010; Stoll, 1999) are also centrally concerned with this group in their analyzes of organizational culture in educational settings.

In this paper, we conceptualize different perspectives on organizational culture – external reality, interpretation, organization, competing subcultures, and process – and analyze the culture change process in a school from those different perspectives.

Our intention necessitates a particular structure for the paper. We start with the case study methodology and then summarize the case. This case study summary gives important contextual information for the illustrative case study data. We then conceptualize each perspective and use additional case study data to illustrate fully the culture change process from that perspective. In the final section, we summarize the analysis we have undertaken, illustrate the usefulness of the contrasting perspectives we have developed, and discuss some of the implications of the analysis.

The case study

Methodology

Our empirical data is a longitudinal, instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) of the changes in a secondary school in South Wales over the period 1998 to 2006. Although our interest is the organizational culture of the staff group, we have set the analysis in a wider context. Data for the case study were from the doctoral research undertaken by Beales (2006), and further interviews and document scrutiny undertaken by Connolly and James provide additional data and investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Beales was the headteacher of the school during the case study period (he was appointed in 1998), and his research sought to analyze change processes in schools. He collected data by means of semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), a questionnaire-based survey (Bell, 2002; Wilson & McLean, 1994), and document analysis (Platt, 1981). In addition, he kept a written record of significant events. All of the data collection instruments were trialled and amended accordingly before use.

Beales conducted semi-structured interviews between 2002 and 2006 with 15 members of the teaching staff (10 of whom had worked at the school for more than 7 years), 7 pupils aged 17-18 years (all of whom had attended the school for more than 6 years), 2 members of the administrative staff, and 3 governors, two of whom were parents (all the governors had been members of the school governing body for more than 5 years). The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain their experiences of leadership practices and the organizational change processes. Twenty five members of the teaching staff selected at random were surveyed anonymously by questionnaire in

2004 to ascertain their experiences of leadership practices and organizational change processes. A range of documents were analyzed including inspection reports (1994, 200, 2006) by Estyn, the education inspection service in Wales, minutes of meetings, school development plans (1994-1997, 1998-2001, 2002-2005), school publications, press cuttings, Welsh Assembly Government school performance data, staff professional development portfolios, and the written records of events. The data collection strands enabled the production of an authentic account (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) of the changes and provided a wide-ranging and rich data set – a thick description (Geertz, 1973) – on which to develop a narrative account of the case study (Stake, 1994). The emergent themes and the developing narrative were validated on six occasions by a group of senior educational leaders/managers from other schools who were themselves researching educational change.

The data and the narrative that Beales developed were scrutinized and triangulated (Altheide & Johnson, 1994) by Connolly and James. They both undertook interviews with eight staff members including Beales and those currently holding senior management, teaching, and administrative posts who had worked in the school since before 1998, and scrutinized the document data set to explore the change processes in the school. The data collected in 2007 was used to validate and augment the Beales' data set.

The case study narrative in outline

Our intention in this section is to summarize the case context and the changes that took place during the case study period from 1998 to 2006.

The school catchment area, pupil numbers, and school management. The school was located in a large, former mining village in South Wales and catered to pupils aged 11 to 18 years. During the research period, the first language of all of the pupils was English with only a few pupils coming from Welsh-speaking families or from minority ethnic groups.

A new headteacher was appointed in 1998. At that time, there were 450 pupils on roll, a number which increased to approximately 1,000 in 2006. The sixth form, which had been established in 1997 with 17 pupils, had grown to 150 pupils by 2006. During the case study period, the number of staff increased from 32 to 57 full-time equivalents, and over 30 members of staff had left and been replaced. In September 2004, new leadership positions within the school were introduced, and the school was divided into a lower school for Years 7 to 9 and an upper school for Years 10 to 13. In 1998, the school's total income was £0.75M and by 2005, it had risen to £3.45M.

The policy and management context and the status of the school. The school had left local authority control and become grant-maintained in September 1991, an unusual move in Wales (Farrell & Law, 1999) in response to a local education authority plan to close it because of declining numbers. A high proportion of the staff at the start of the case study period had been hastily appointed in July/August 1991 in the politically charged period just before the school moved out of local authority control. The school subsequently gained foundation status in September 1999.

