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**SUBCULTURAL TENSIONS IN MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE:
A STUDY OF AN ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE FOOTBALL ORGANIZATION**

Abstract

In this article, we explore subcultural interaction in the context of attempts by executives to control culture in the unusual organizational setting of football. We present evidence of five tension points in subcultural relations (togetherness or isolation, internal labour market, multiple identification and allegiances, individual and organizational requirements and competition and cooperation). We examine how these tensions were induced and or exacerbated by the culture management efforts, as well as the ways in which the dynamics of change impacted on the objectives of executives. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for theory and practice.

Keywords
Managing organizational culture
Organizational subculture
Culture control
Cultural change
Subcultural tensions

INTRODUCTION

It is remarkable that despite the extensive and longstanding criticisms of the idea that organizational culture is susceptible to conscious management manipulation (see Krefting and Frost, 1985; Legge, 1994), the issue of planned culture change ('culture control') has continued to drive the popularity of the culture construct. Indeed, it appears that the recent celebration of the demise of what has been referred to as 'corporate culturism' by some scholars (e.g. Fleming, 2013) is somewhat premature given the evidence that indicates that planned culture change remains one of the most important initiatives in which executives engage (see Bremer, 2012; Hill, 2013). A further indication of the perceived relevance and continuing popularity of culture and culture control can be seen in the number of high profile organizations such as the NHS (see Employee Outlook, CIPD 2013) and General Motors (see Krisher, 2012) which have recently identified 'inappropriate culture' as the source of their problems. In this regard, whilst external evaluation of university research strongly emphasises the importance of 'impact', the divergence in what practitioners and academics consider 'important' and 'valuable' in this area is interesting.

While there is a notable gap between practice and current theoretical interest, such academic hubris is partly explained by narrow conceptual foci. For example, most studies of culture change have either focused on investigations of change initiatives to uncover whether and what level of change has occurred (see Grugulis et. al., 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003), or are aimed at presenting conceptual critiques of the culture management approach (e.g. Fleming, 2013). Similarly, although culture researchers have long argued that organizations comprise multiple rather than unitary cultures (see Alvesson, 2002; Meyerson and Martin, 1987), there remains a shortage of empirical research into inter and intra subcultural interaction especially in the context of planned cultural change (see also Lok et al., 2005, Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008).

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We contribute to empirical and theoretical knowledge through explicating the tensions that emerge in culture control practices in an unusual organizational setting and we elucidate the implications of these for the management of culture and human resources in other organizational contexts. Specifically, we examine how inter and intra subcultural dynamics are impacted by the efforts of executives to control organizational culture through planned change. We explore the tension points that are induced and/or exacerbated by the change efforts and we elucidate the power interplays within and between subcultures (especially in relation to the interactions between individuals and groups perceived to be central to organizational activities and those that were on the periphery).

We locate our study of subcultural interaction in the context of a football organization for a variety of reasons. Firstly, although football clubs are important parts of the social fabric of many societies, there are surprisingly few studies of management (especially human resource management) in such contexts. Secondly, football represents a good site for this study in that the idiosyncratic nature of football business, including entrenchment of values, emotional attachment and connection, multiplicity of interests, diversity of stakeholders, and fluidity of operations distinguish football clubs from conventional organizations on which much culture research is based and these pose interesting challenges for cultural analyses. Moreover, as we shall see later, whilst there is distinctiveness in elements of these features, there are interesting parallels between the football context and those of other organizational types. For example, while football is renowned for promoting specific star employees (players) who are given enhanced status and preferential contractual terms relative to other employees (see Dobson and Goddard, 2011; Szymanski, 2010), there is an increasingly popular organizational literature that explores various ramifications of such differential treatment through, for example, talent management (see Gelens et al., 2013; Van den Brink et al., 2013). Similarly, the issue of power relations within and between internal and external

groups is well documented in football including studies of the links between fans and their clubs (see Harris and Ogbonna, 2008) and research into the relationship between players and the clubs they represent (see Szymanski, 2010). Parallels exist with traditional organizations in studies that investigate the political and cultural influences inherent in organizing and managing individuals and groups in organizations (e.g. Hallett, 2003; Moldaschl and Fischer, 2004). Our study of the football context will explore these parallels and provide interesting contrasts that will help in shedding additional light on these important debates.

