Management Department Faculty Publications   Management Department

1985

Refining the Displacement of Culture and the Use of Scenes and Themes in Organizational Studies

Nancy C. Morey
Western Illinois University

Fred Luthans
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, fluthans1@unl.edu

Refining the Displacement of Culture and the Use of Scenes and Themes in Organizational Studies

NANCY C. MOREY
Western Illinois University
FRED LUTHANS
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The move to displace the concept of culture traditionally used in anthropology to organizational research is discussed. Issues surrounding the culture concept and the juxta-position of culture and organization are given special attention. Current thinking about the nature of the process of displacement is refined. Examples from an ongoing study of a city transit organization are used to demonstrate the use of cultural scenes and themes in organizational research.

Displacement of concepts from one discipline to another is a recognized means to advance knowledge and an important way to promote needed, but difficult, interdisciplinary work. The question addressed here is to what extent and in what ways the increasingly popular concept of culture is a potentially useful metaphor for advancing the understanding of modern organizations. As Jelinek, Smircich, and Hirsch (1983) recently pointed out, culture may be becoming the "explanation of choice" for organization researchers.

Issues Surrounding the Cultural Concept

The concept of culture is most closely associated with the behavioral science discipline of anthropology. Within anthropology it receives full analytical treatment and adequate recognition of all its dimensions and complexities. Now that important behavioral science research questions are increasingly cutting across different cultural, national, and even subcultural boundaries, the concept of culture itself is being borrowed by other disciplines, but perhaps not always to the best advantage. It has, for example, become increasingly popular in organization theory to assume that organizations either are or have "cultures." Yet, despite a few examples of productive usage, there is growing evidence that

the construct of culture may be overinterpreted. This creates problems in attempts to transpose related cultural concepts such as rituals, myths, ideologies, or symbols. There seems to be a temptation merely to impose a concept such as culture and lose track of organizational reality, that is, trading richness of context for total obfuscation (Schwartz & Davis, 1981; Whorton & Worthley, 1981).

Even a cursory look at the literature reporting the use of culture in organizational research quickly reveals that the concept is seldom specified in any way. Most organizational researchers do not define culture explicitly and make no attempt to explain its use or to indicate how the concept fits into research design. Even when explicitly discussed, the concept generally is not defined in relation to the particular study being reported. Definitions that do exist often equate it with values (Kelley & Worthley, 1981). In other words, culture as a metaphor frequently is applied almost unconsciously. The concept is slipping into organizational studies through the back door, with little direct reflection on its implications.

Displacement of the concept of culture from anthropology to organization studies seems a response to some need felt by organizational researchers. Culture is being increasingly discussed in the whole range of organizational studies—from organization development-related work

like that of Schwartz and Davis (1981) to sophisticated cross-cultural designs for organizational research such as that of Hofstede (1980). Many years ago Schon (1963) discussed how these displacements occur from "demands of the situations confronting us" (p. 68). Clearly the need for an explanatory metaphor such as culture has emerged in the study of organizations, and the time has come to begin assessment of its impact and refine its displacement to the study of organizations.

The Displacement Process

Displacement of a concept through metaphor and analogy is simply a process whereby the concept as used in one discipline or theory is transferred to a new discipline or theory so that the theorist/researcher is treating the new as the old. Many new hypotheses can be expected to come from this process, which is why displacement is so attractive. Displacement, however, can also be misleading and deceptive. Analogy and metaphor can trick the theorist/researcher into believing that because something can be treated "as if" it were something else, it actually has *become* that something else. Knowledgeable and careful theorists try to avoid overinterpretation of metaphors and analogies by maintaining, as Morgan (1980) and Meyer (1984) suggest, conscious awareness of what they are doing.