School inspection evidence. The 1994 Estyn inspection report documented a number of weaknesses. Teaching strategies were limited, expectations of the pupils were too low, the pace of lessons was too slow, and procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching were inadequate. Inspections by Estyn in 2000 and 2006 found substantial improvements. The 2006 inspection report awarded the top grades in five of the seven inspection criteria and, referring particularly to teaching quality, stated that “performance is often outstanding” (Medhurst, 2006, p. 4).

The curriculum and changes in pupil performance over the case study period.

The National Curriculum in Wales had a Year and Key Stage (KS) structure similar to that in England. In 1994, 13% of pupils achieved five A to C grades at GCSE. From 1997 to 2004, the percentage of Year 11 pupils achieving five or more A to C grades at GCSE rose from 25% to 71%, and the percentage achieving five or more A to G grades rose from 78% to 100%.

The organizational culture change from different perspectives

In this section, we establish the different perspectives on organizational culture and then examine aspects of the change processes in the school from each perspective.

The basis of the different perspectives

Over 25 years ago, Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) identified 164 definitions of organizational culture. More recently, Martin (2002) in confirming the multiplicity of

definitions has argued that different ontological and normative underpinnings explain some of the variation.

An important ontological fault line is the difference between realist and interpretivist perspectives on organizational culture. A realist perspective views organizational culture as an external phenomenon, that is, an objective feature of the organization. From an interpretivist perspective, organizational culture is a subjective experience and a construct of the individual's inner world. Thus, there are two differing perspectives: organizational culture as "external reality" and as "interpretation." A central subsequent issue is the epistemological and managerial consequences that result from these different ontological perspectives. Thus, as we shall see, viewing culture from a realist, ontological perspective suggests that culture is an objective phenomenon that can be managed by a series of managerial actions.

The normative foundations of many definitions highlight variations in the focus and breadth of the cultural phenomena that are encompassed which in turn raises the issue of what organizational manifestations are to be embraced by the concept. For example, Davis (1984) has a somewhat narrow view of organizational culture as a pattern of shared values and beliefs, whereas Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, and Martin (1985) consider that it covers the meanings, values, beliefs, myths, stories, as well as the rites, rituals, and ceremonies that take place in organizations. Schein (1992) similarly adopts an inclusive approach by incorporating processes, values, and taken-for-granted beliefs. In studying educational change, Hannay et al. (2006) limit their view of it to collaborative inquiry, continual improvement, and mutual self-help, whereas Friedman, Galligan, Albano, and O'Connor (2009) use a broad definition

similar to that of Frost et al. (1985). Shachar et al. (2010) take a similarly all-encompassing view including staff efficiency, job satisfaction, and the school's physical maintenance to "provide a relatively inclusive picture of the school organizational culture" (p. 3). This highly inclusive standpoint on culture gives rise to the 'organizational culture as an organization's perspective because all or a very large number of aspects of the organization appear to be included.

Although there are differences in the characterization of organizational culture in the literature, a common thread is its collective nature; it is considered to be a shared phenomenon. But even that commonality is problematic as it raises the issue of how widespread a particular culture is across an organization and the prevalence of subcultures. Friedman et al. (2009) acknowledge the prevalence of subcultures and use it to analyze organizational culture in a reform context. The notion of subcultures gives rise to the "organizational culture as competing subcultures" perspective on culture change.

A final distinction is grounded in the nature of reality and whether it is in any sense fixed or is continually changing and in process. From the latter standpoint, the present exists only fleetingly, and processes are the essence of social reality. This ontological standpoint gives rise to the final perspective we consider, "organizational culture as process."

In the following sections, we examine the changes in the case study school from these different perspectives on organizational culture. The perspectives overlap with those of Martin (2002) particularly in relation to the organizational culture as organization

perspective, but they are grounded more in ontological and political concerns. We acknowledge that the perspectives are not mutually exclusive; indeed both academics and educational leaders frequently emphasize and employ a combination of standpoints.

Organizational culture as external reality

The perspective of organizational culture as external reality is founded on a realist view of the social world. This realist position deems there to be an actual, measurable, and real social world external to the individual. Importantly, this reality “pre-exists independently of observation” (Chia, 1996, p.33). That is, organizational culture exists before we seek to measure it or indeed change it. Many theorists base the ontological status of the objects of organizational culture on that assumption (see for example, Hannay et al., 2006; Mills, Boylstein, & Lorean, 2001). Organizational culture from this perspective is seen as the “social or normative glue that holds an organization together” (Smircich, 1983, p. 344), “the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed” (Kunda, 1992, p. 8), a way of ensuring that organizational members identify with organizational goals (Brown, 1998), and providing a set of cultural expectations that can be used as a means of management control (Aubrey-Hopkins & James, 2002; Bates, 1987; Ouchi, 1981). This view that organizational culture is defined as an objective phenomenon is well-established (Smircich, 1983), and arguably it dominates in the literature, certainly in the managerial literature.