CULTURE CHANGE, CONTROL AND SUBCULTURES

Schein (1996) argued that organizational culture is the 'missing concept' in management and organizational analysis. This position can, on first reading, be seen as contradictory in that culture has been one of the most widely researched concepts in contemporary organizational theory and practice. However, Schein's contention is best understood as testament to the ubiquity and opacity of culture; for the more we seem to learn about culture the more we uncover hidden dimensions that speak to our incomplete knowledge (see Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). Although there remains significant confusion surrounding various aspects of organizational culture, it is not the aim of this review to explore these issues. Instead, the aim is to highlight the value and perspicacity of the subcultural approach in understanding the dynamics of planned organizational culture change. To this end, the definition of culture in this article is derived from Schein (1996, p.236) who defines culture as *"the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments"*.

This definition views culture as negotiated order which is not only influenced everyday interaction but which is also shaped by the power capacity of the various individuals and groups to set the agenda for such interaction (Hallett, 2003). The definition also suggests that culture has material and cognitive elements, with the cognitive aspects

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embedded in values, beliefs and assumptions that in turn drive the responses to the material objects in the environment (Jermier et al., 1991) in a manner that has been described as providing a 'toolkit' that facilitates problem-solving in organizations (Harrison and Corley, 2011). This definition also suggests that the likelihood of finding homogenous values in large organizations is rare (Gregory, 1983; Meyerson and Martin, 1987), thereby implying that researchers should concentrate on identifying the multiple values that may characterise single organizations (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008).

In contrast to organizational culture which refers to the ideational system of the entire organization, subcultures refer to the multiple values and assumptions that are present in a given organization (see Hopkins et al., 2005). Scholarly classifications of subcultural categories have centred on whether they are enhancing or deviating from the core organizational ideologies (see Jermier et al., 1991; Trice, 1993). Martin and Siehl (1983) present a widely adopted typology through their distinction of subcultures into those that support organizational core values (enhancing subcultures), those that accept the core values while developing and maintaining different but unthreatening set of values (orthogonal subcultures) and those that embody values which are in direct opposition to the dominant organizational values (counterculture).

Researchers have broadened studies of organizational subcultures to a variety of organizational concerns including corporate sustainability (e.g. Linnenluecke et al. 2009) and competitive advantage (Hopkins et al., 2005). However, it is the study of occupational groups that has remained the mainstay of subcultural research (see Bloor and Dawson, 1994; Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008), a factor which suggests the need to extend studies of organizational subcultures beyond conventional occupational groups to wider organizational types and communities (see also Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008: Jermier et al. 1991) especially those that have been neglected in traditional organizational research (such as football clubs).

Organizational Culture Control

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The debates on planned culture change (culture management/control) can be traced to the epistemological and ontological positions of protagonists as appropriately framed in Smircich's (1983) categorisation of the ways in which culture is conceptualised. That is, whether culture is viewed in material terms and thus susceptible to manipulation (see Peters and Waterman, 1982) or whether culture is perceived as a cognitive aspect of organizations that cannot be controlled by conscious management action (see Legge, 1994). In this regard, three perspectives have emerged on the debates encompassing those who believe that managers can control culture consistent with their requirements (see Peters and Waterman, 1982), scholars who reject this view completely and who argue that culture cannot be controlled (see Krefting and Frost, 1985) and those that argue that managers may be able to achieve culture change under certain but rare organizational contingencies (see Martin, 1985). However, a pivotal issue is the question of what constitutes 'managing' or 'controlling' culture. This seems to mean different things to different people from creating culture, maintaining culture, changing culture to abandoning culture (see Alvesson, 2002; Robbins, 1987).

Interestingly, much research and practitioner interest on controlling culture has focused on planned culture change, with planned change commonly defined as a deliberate movement from one state to another (see McCabe, 2010; Ogbonna, 1993), a process which implies managerial control. Unsurprisingly, scholars have highlighted several limitations of the planned culture change approach. For example, researchers have argued that culture change studies are commonly based on snapshot accounts (see Harrison and Carroll, 1991), a limitation which has led to the criticism that such studies commonly focus on visible manifestations rather than deeper level change (see Schein, 2004 for further discussion). It is for this and other reasons that Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1990) coined the phrase 'resigned behavioural compliance' rather than value change to describe the outcome of many planned culture change efforts (see also Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). Linked to this is the ongoing debate on whether managers can have effective control over the outcomes of culture change efforts (see Grugulis et al., 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). Here, the recent

contribution by McCabe's (2010) on the role of organizational memory sums up the position of many researchers on the difficulties inherent in any attempt by executives to appropriate individual and collective memories for their own profit motives. As McCabe (2010) argues, the outcome of such efforts can be negative or positive. It is this unpredictability that scholars present as reducing managerial capacity to control culture (see also Willmott, 1993).