A degree of flexibility, of "playful" give-and-take, seems beneficial in the early stages of concept displacement. Theorists and researchers need to explore the limits of a concept, stretch it, and try out its applications. This is an important part of scientific inquiry. It stirs up new ideas and performs an important "unsettling" function in relation to old ideas, and in relation to the metaphor used. The "garbage can" analogy (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972) is an example of concept displacement that has produced useful rethinking of ideas and theories of decision making. Looking at an organization in terms of the Rumpelstiltskin fairy tale (Smith & Simmons, 1983) is a recent example of the utility of using the concept of culture in an almost "playful" manner. However, there comes a time in the process when such playfulness must give way to a more serious and rigorous examination of just what is being accomplished by the displacement (Smircich, 1983).

One such systematic analysis of displacement is provided by Schon (1963). His four-step scheme may help refine the displacement of culture to organizational studies. Briefly summarized, these displacement steps are:

1. *Transposition.* This beginning, whereby the old concept is transposed to the new situation, is the point at which most of the "playfulness" enters the process. The "as if" nature of a metaphor such as culture will suggest a variety of new and intriguing ways of looking at a unit of analysis such as an organization.

2. *Interpretation.* Seeing possible new interpretations leads to the displaced concept being assigned to some aspect of the new situation and examined for suitability. This probably is where most current organizational research using the culture metaphor is now. The concept of culture is being assigned a particular role, or place, in organizational research. Agreement on this place is not universal, and this is where discussions currently are focused.

3. *Correction.* This means a mutual adaptation between the old and the new, including mutual modifications. In this step, the metaphor becomes widely used and expanded. The theorist/researcher learns which associated concepts may be transposed along with it and how these should be modified. Some aspects of the transposition of the culture metaphor are approaching this stage.

4. *Spelling out.* This final stage is an attempt to make the metaphor explicit and to set forth as exactly as possible what it means in its new context and what is hoped to be accomplished by its use. Schon cautions that this process is never complete. Obviously, the concept of culture has not yet reached this final stage in displacement.

A major purpose of this paper is to use these four steps to direct attention to some possibilities for refining the displacement of the concept of culture from anthropology to organization studies.

The Interpretation of Culture

Because most organizational theorists and researchers are at the second step of "interpretation" of the concept of culture, this seems to be the logical place to start analyzing and refining the displacement process. Despite disagreements on other aspects of the concept of culture (e.g., specific definitions regarding content), anthropologists do agree on certain attributes of culture

that are, in part, currently being displaced to organizational contexts. First, culture is *learned*. It is not genetic or biological, although it interacts in complex ways with human biology. Culture is *shared* by people as members of social groups; it is not an idiosyncratic attribute. Culture is *transgenerational* and *cumulative* in its development; it is passed from one generation to the next. It is *symbolic* in that it is based on the human capacity to symbol. Culture is *patterned*, it is organized and integrated; a change in one part will bring about corresponding changes in other parts of the system. Culture is *adaptive*; it is the basic human adaptive mechanism, replacing the more genetically-based adaptive systems of most other animals. For extended discussions of these common characteristics of culture see Haviland (1983) and Spradley and McCurdy (1980). Of particular relevance for organizational studies are its patterned, shared, learned, and symbolic characteristics.

It should also be noted that as used in anthropology, culture is not an attribute of individuals, although individuals have cultural attributes. Culture is an attribute of groups, especially of societies, and is analyzed in terms of this higher system level (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Miller, 1965). Another important point to make about the concept of culture in anthropology, and one that often is ignored in its displacement to organizational studies, is that culture exists on two quite distinct levels. There is culture as a general attribute of the species, Homo sapiens. This is the level to which most refer when they state that culture "is" one or another thing or that culture "has" particular attributes such as being patterned, shared, learned, or symbolic. This is quite different from statements about the culture of a particular group of human beings, that is, the unit of analysis for culture. Culture, as a human phenomenon, is systematically patterned, shared, learned, symbolic, and so forth. The culture of the Eskimo, however, has specific, identifiable patterns and content that mark it off as Eskimo culture as *contrasted* with Aleut culture, Navajo culture, or French culture. The researcher can only examine these specific cultures oᶠ specific human groups. Only the content of these cultures can be analyzed. Specific cultures exist as contrasts to each other. Human culture is learned

in the generic sense only through compilations of information on the patterns and variations in the many individual specific cultures. It is from this information that anthropologists abstract general theories of culture.