Implicit in this perspective is that organizational culture is a key contingency which organizations can and must get right if they are to succeed. It is “another critical lever or key by which strategic managers can influence and direct the course of their organizations” (Smircich, 1983, p. 346). Thus, for example, Stoll and Bolam (2005) and Stoll (2009) take the view that the right culture needs to be “put in place” (Stoll, 2009, p 122) if change capacity is to be sustained. Unsurprisingly, leaders and managers are typically assigned this task, and the literature gives a prominent role to leaders, especially founders of organizations, in generating the right culture in schools and other organizations. Leaders interpret organizational phenomena and create meaning (Pye, 2005) usually by arguing that they understand reality. Due to their charismatic qualities, transformational leaders are seen as able to bring about deep and meaningful culture change in organizations generally (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2006) and in educational organizations in particular (Barth, 2002; Firestone & Louis, 1999; Leithword, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). This view is frequently supported by US and UK education policymakers (Curry, Boyet, & Sumhinilova, 2005). The nature and extent of leaders’ capacities to achieve a “desired” outcome is worth considering in an analysis of cultural change as indeed is the extent to which organizational culture affects the kinds of influencing relationships in which the “de facto” organizational leader is involved. Nonetheless, that organizational leaders have a role in bringing about “the right culture” is a central tenet of the realist view of organizational culture.

Case study illustration

When the new headteacher was appointed at the start of the case study period, he decided that the school was characterized by “*a culture of complacency*” even though the pupils were performing very poorly on external tests at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching was generally of low quality and there was little focus on the development of teaching that would enable pupil attainment – “motivational teaching” as the headteacher called it. This “objective” observation was sustained by two teachers, one who recalled that “no one talked about grades . . . there was no drive” and another who recollected, “We just did our own thing; you just had to turn up.” At the same time, “firm discipline and achieving an orderly environment” (Headteacher) were stressed. This view was corroborated by other teachers: “There was an emphasis on keeping the kids in order” (Teacher), and “The solution with difficult pupils was to expel them” (Teacher).

The school management team (SMT) lacked the desire to improve pupil achievement or to organize the school properly. In the headteacher’s view, “The deputy heads wanted an easy life.” The members of the governing body were similarly satisfied with the school and lacked the motivation to improve matters. As a result, in the headteacher’s view, important staffing and organizational issues, such as serious professional misconduct and long-term absences, had not been addressed and that “the pastoral care department was in disarray.” There were very few job descriptions and school policies. Roles and responsibilities had been allowed to drift with some members of the SMT and the administrative staff taking decisions that were not theirs to take.

The headteacher felt that “change was needed urgently.” He considered that bringing about this change was a priority which was his responsibility and, though it would be difficult, it was, in his view, possible. “The state of affairs I found when I joined the school in 1998 governed my leadership practice during the following 3 years. I felt I faced an enormous challenge in changing the culture” (Headteacher). In other words, he saw himself as changing the culture to secure the “right culture.”

To change the organizational culture, he embarked on a number of initiatives. The headteacher’s first year in office involved producing policies, job descriptions, and monitoring and evaluating procedures “in order to establish a working framework for the school.” He was in effect attempting to change the accepted rules that governed practice, something he did “without consultation.” When he had been in post 18 months, he introduced an annual subject review with heads of subject departments and implemented a pupil progress monitoring and tracking system. From 1998 to 2001, according to the members of staff from both the survey and interview data, the headteacher’s leadership style was dominated by autocratic and dictatorial practices as he directed change in the school.

The data set revealed changes of cultural significance in the organizational structures and processes, the plans, purposes, and intentions of the organization, and importantly what the staff group valued. His efforts had an impact on the organizational culture, and he created a new set of cultural rules and expectations. But there were other changes, too. For example, the school grew considerably in size – including the number of staff - which some welcomed. One teacher felt that in the past, the staff room seemed “empty”; there were “few interactions and few possibilities, like a party

when not many people have turned up.” Some members of staff we spoke to objected to the headteacher’s priorities and approach – his philosophy, overall strategy, and goals. For example, some spoke critically of the value he placed on evaluating examination results and his goal of improving pupil performance. This new culture was not, therefore, wholly welcomed.