However, interestingly, far from culture management being consigned to the past, recent contributions suggest that executives continue to view culture control as a way of achieving competitive advantage in an increasingly hypercompetitive business world (see Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2005; Krisher, 2012). Moreover, scholars have suggested that managerial efforts to control culture have become more sophisticated partly in recognition of the failings identified above and partly in acknowledgement of the ongoing limitations of alternative forms of control such as bureaucracy. Indeed, Fleming and Sturdy (2009; 2011) find that while collectivism and strong value alignment were central to traditional forms of culture control/management, contemporary approaches emphasise individualisation. They note that new approaches to culture control encourage employees to express their individualism, embrace entrepreneurialism, risk-taking and innovation in a manner that is supporting of play and fun-filled work environment. Thus, these approaches are argued to be about the 'authenticity' of the individual and eschews previous attempts at culture control which were posited as stifling individuals in hegemonic regimes that not only failed to achieve organizational identification but that also placed undue psychological burden on employees (see Casey, 1999; Grugulis et al., 2000).

However, although these new forms of culture control are gaining increasing recognition in the literature on contemporary developments on organizational culture, they remain problematic in a number of respects. Specifically, there is concern as to the extent to which these modern individualised approaches are consistent with 'culture' which commonly emphasises shared values (see earlier). In this regard, it is not clear how the friction between the individual freedom they

promote and the desire of managers to maintain culture control through initiatives that encourage collectivism is resolved. Moreover, current contributions which report these new approaches are frequently based on individual cases that are outliers even within their own contexts, for example the call centre case reported in Fleming and Sturdy (2009; 2011), and this makes it difficult to assess the trend in this area. Finally, there is limited insight into the subcultural implications of such individualised approaches particularly in relation to inter and intra subcultural relations. The study reported in this article provides an opportunity to evaluate cultural control practices in an unusual organizational setting that nevertheless has important implications for traditional organizations.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This article reports the findings of a qualitative, single organization case study. The case organization is identified by the pseudonym 'Regent FC', an English Premier League Football organization. As an important aspect of the study is to contribute rich descriptions of important organizational phenomenon, our choice of case is (partly) informed by the potentially revelatory quality of this peculiar context (see Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

Data Gathering

As part of a large study on organizational culture processes, Regent FC granted considerable access to the researchers and while imposing a number of confidentiality requirements (such as, the use of pseudonyms), were generous in the time they were willing to allow us (the researchers) to spend observing and interviewing personnel. Consequently, we adopted multiple data gathering techniques, including archival research, observations and face-to-face interviews. However, we relied heavily on face-to-face, private interviews to gain insight into the interpretations of organizational members. We conducted interviews with employees at various levels of the organizational hierarchy and at a number of operational centres. A total of 50 interviews were conducted with executives (5), divisional managers (18),

administrative staff (14), coaching and team management staff (6) and team support staff (7). We used semi-structured, private, one-to-one interviews to uncover the views of participants on a range of important issues, including their interpretations of (1) the wider organizational cultural assumptions, values and beliefs, (2) the emergence of different organizational groups, how they define themselves, the values they hold and how they are defined and distinguished by others, (3) the ways in which any differences/disagreements that arise are manifested and the implications of these for inter and intra cultural relations, (4) the recent organizational culture change efforts, the tensions linked to this and the responses of different subcultures to change efforts.

All the interviews conducted in this company were audio-recorded. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes on average and were all transcribed verbatim in order to capture the full essence of the views of the participants. Interview questions were open-ended to allow a greater opportunity for participants to describe their working lives in their own terms, using their own language and jargon. Although we were convinced that the nature of our study was such that every individual's perception was important, we sought to limit potential bias and retrospective sensemaking and interpretation by using multiple, highly informed interviewees with contrasting perspectives on the issues under investigation (see Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

The insights gained via interviewing organizational members were complemented by data gathered through observation. We were granted access to several meetings and to a variety of formal and informal functions. These included observation of the preparations for six different match days, attendance at ten home matches, access to executive areas where ex-players and dignitaries were entertained during matches, observation of training sessions and preparation for matches, visits to the club museum, attendance at Charity events and 'Meet the Fans' communication events organized by the club.