All organizations "have" culture in the sense that they are embedded in specific societal cultures and are part of them. Organizations are important cultural artifacts themselves. They are both a product of the culture of Homo sapiens as a species as well as contributors to further evolution of that culture. So organizations are both product and producer of culture, but they are not independent entities. Organizations exist on a lower level of analysis than anthropologists usually use when applying the concept of culture. Specific cultures can have organizations of various types. In addition, organizations can be cultures, and even have their own subcultures, in a more limited anthropological sense of the term. The implications from this interpretation must be examined carefully.

Juxtaposition of Culture and Organization

An important start in refining the displacement is to determine whether the concepts of culture and organization are congruent or whether they conflict. The place to begin the juxtaposition of the concepts is at the highest level of analysis. Therefore, only aspects of organization as a concept are considered, as distinct from specific organizations such as IBM, the local utility, or the corner grocery. Although organizations as a phenomenon often are expressed through such specific representations, they are not sufficient to represent the generic concept of organization. However, the *concept* of organization does indeed seem to share important attributes with that of culture. In particular, organization is a concept based on attributes of patterning, learning (by individual participants), and human symboling capacities. In fact, an argument could be made that the concept of organization contains attributes of being transgenerational and cumulative.

Despite the similarities between the concepts of culture and organization, there do seem to be some important differences. These differences are made more pronounced by the particular ap-

proach to culture that has become popular in the recent organizational literature. In particular, the implicit assumptions made about culture in the organizational literature could be labeled a "simple society model" of culture. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of this simple society model along a dozen relevant dimensions. Although this model is highly simplified, when it is contrasted with that of complex organizations the differences become readily apparent.

Each of the points in Table 1 can be argued and need further explanation and clarification. Yet, despite the oversimplification, they point up some potential and very real differences between the concept of culture being used in organizational studies and the organizational realities that this prevalent "simple society model" of culture is being used to explain.

Table 1
Contrasting a Simple Society Model of Culture and Complex Organization

Relevant Dimensions	Simple Society Model of Culture	Complex Organization
Structure	Emergent	Deliberate design
Direction	Total, integrated way of life	Limited goals
Complexity	Few, simple roles (structurally simple)	Multiroles (structurally complex)
Authority	Egalitarian	Hierarchical
Control	Through ritual, myth, symbols, tradition	Through authority
Symbolic systems	Ritual and myth have instrumental as well as expressive functions	Ritual and myth limited to expressive functions
Training/education	Informal training for roles and tasks, with ritual and myth performing central educational functions	Formal training for roles and tasks
Age of members	Members from all age ranges (many not economically active)	Members concentrated between 18-65 (economically active adults)
Membership	Involuntary/ascribed	Voluntary/achieved
Integration	Members bound by strong emotional as well as instrumental inter-dependencies; psychological bonds are primary	Members bound by division of labor (emotional bonds may occur, but are derivative)
Variation	Small, uniform "pool"	Large, varied "pool"
Autonomy	Relatively autonomous	Embedded in larger society; nonautonomous

"Correcting" the Displacement of Culture to Organization Studies

There obviously are a variety of ways to develop the third "correction" step in displacing culture to organizational studies. The approach proposed here seems to "fit" best with those already in the organizational field and in a sense is complementary to them. The proposed approach is not necessarily the one to follow. In fact, a wide variety of approaches are needed, and the intent is to suggest more than one.

In recent years, as anthropologists have moved away from the study of traditional primitive societies and concentrated more on modern societies and urban environments, there has been an accompanying shift in research techniques and concept development. It is from this newer, but often overlooked, body of anthropological thought and methodology that organizational researchers can derive the most beneficial "transpositions." One example is the recent emphasis anthropologists, such as Spradley (1979), give to both the content and the meaning aspects of culture. At the initial,

pragmatic level of organizational analysis, the recognition of content and meaning allows the researcher to discover and make use of limited *cultural scenes* in common social situations in organizations. In this sense it also implies a particular methodology, one that some organizational researchers are beginning to use (Barley, 1983; Morey & Luthans, 1984).