Interpretation

From this perspective, there was evidence of a change in the organizational culture of the staff group that were real in the social world of those in the organization. We accept that such an assertion is open to critique on the grounds of reification (Martin, 2002) as is the perspective, and that something much more complex has been represented rather unproblematically. Moreover, our argument is not that the school embodied an objectively defined culture but that the headteacher and many staff, governors, and other actors, understood the culture in this way. The debate was framed as if there was an objective reality; the organizational culture was deemed inappropriate and in need of changes, principally by the headteacher. Indeed, many of those we interviewed saw the headteacher as the instigator of the changes. One interesting point, which added to the acceptance of the objectivist grounding of this perspective, was that many staff also felt that the school had changed in a range of ways which were not the direct result of the headteacher’s actions, for example the increase in the number of pupils. Furthermore, it should be noted that, while the headteacher sought to change culture directly, he also expended considerable effort in changing organizational structures and more particularly procedures which themselves brought about culture change.

Organizational culture as interpretation

The starting point for the organizational culture as an interpretation perspective is nominalism or relativism. From this perspective, organizational culture is a subjective phenomenon, a construction of the mind and a means of representation. It serves as a metaphor, or more precisely a root metaphor, which Alvesson (2002) defines as “a fundamental image of the world on which one is focussing” (p. 19). Thus, organizational culture is “conceptualized in terms of meanings or understandings” (Martin, 2002, p. 56). Meaning refers to the interpretation of objects which include technological and artistic artifacts and audible and visible patterns of behavior (Schein, 1992). This interpretation shapes our relationships with objects. Symbols, which are objects that stand ambiguously for something else or more than something else (Cohen, 1974), must be interpreted to grasp what they represent. Thus, organizational culture from this perspective is a process of interpretation. Importantly, it is a collective process which takes place in “a shared frame of reference of beliefs, expressive symbols and values” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 5).

Case study illustration

Within the staff group, the nature of the teaching task, success (or otherwise) of the pupils in external tests, and the purpose of the school were all open to interpretation. At the start of the case study period, while there were countervailing views, there was a general sense of comfort with the school. It was described by the various members of staff during interviews as “friendly,” “calm,” and “comfortable.” “Many staff were

complacent” (Member of the administrative staff); “They thought it was working, so why change it?” (Member of the current School Leadership Team [SLT]). One teacher recounted that, at the time, “good teaching” was characterized as keeping the pupils “passive” and “quiet” and engaging them in rote learning. Another teacher recalled that using other approaches to teaching would have been interpreted by most staff as unacceptable and would have been resisted. The headteacher recalled that “expectations of the pupils were very low. The staff felt that pupils were achieving as well as might be expected given the background they [the pupils] came from.” To counteract this view, “exacting targets for pupils were set which helped to counter the culture of low expectations” (Headteacher). Many staff did not interpret pupil expectations in that way. They did not like what they experienced as a “culture of measurement” and actively argued against it. Others left the school, some because “they didn’t like the head’s high standards” as one current teacher put it, or “because of personality clashes” in the words of another. Accordingly, to a current member of the SLT, new members of staff were appointed who had high expectations of pupil attainment and were ready to teach the pupils accordingly.

Interpretation

The dominant, underlying assumption of the staff group at the start of the case study, which the headteacher felt he needed to challenge, was that a “good school” was a place where there was order and calm even though the level of pupil attainment was very low. The low expectations of pupils’ academic attainment illustrated the prevailing internal construct and interpretation. The underlying assumption was that pupils from such (impoverished) backgrounds will never be able to achieve

academically. The pupils' poor results were interpreted as a consequence of their background. To change the organizational culture, the internal models – the assumptions, beliefs, and principles on which teaching and organizing were founded – needed to be changed. Although the improvement in pupil achievement countered the established assumptions about low expectations, inevitably the “prevailing mindset” was difficult to shift. The change in the organizational culture from this perspective may have occurred as a result of members of staff who did not share the headteacher's basic assumptions and interpretation of educational matters with some leaving the school through resignation and others joining the school who shared this vision.