Data Analysis

Data generated from the extensive series of observation in this study were recorded in research note books and were combined with the verbatim transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews to aid the process of analysis. The transcriptions revealed a number of issues that required clarification and we were able to arrange additional visits to the company to clarify them up to twelve months after the end of the initial period of data gathering.   Following the recommendations of Strauss and Corbin (1998), we employed open, axial and selective coding to facilitate the task of analysis. First, 'open coding' was used to discover and identify the properties and dimensions of concepts in data.   Second, 'axial coding' was employed to link the core categories together at the level of properties and dimensions. Third, 'selective coding' was used as a process of integrating and refining theory.

CULTURE CHANGE AND SUBCULTURAL TENSIONS AT REGENT FC

It is useful to provide a brief overview of the context of the study as well as to highlight the rationale for the culture change efforts.   This is followed by a presentation of data on subcultural tensions and the ways in which such tensions were induced or exacerbated by the change initiative.

The English Premier League

Although the multiple particularities of the football context have been identified and discussed by a number of researchers (e.g. Dobson and Goddard, 2011;   Kuper and Szymanski, 2012), it is useful to highlight those that are pertinent to this study. The most significant of these is the business models of clubs in the English professional football sector (especially the twenty clubs that make up the Premier League) which have been described as highly *"unusual"* (Guzmán and Morrow 2007; p. 309). Indeed, Premier League clubs have

adopted a variety of complex business approaches ranging from highly leveraged financial arrangements to reliance on huge television deals and funds from single benefactors.

Dobson and Goddard (2011) likened some of the unusual financial dealings in this sector to re-mortgaging a property in order to finance current consumption. One outcome of this is that the emerging organizational cultures in football are not supporting of profitability, a line of reasoning which is consistent with reports that suggest that the combined clubs in the Premier League have not once returned a pre-tax profit since the formation of the Premiership in 1992 (see Hamil and Walters, 2010). Indeed, unlike traditional commercial organizations where profit is a key measure of business success, football clubs (especially Premiership clubs) invest heavily in pursuit of only three domestic trophies annually and view winning one or more of these, along with finishing high up in the league to qualify for European-wide football, as measures of success. To put this in context, while the total income of Premier League clubs in the 2011/12 season was £2.36billion, their expenditure on wages alone accounted for £1.7billion thereby leaving them little room to cover other operating costs and return profits (see Deloitte Annual Review of Football, 2013).

Other peculiarities of the football business relate to the nature of the labour market/process. In some respects, the huge differences in salaries, terms and conditions of employment and other features of work between the administrative /support workers and the football playing staff can be found in a number of other types of organizations and sectors including academia (e.g. Van den Brink et al., 2013) and banking (e.g. Groysberg et al., 2004). However, the labour market/process of football players is very unusual in that there is a transfer market wherein players are bought and sold like expensive commodities (see Kuper and Szymanski, 2012). Further, the labour market is regulated by multiple external agencies such that there are restrictions as to the periods in a season when players are allowed to change their jobs (see Szymanski, 2010). Another peculiar aspect of football is the

relationship that clubs have with their customers (fans). Although all organizations invest in maintaining good relations with their customers, the dynamics of the relationships between football clubs and their fans are different in many respects. For example, unlike customers in traditional organizations, football fans tend to develop a life-long affiliation to a club and the support of a particular football club usually runs in families. This creates a different level of emotional and psychological relationship that is rare to find in conventional organization-customer relationships (see Harris and Ogbonna, 2008).

Cultural Control at Regent Football Club

Regent FC has a long and distinguished history at the top echelon of the English football hierarchy and was a founding member of The Premier League. It employs 500 full-time staff and it has a huge fan base across the world. It has won many national and international trophies. Although its recent success has not matched its achievements in the past, it remains a major force in British and international club football.

Interviews and archival data suggest that Regent was run in a rather autocratic way by a CEO who had total control of all activities and who only ceded control of football related matters to the team manager. This CEO enjoyed a reign of over two decades in the organization. His longevity was partly a result of the legacy of success, with his stewardship coinciding with the most successful period in Regent's history (the 1970s and 1980s). As success (defined as winning trophies) deserted Regent FC for many years, the owners decided to change the direction of the organization to embrace more business-oriented practices and to ensure the long-term future of the organization. This led to the appointment of a new CEO who was an accountant by training and who had substantial corporate experience.

The new CEO, who took over shortly before our data gathering, was set a goal of transforming the organization and making it successful. However, significantly, rather than success being measured purely in terms of winning matches and trophies, the CEO started a

culture transformation process which was pivoted on changing the perception of success by redefining this to encompass on-field and off-field measures. He initiated a major programme of transforming the organization in terms of infrastructure (by investing in a new modern facility for the team, thereby separating the team from the stadium and main administrative offices), in terms of professionalising the management of the organization (by improving the organizational structure, instilling administrative control and appointing professional managers to head all new departments) and in relation to changing the culture of the organization such that financial responsibility is given more prominence.

A key aspect of the culture management initiative was to transform the values of employees so that they will adopt traditional business models of financial success and responsibility. This necessitated a major shift in subcultural centrality in that the dominance of the football playing side of the business (the team subculture) was tempered by the newly espoused values which placed significant power and visibility on all those associated with maintaining financial viability. Thus, an important part of the espoused change was the redefinition of the perception of success in the organization from what was previously viewed as winning football matches in the short-term and winning trophies in the long-term to newly espoused values that emphasised the importance of both winning matches and financial prudence, with financial prudence given greater significance as a more controllable objective.

The pursuit of the newly espoused value of financial prudence led to the introduction of a variety of changes which altered the nature of the interaction within and between subcultures, and in doing so revealed important points of tension as the change programme unfolded.

Subcultural Tensions at Regent FC

Prior to a presentation of data on subcultural tension in Regent FC, it is useful to note that while our interviews and observations point to the existence of two broad subcultures:

administrative and team subcultures, there were other smaller subcultures within each of these broad categories and we highlight these where relevant. Our data suggest five 'tension points' which we discuss in turn below.

Togetherness or Isolation

A major tension point that emerged during culture change at Regent FC was the desire of some groups to foster close relationships and the preference of other groups to be separate. This was more marked in the relationship between the team and administrative subcultures wherein the team subculture's preference for isolation was perceived by members of the administrative subculture (including executives) as weakening the espoused organizational culture. Ironically, this division was made worse by the culture change programme with the building of a new team base which led to a physical separation of the team from the administrative subculture. Interviews with members of the team management suggested that *camaraderie* within the team and the isolation of the team from any external influences were important in establishing a strong subculture (team) which the team management viewed as crucial to success on match days. For example:

> You have to understand that you need everything to be right to win a football game. We like to keep things tight and we like to keep the boys together, getting them to interact and develop an understanding of each other without the interference of anyone outside [the training ground] (First Team Head Coach).

Another member of the team management group indicated why the players had a preference for isolation even if this resulted in separation from other employees of the same organization:

> These guys go through their lives being harassed and hassled for attention. They have no privacy… They have people standing outside their houses waiting to photograph them and their families and they can't go out without being followed. The last thing they want is to come to work and face the same thing (Chief Scout).

However, such preference for isolation is perceived negatively by members of the

administrative units of the business and many view this as a negative consequence of the cultural transformation. For example:

> It is a shame that we don't have the type of contact with the people [at the team base] that I had expected before joining [RFC]. My colleagues tell me that things were different in the past and that the players were here laughing and joking with them regularly. I wish we can go back to that and be like one organization (Administrative Assistant).

Interestingly, the team subculture's desire for isolation is such that even the CEO makes the trip to the team base whenever he needs to meet with the team manager, and senior executives and other staff at Regent are advised to stay away from the first team complex. As a consequence, there is very little interaction between the administrative units and the team and this was presented as a source of frustration which undermined the objective of achieving commercial success:

> The manager and the first team are sort of sacrosanct and are kept in a little bubble. It's sort of established practice here that we in the commercial side are actively kept away from the manager and players. I find this surprising and it is very different from what I was used to in my previous jobs (Brand and Marketing Director).