Organizational culture as organization

Martin's (2002) analytic category of “focus and breadth” for definitions of organizational culture highlights the problem of deciding what is encompassed in the concept and what is not. Arguably, if actions are to be included in the notion of organizational culture, then it becomes something an organization is as opposed to something an organization has (Bate, 1994), and organizational culture and practice merge and become synonymous. Culture then becomes an all-encompassing description of an organization as opposed to being a particular feature with the notion of organizational culture losing its analytical usefulness. This “organizational culture as organization” perspective is distinct from the view held by many authors, for example, Morgan (1988) and Bate (1994) claim that organisations are cultures and can be analyzed in that way.

The validity of the “organizational culture as organization” perspective lies in the notion that beliefs, symbols, values, and assumptions are likely to influence

organizational practices, and that specific deeds including acts of speech can be interpreted from that underpinning. Moreover, specific acts, especially those with cultural meaning and significance, may influence beliefs, values, and assumptions. Thus, there is interplay between organizational culture and structure and the boundaries between practices and beliefs and values and philosophies is significant, although problematic (Connolly & James, 2009). In this wider social sense of culture, if practices are to be included, culture shifts to being “a way of life” as Ricoeur and Williams for example have argued (McCarthy, 1996). In the same way, organizational culture becomes “the way we do things round here” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fullan, 2001), a definition which has considerable popular use.

Case study illustration

In the early stages, the headteacher felt that many teachers did not have the capability to teach or manage effectively. Immediately prior to the school becoming grant-maintained in 1991, many members of the school staff had been redeployed to other schools. Thus, many of the staff group at the start of the case study had been hastily appointed or were “last minute appointments” (Member of the school administrative staff). The headteacher felt that “a high proportion of staff would not have been appointed in an established school,” and there was what he termed “a competency deficit.”

A wide range of development programs were provided for the staff. The headteacher ran courses on “motivational approaches to teaching” which were intended to develop teaching practices that stimulated the pupils’ desires to learn. For him, this technology

was crucial in bringing about culture change. He felt that it helped to make pupil learning, defined in terms of pupils' attainments on national tests, a significant focus for the teaching staff which shaped their practice. Development programs were provided for the SMT, subject leaders, and governors to enhance their management capability. The headteacher also addressed inappropriate practices, such as those relating to staff absences, which over time had created apparently intractable organizational problems. Subsequently, the pupils' results on national tests and on GCSE examinations began to improve which "contributed to the change in mood" as one teacher put it. Those interviewed recalling that time referred to the improved results and to the various improvement-related awards gained by the school as bringing a "new feeling of confidence" (Teacher). Staff felt "more positive and optimistic" (Teacher) and had an "increased commitment" (Teacher) to their work. However, a member of the current school leadership team recalled that "some staff remained cynical and pessimistic" even though many of the staff group valued the changes the headteacher had implemented.

Interpretation

From this "culture as organization" standpoint, changing the culture of the staff group involved bringing teaching and organizational practices into line with the headteacher's view of what needed to happen. It suggests that changing the organizational culture may be achieved indirectly. For example, changing practices as part of a culture change process appears to affect organizational performance which then in turn appears to affect the organizational culture. Here we see the importance of the interplay between culture and performance (Connolly & James, 2009).

Changing practices can change what is valued and alter the prevailing assumptions. Thus, although the “organizational culture as organization” perspective may not be helpful in an analytic sense, from the management practice point of view it has value. Changing practices can lead to changes in the organizational culture.

Organizational culture as competing subcultures

This perspective accepts as axiomatic that organizational culture is in part the outcome of competition between subcultures, each endeavouring to gain ascendancy, which prevents the development and maintenance of one unified organizational culture. As Riley (1983) asserts, organizations are not monolithic in nature nor are they rational entities but are complex mixtures of political, game playing and self-seeking behaviors and of competitive and covert motives. Organizational culture change is thus the outcome of competition between subcultures. This perspective in turn raises questions about the nature of the relationship between power and the creation of corporate culture and recognizes that cultures are in some sense created around personal and group identities (Parker, 2000). Thus, change management can be understood as a political activity. Change both upsets the bases of power and influence and also is supported or opposed because of its impact on groups and their understandings of the implications of the proposed change (e.g., Tjosvold & Wisse, 2009).

For this perspective, we draw on the model developed by Rodriques (2006) which is based on empirical work in a Brazilian telecommunications company over a period of 27 years. Rodriques rejects arguments that organizational culture changes occur as a

result of internal factors. For her, organizations are pluralistic in nature, and conflict is endemic within them; culture change is thus a multifaceted and multilevel process. Significantly, though, it is a political process, and changes in the organizational culture can be attributed to the mobilization of different groups.