The outcomes of this are a lack of understanding of the activities of different subcultures and resentment by members of the administrative subculture who do not feel that their colleagues in the team subculture appreciate their role in the organization sufficiently. This also suggests a failure of executives fully to realise their objective of achieving cultural control through creating a strong culture that cut across departmental boundaries.

Internal Labour Market

As part of the culture change programme, Regent FC established a new human resource management function and appointed a new manager with a remit to professionalise the management of human resources. This heralded a variety of changes but the aspect that highlighted the most internal tension was the change in the approach to recruitment and selection. This tension was particularly felt in the team subculture where members were

unhappy with the decision of the administrative based executives to appoint a team manager that represented a shift from previous practice. Regent FC had a practice of internal appointment and promotion for its team managers and coaches. Indeed, information from the company archives and interviews with long-standing employees link internal promotion to the previous success of the club and this approach was highly favoured by the team subculture as something that will help to return Regent to success:

> There is a lot of continuity in this place although this may not be apparent to many people… we [the department] try to reinforce the values that were passed down to us by our predecessors…My transition from a player to a coach is part of this and this is something that was made smoother by the fact that there were people who had been here a long time (First Team Head Coach and Ex-Player).

However, administrative executives perceived this practice as fostering the values of conservatism and continuity and one which was not in keeping with the new culture they wanted to promote. The new CEO expressed his desire to appoint a manager who was more likely to buy into the newly espoused value of financial responsibility and he and his team decided to embark on an external appointment. This created internal tensions between the administrative executives and the team subculture. Indeed, when we asked our interviewees from the team subculture; only one interviewee (the team doctor) indicated that he thought this was a good appointment at the time:

> I always thought this appointment was brilliant for the future of the club. The new manager has already done well to blend the existing culture with new ways of doing things. Our approach of sticking to what and who we [the club] know resulted in promoting from within and we did not have a lot of new blood coming in. The new manager has brought quite a lot of new blood and they have come with new techniques in medical, training and fitness areas and I think it's been good for us…(Team Doctor).

Nevertheless, there were several stories of those who resisted the appointment of an external candidate vociferously to the extent that we were told that four ex-players working in various capacities left the organization as a result of their dissatisfaction.

Multiple Identifications and Allegiances

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Our data analysis revealed a variety of tension points that were linked to multiple identifications and allegiances of organizational members. In the case of intra-subcultural relations, the tensions are best illustrated by the nature of football sport and by the unintended consequence of the changes introduced by the newly appointed team manager. Indeed, identification claims in high profile football teams are often linked to a variety of factors including the position of the players as well as other factors such as nationality or region of origin. Regents FC previously emphasised promoting locally born and national players through the ranks and making locally born players the focus of team activities for others to emulate. However, probably as a desire to break from the past or as a result of the new financial restriction he inherited, the new team manager, decided to recruit players from his country of origin. This action appeared to impact on the cohesiveness of the team and created a number of intra subcultural tension points. The first was that the foreign players were largely unhappy with the food provided in the team restaurant and would often prefer not to eat and socialise with the rest of the team after training. This was a source of concern and continuing discussion by the team management as this undermined their efforts to introduce strong team spirit. The second was the tension that was caused by language differences wherein many of the newly recruited overseas players either struggled to understand or were perceived to be unwilling to learn to speak English. One employee, who was a caterer to the first team, provided an insight into the changes in intra subcultural divisions:

> It used to be better than this…like one big family and although they had problems, you got the impression that they [the palyers] were talking to each other and resolving their problems… These days, I find that the players can be very cliquey most of the time. The French sit together all the time and speak in French, the Africans tend to sit on their own and even the British are divided according to their region, with northerners staying together and the southerners sitting with each other (Catering Staff).

Informal conversations with members of the wider team subculture revealed a number of incidents where players apparently had heated words either on the training grounds or during post match briefings and in one case where two players who were apparently arguing over an

incident that happened during a match had to be physically separated by the coaching staff.

One member of the coaching staff indicated that such disagreements and tension points were

common in football although he conceded that they were exacerbated by the language and

cultural differences at Regent.

Individual Needs versus Organizational Requirements

As part of the newly espoused culture of financial responsibility, administrative executives

developed a series of performance matrices that were designed to maximise efficiency in the

entire organization but most especially in the utilisation of the players who represent the most

substantial asset in the balance sheet:

> If you look at any football club you will find that the players represent a substantial part
> of the value of the business. It is folly to profit from this asset for just a couple of hours
> on Saturday afternoons….You have to maximise their income generating capacity…
> (Chief Accountant).

One way the organization sought to maximise value was to involve the players in all

marketing and promotion activities. However, whereas this was largely informal in the past,

with players being available for occasional photo shoots and signing of merchandise,

executives decided (as part of the culture management programme) to formalise and extend

this to include activities such as dinning with high fee-paying fans, making speeches and

representing the club at high profile events organised by sponsors. Unsurprisingly, the

players (especially the new recruits with weaker club ties) were largely unwilling to work

with this extended requirement as they each had their own agents who wanted them to protect

their image rights. In a sense, this revealed a peculiar tripartite arrangement in which the

employing organization paid the salary of the player but in which an influential but external

party to the contract, the agent, exerted a powerful influence on the player's conduct in all

off-field football activities. One manager expressed her frustration at this:

> A few months ago, I wanted one of our new players for our summer photo shoot. First, I
> had to go to the press office and they put me through to the players' liaison office. They

did the negotiation with the player and his agent. The agent kept coming up with all sorts of conditions. It took several weeks for them to agree, by which point it was too late (Retail Manager).

This manager showed the researchers a copy of the internal memorandum that she had written to the CEO in which she noted that not having the necessary support from the team and players was hampering her ability to do her job. Another employee's comments provide a good indication of the nature of this relationship and the potential for tensions that may arise:

> You have to understand that the players have their own individual agents and you sometimes get the impression that they are more loyal to their agents than they are to this football club. They have a limited career and they feel driven to maximise their incomes while they are able to. They love the club alright but they always feel driven to look after number one. They see their agents as people who are interested in their individual success and they work with them at all times. Unfortunately, the agents often have no interest in the club and would encourage the players they represent to leave for another club if a better offer comes in…(Media Officer).

Cooperation versus Competition

The final tension point revealed in our data analysis is the tension between cooperation and competition. This category is related to the frictions between individual needs and organizational requirements discussed above in that they are both premised on the tensions arising from individual and group affiliation that characterise intra subcultural relations.

A number of participants highlighted the problematic nature of competition and cooperation in the functioning of teams involving professional footballers. Possibly the best example of this is that in a football team, highly fit and driven individuals are required to act as teammates, yet they are encouraged to compete against each other for the limited number of positions that constitute the first team. One first team coach who played for Regent FC for 10 years prior to his current role captures the essence of this conundrum:

> There are around 35 players here in the main squad and each one is a top professional in his own right. However, you can only have 11 players on the pitch at any one time. This means that there are at least 3 players fighting for the same position. Football is like that… We do all we can to encourage competition amongst the players yet we keep

preaching the virtues of teamwork and togetherness (First Team Strikers' Coach).

Indeed, all the long-serving players we spoke with during informal conversations argued that the camaraderie that existed in the team in the past made it easier to manage the tensions that arose when individuals were not in the first team. They noted that the changes introduced by the new team manager had impacted on the strength of the intra-team cohesion and had made this tension point more visible.

Thus, intra-cultural tension points are surfaced when players are not in the first team. The potential for tension is especially high in the contest of high profile players who, in many cases, will encourage their agents to brief newspapers and other clubs on their availability in a way that is detrimental to their existing club. As one employee and former player argued:

> They [administrative executives] said that the recent changes will make everyone here, including the players, to be professionals but I can't say that this has been for the better…Things used to be different in my time. If you're not in the team you work harder and try to get back into the team and you support your team mates…Today, anyone that is not in the team will argue with the manager, sulk, whine, leave for another club or destabilise the rest of the team (Academy Director).

Thus, although this final category is a regular feature of football teams, interviewees believed that the cultural change programme (especially the appointment of an external team manager and the increase in the number of players without local ties) exacerbated the impact of this at Regent.