Rodriques (2006) bases her analysis on Martin's (2002) distinction between cultural conditions: an integrated culture when it reflects wide consensus, a differentiated culture where an organizational culture is confined to certain subcultures in opposition to others, and a fragmented culture which occurs when there is no or little consensus. She argues that organizational culture consists of subcultures which have many sources that include participants' personal characteristics and positional characteristics, organizational substructures, technical requirements of the work, and/or managerial demands. A dominant subculture becomes the organization's corporate culture, and Jermier, Slocum, Fry, and Gaines (1991) argue that the primary purpose of the "official culture" is to gain and maintain control over the interpretation and meaning given to symbols. Rodriques suggests that changes in organizational cultures derive from shifting power relations between organizational groups. For her, this shift mainly results from changing external conditions which support (or otherwise do not support) some groups at the expense of others. However, the change in response to external conditions can take either an integrationist, differential, or fragmented trajectory. Riad (2005), in her analysis of organizational culture change during mergers of public sector organizations, concludes that achieving the dominance of one organizational culture over the other was a motive for the merger she studied. Friedman et al. (2009), in considering organizational subcultures in an educational reform context, argue for the ascendancy of one particular subculture.

While external conditions influence the ascendancy of particular subcultures, the changing nature of the professions and their relationship with management are also significant. There has been a significant shift in favour of the power of the de facto leader and a diminution of the influence of professions, including the teaching profession (Broadbent & Laughlin, 2002). Thus, the views of headteachers may be more likely to influence debates about how teachers might improve pupil attainment than in the past. In turn, headteachers will be influenced by various external forces such as the views of school inspectors and government pronouncements.

Case study illustration

The school was faced with closure in 1991 and controversially had chosen to leave local authority control and become grant-maintained in order to survive. Over time, it had been increasingly shunned by the local authority and neighboring schools. There was a widespread feeling among the interviewees that this rejection by the wider community led to a sense of isolation and detachment from the local and the wider educational worlds. The headteacher reported that when he was appointed, the governing body was not aware of the poor performance of the school.

The new headteacher undoubtedly disturbed the state of affairs in the school following his appointment, but his use of externally focused rationales was essential to his culture change strategy. Thus, to justify his actions, he deployed arguments about the necessity of “improving teaching and learning and academic performance,” the increased accountability on schools, and also emphasized that without improved

performance, pupil numbers would decline further, the school would not be viable, and would have to close. His reference point was “the real world of education” (Headteacher) which he considered as being characterized by “increasingly high levels of accountability and expectations of continuous improvement.” He used external validations from previous Estyn inspections to strengthen his position with the staff group.

Many of the changes he implemented were unpopular. Arguments often erupted particularly during staff meetings, especially when the headteacher’s expectations of the staff were at odds with what had previously been accepted which was often the case. During the early stages of the case study, there were clandestine meetings between a group of staff members who were resistant to the changes and a small but vociferous sector of the governing body attempting to undermine the changes being implemented. By 2001, some of these staff group members had left, and there were changes to the governing body. A new chair was appointed and the roles and responsibilities of the governing body were reviewed and clarified. The headteacher forged strong allegiances with the new governors who he felt “understood the school’s progress since 1998 and wanted to offer support and encouragement.”

The headteacher himself considered that there was a political, almost manipulative, dimension to his leadership, a view supported by others we interviewed. He clearly did not want various antagonistic groups operating in the school and worked to forge a culture that was as unified as possible. There were three main strands to this political work in changing the culture. First, he nurtured various members of staff, thereby forming allegiances. He deliberately awarded salary scale points (a now

defunct way of rewarding staff for undertaking responsibilities) to the members of this group who supported his leadership and who took on particular responsibilities. This group included two members of staff who he considered were excellent teachers and had leadership potential and who offered, in the headteacher's words, "a glimmer of hope." The second strand was concerned with reducing the influence of those in the school who were blocking the culture change. In September 1999, he restructured the senior leadership of the school and set up the Leadership Group. Two members of the previous management team were removed and the two "glimmers of hope" were brought in. Thirdly, he sought to support his position which entailed "getting the school to face up to the real world of education," a rhetorical device intended to support his standpoint.