DISCUSSION

Our first contribution is to the literature on organizational culture, and specifically organizational culture control and change. As stated earlier, organizations abound with (often naïve) attempts to manage organizational cultures. Practitioner-oriented journals are littered with helpful (albeit hugely optimistic) suggestions for such processes (see Hill, 2013). However, scholarly attention to the issue of organizational culture and management interventions is largely limited to conceptual critiques of naïve management or studies

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(admittedly including the current study) that find culture management a failure, with some even proclaiming the end of 'corporate culturism' (see Fleming, 2013). Such pessimistic assessment of the central tenets culture management (the generation of widely shared values) is continued in contributions which argue that traditional forms of culture control are no longer viable and that instead we should look to approaches that encourage individualisation and authenticity (see Fleming and Sturdy, 2009; 2011). Yet, consistent with findings from practitioner circles (see Bremer, 2012), our study suggests that executives continue to pursue conventional cultural control techniques with particular focus on collective value internalisation. Our finding of a marked difference between what practitioners consider important and what academics view as interesting provides some support for recent calls for additional understanding of managerial practices in human resource management (see Van den Brink et al. 2013; Watson, 2010). Indeed, given the emphasis on 'impact' in the REF, it will be interesting to see if the evaluators of research address such issues.

We also contribute important insights into intra subcultural relations. Our inclusion of intra subcultural relations reveals that an understanding of intra subcultural dynamics is just as important as inter subcultural relations (especially in the context of evaluating organizational cultural change programmes). In the current case, the team subculture was typically united in its opposition to cultural change and in the struggles with the administrative subculture. However, members of the team subculture concurrently exhibited differences in intra subcultural interactions, with tensions emerging from individual value alignment which were heavily influenced by on- and off-field variables (including social links, language similarity, and team role). The finding of such tensions in the context of an apparently strong subculture raises questions about whether, in the study of organizational culture, the construct of subculture should be extended to acknowledge that subcultures are not the smallest unit of cultural analysis. This suggests that the clusters that may form within subcultures must be included in analyses to improve understanding of subcultural

dynamics. Such formation of multiple subcultural clusters in change programmes, some predictable in advance and others unpredictable, unstable and often predicated on the subtleties of the change initiatives, constitutes an important explanation to why culture control efforts are frequently unsuccessful.

Linked to the above is our finding of significant power interplay in inter and intra subcultural relations which was exacerbated by the change programme. While it has been suggested that organizational culture should be viewed as negotiated order that is heavily influenced by the relative power capacities of the various actors (see (Hallett, 2003), empirical investigation of this in relation to culture control and subcultural dynamics is limited. Our exploration of the relationships between and within subcultures suggests that the dynamics of subcultural relations especially during cultural transformation is best understood as power-play, in that not only might change signal the distortion in the locus of power, the existing dominant subculture might also rely on its power base to form the nucleus of resistance. Thus, the pre-existing power balance and dynamics play a major role in determining the outcome of culture management as influential actors seek to set the agenda for change and to control the context of interaction for implementing or resisting change. In the current case, the team subculture was able to use its pre-existing power to influence the direction of change and was able, in many respects, to neutralise the efforts of executives to achieve control over their work.

Our contributions also extend to the context of this study. Specifically, our study is an important step towards integrating football into mainstream research in management studies. Indeed, while the idiosyncratic and distinctive qualities of the football context have been highlighted by many (e.g. Dobson and Goddard, 2011; Kuper and Szymanski, 2012), our study finds that parallels abound with recent research in human resource management, for example in the area of talent (star) management (e.g. Van den Brink et al., 2013). Examples of sectorial application range from the entertainment industry (from which the 'star'

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metaphor is derived) to the banking and finance sector where star dealers are rewarded and retained with huge bonuses. In professions, celebrity lawyers attract vast retainers while (arguably) REF pressures on UK academic institutions have led to the emergence of powerful research-prolific academics that trade on their publications. However, while much is known about how such individuals identified as having exceptional abilities are recruited and managed (see Van den Brink et al., 2013) and the potential impact on organizational justice (see Gelens, et al., 2013), little is known about the implications of such talent management on inter and intra cultural relations and on the desires of executives (as in this case) to achieve culture control. Our study finds that the achievement of Regent executives' espoused aim of cultural unity was severely undermined by the differential treatment of 'stars' within the team subculture and by the huge disparity in earning and other conditions between the team subculture and the administrative subculture.

Overall, our study of the football sector suggests that the desire to achieve culture control remains important to executives and they continue to adopt traditional approaches to culture change which emphasises collective value alignment. However, the success of these programmes remains contested as they are often influenced by a variety of factors outside the control of executives. In the current case, the tensions in inter and intra cultural relations increased uncertainty and undermined the efforts of executives to achieve their objectives.

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