Respondents considered that the high level of pupil attainment attracted higher quality applicants for vacant teaching posts in the later stages of the case study period than previously. The members of the senior management of the school were clear that staff were appointed substantially on the basis of their commitment "to the ethos of the school" (Current member of the SLT). The headteacher himself refers to developing a "critical mass" and to "the balance tipping my way" to indicate how he felt at that time. However, from the interview data, it was clear that pockets of opposition remained with different cultural norms and assumptions.

Interpretation

Before the case study period, the school, faced with closure, had opted out of local authority control in order to survive. As a result, these external pressures had helped

to create a coherent, consensual school with an integrationist culture at the beginning of the case study period.

External influences were important in understanding change from this perspective. In Wales and across the UK generally, changing views on a variety of educational issues were important external factors driving organizational culture change during the case study period. These emphasized the view that schools mattered in terms of the educational success of pupils as the extensive school effectiveness literature makes clear (e.g., Sammons, 1999), and that headteachers, in conjunction with governing bodies, had a responsibility to ensure that their pupil attainment was acceptable and would be called to account for doing so. These trends represented a crucial definition of what was legitimate in terms of education practice and clearly authorized the headteacher's strategy and reinforced his views and actions.

The headteacher sought to advance a subculture which aligned with his beliefs and values. He was, to (mis)use Inglis's terminology (Inglis, 2008), a cultural entrepreneur in opposition to the cultural guardians. The headteacher was making sense of the school's context, an interpretation that (conveniently) supported his position. The staff group moved from an integrationist, organizational culture to a differentiated one (which he was clearly keen to avoid) and then back to an integrationist one, as those who opposed the headteacher – the cultural guardians - either left or kept quiet calculating that the headteacher was unlikely to change or go, at least in the immediate future. His use of terms such as “critical mass” and “the balance tipping my way” indicate to his experience of the developing ascendancy of this later integrationist culture.

Organizational culture as process

The organizational culture as process perspective is grounded in Hatch's (2004) somewhat gnomic assertion that "cultures change, but they also stay the same" (p. 190). She argues that most of the literature (managerial and critical) sees culture as a static phenomenon claiming that few studies of organizational culture consider its dynamic properties. Hatch argues that stability and change are dual products of the same cultural processes. Organizational culture is a multilayered, dynamic phenomenon which changes for a range of reasons and as a result of a set of pressures, and that purposeful culture change interventions may well lead to a variety of unintended consequences.

This perspective on organizational culture is grounded in process ontology. From this standpoint, as Sztompka (1994) argues, processes are "the ultimate atoms of social reality" (p. 275) and are the fundamental ontological objects of the social world. Further, social reality, as Mead (1932) asserted, only exists in the present which is characterized by "its becoming and its disappearing" (p. 1). These assumptions underpin Hatch's interest in organizational culture (Hatch, 2004). In line with many other theoreticians, Hatch considers organizational culture to be concerned with values, assumptions, symbols, and artifacts. However, her interest is in the processes linking these elements. Thus, assumptions are manifested in values which in turn are realized in artifacts. Assumptions are also interpreted in symbols and artifacts and have symbolic significance. Movement in any one of these dimensions brings about adjustments to the others. Hatch suggests that organizational culture is created and

recreated daily by individuals who themselves adopt and adapt, and learn and unlearn as a result of reflections on events.

It is certainly worth pointing out that, especially with regard to the two perspectives on organizational culture considered here – “external reality” and “organization” – there is a risk of embracing an overly static view of culture. The literature speaks of cultural change as a once and for all event and rarely of a continually changing requirement. Even from the ‘organizational culture as competing subcultures’ perspective, culture is seen as something that shifts with the ascendancy of particular subcultures changing and becoming established.

Case study illustration

It was clear that the culture had altered considerably as the change initiatives were implemented. The processes and patterns of shared taken for granted beliefs and values had changed over time as the case study overview and the individual case studies have demonstrated. The stories respondents told indicated the change that had taken place. New rituals and ceremonies – for example prize days which had been implemented to reward and celebrate pupil achievement – had become established.

The data also indicated a lack of stability in the culture of the staff group and what that culture had become. For example, many staff members were unsure whether there had been a permanent shift in the staff group culture during the case study period. Interestingly, one respondent seriously questioned whether the culture would survive the headteacher’s departure given the importance she felt he had in establishing and

maintaining it. In her view, the original organizational culture of the school staff group might just reassert itself: A culture that seemed dead was in fact simply dormant. She felt, “We might go back to our old ways.”

The headteacher made considerable efforts to establish the culture he wanted as widely as possible. Thus during the period 2004-2006, he broadened the range of leadership responsibility among the staff. This process, which the headteacher called “leadership distribution,” was underpinned by his wish to share decision making processes and to widen the extent of influence and authority. A new school development plan was developed towards the end of 2005, which unlike earlier plans, was written almost entirely by staff members and had considerable pupil and stakeholder involvement. Importantly, he wanted to ensure that the work of the school improved in the ways that had been established over the past 8 years. As he made clear, “I am concerned that when I leave my post, the good practices we have developed will remain embedded and will continue. I want to leave the school in good shape.” So, he was cautious about widening leadership authorization, but it was important for him to do so. Intriguingly, despite the changes to the prevailing assumption and norms that had been established, some staff members remained strongly opposed to the headteacher and his pedagogic philosophy and approach.

These various in-school cultural phenomena were not the only factors in the changes in the organizational culture of the staff group. Interviewees emphasized how the life experiences of individual staff members impacted their attitudes to work and hence the culture of the staff group. For example, two teachers with small children had separately gone through divorces during the case study period. Both considered that

they were “good” members of staff and saw themselves as “being on the headteacher’s side,” but both acknowledged that their interest in and enthusiasm for teaching had waned as they sought to cope with various personal issues. They both confessed to “playing the game,” that is going along with various changes without embracing them fully. There was thus a distinct impression that the organizational culture could change again and continue to do so.

Interpretation

From this perspective, the changes introduced by a new headteacher must be seen in relation to existing organizational cultures. These cultures are changing partly because of external influences and partly because of staffing developments in the forms of new staff and changes in the values and attitudes of existing staff. The headteacher was aware, as were other staff members, of the potential for “cultural regression,” a reversion to old values, beliefs, and assumptions. Hence, he was quite cautious about enhancing the leadership authority of others lest the culture returned to its former state helped along by the remaining “pockets of resistance” and “willing compliers.” Nonetheless, increasing leadership authorization was important in changing the organizational culture of the staff group even though there were attendant risks. However, despite the headteacher’s efforts to ensure that the “new culture” would endure, changing conceptions of management and schooling, the dynamics of school structure, the external environment, and the changing personal and interpersonal dynamics of those associated with the school were likely to ensure that the organizational culture of the school would change.

Discussion and concluding comments

In this article, we have clarified five perspectives on culture which are rooted in ontological differences and contrasting views on organizational culture, and we have illustrated their utility and application for understanding organizational culture change processes in educational settings. The perspectives we have highlighted and illustrated enable previously published work that has analyzed changes in organizational culture in educational settings to be categorized, the dominant perspective to be identified, and the outcomes understood more fully. Thus, in the *Journal of Educational Change*, Friedman et al. (2009), while focussing on (competing) subcultures, adopt a realist, inclusive, and static view of the subcultures they depict. Hannay et al. (2005) take a restricted view of culture and adopt a realist and unified perspective while importantly addressing the issue of changes over time in the organizational culture as they have defined it. Shachar et al. (2010) assume a highly inclusive standpoint, but their work takes a realist perspective, and they view organizational cultures as unified in that the matter of organizational subcultures is not substantively addressed. Interestingly, they appear to view culture as a static phenomenon despite their finding that their extensive development initiative moved many of the organizations from one culture to another, in way reminiscent of Kurt Lewin's (1947) "unfreezing-moving-refreezing" model. This brief consideration of these studies reinforces the assertion that the researcher's perspective on organizational culture conditions the findings. This claim is another dimension of Jeffcutt's (1994) contention that understandings of organization organize understandings; understandings of change in organizational culture organize changes in understandings.

The analyses from the various perspectives have implications for the management of culture change in educational settings. The central message, following Jeffcutt (1994) again, is that the way educational leaders and managers set about organizing culture change is conditioned by their perspective on organizational culture and the essence of what they consider they are changing. As educational leaders' and managers' understandings of organizational culture may be intuitive, arguably helpful insights may be gained from a fuller understanding of the ways in which culture may be understood.

Finally, although academic and practitioner colleagues may engage in conversations about organizational culture and culture change and indeed may use (some of) the same language, this article suggests that they may in fact be participating from very different standpoints. The various perspectives we have elucidated may help to clarify some of those conversations and enhance understandings of educational change, though we recognize that our study also illustrates that culture is inevitably a slippery notion and will continue to be used frequently, if not carefully.

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