The Use of Cultural Scenes

The use of cultural scenes in organizational research can be demonstrated by the following example taken from an ongoing study of a city transit organization. Picture three employees sitting around an ordinary, formica-topped table writing on pieces of paper. This is a social situation. The researcher has no idea of the cultural meaning of this situation; this is what must be discovered. Now suppose that the description is expanded with the information that there are two men and a woman wearing identical blue-grey uniforms, they are sitting in a place called the "ready-room," and they are filling out "trip sheets" to get ready for "pull-out." Now perhaps there is too much meaning and too litle explanatory structure in the described scene. A meaningful explanation of this social situation is that this is the drivers' waiting room in a city transit organization about 5:00 A.M. with three bus drivers doing their paper work preparatory to leaving the garage.

Many more elements could be added to the description to derive further aspects of its meaning to these participants, but this is sufficient to illustrate that the "cultural scene" is much more than just a simple description of observed behavior. This is an important point in the proposed displacement of "cultural" analysis to studies of organizations. There is a need to examine the meaning of this social situation in order to give it *content* as a cultural scene. This meaning, however, must be translated from the "insider" language (e.g., "ready room," "trip sheets," or "pull-out") to general "outsider" terms (e.g., "waiting room," "paper work," or "leaving") in order to interpret it and gain an understanding of an important cultural scene within this organization.

Methodological Implications

This approach implies a two-stage research process with methods appropriate for one stage not necessarily appropriate for the other. In the initial stages of research, a cluster of methods that could be broadly termed idiographic/qualitative/insider become particularly useful for organizational studies. In the later stages, a seemingly opposite cluster of analytical approaches broadly labeled nomothetic/quantitative/outsider become the focus. Importantly, however, these methodological clusters need not be polar opposites. Qualitative approaches can be just as nomothetic as can quantitative ones. In anthropology the distinctions made between nomothetic and idiographic research orientations have nothing to do with whether the researcher is qualitatively or quantitatively oriented. Either approach is seen as much qualitative as quantitative.

What is suggested here is that the initial research be done with a primarily *emic* (or insider's) orientation and subsequent analysis of data be done using *etic* (or outsider's) analytic categories (Morey & Luthans, 1984). Emic approaches do not mean a return to the earlier case approach discouraged by modern organization theorists and researchers as simplistic and methodologically unsound. Instead, the emic approach is simply a specific set of procedures and techniques (some quite sophisticated and complex) for eliciting, in a carefully structured but nondirective manner, the meaning of any cultural scene from the participants. Such an emic approach is the important initial step in the discovery of insider *meanings* for outsider observed social situations, that is, the transposition of social situations into cultural scenes.

Organizations are full of social situations that can be observed easily by both researchers (outsiders) and actual participants (insiders). Organizational researchers, however, are interested in much more than just the meaning of these social situations to those participating in them. In other words, there is a need to transpose social situations into cultural scenes by investigating the "insider" meanings. These meanings, or patterns of meanings, derived from a focus on cultural scenes, can then be analyzed in a variety of ways to produce a context-rich description of life within the organization. This is certainly one appropriate goal for organizational studies.

Emic analysis is necessary to the discovery of cultural scenes. Such identified scenes then can

be put together to interpret other aspects of organizational life. For example, particular events occur in reference to, or in the context of, specific cultural scenes that can be used to interpret them and link them. In other words, emic descriptions can be used and analyzed in "outsider" terms to produce culturally meaningful comparisons of organizational phenomena. Thus, what starts out as an emic methodological perspective switches to the etic perspective as the research progresses. This two-stage methodological approach closely corresponds to what Van Maanen (1979) has called the first order (interpretations made by members of an organization) and second order (researchers' explanations of patterns observed in the first order data) approach. It also is what Driggers (1977) meant when he recommended that researchers develop a reflexive ability to switch back and forth between participant's and detached observer's views of the situation.

The emphasis on language and its coding function in the proposed two-stage research methodology would satisfy Manning's (1979) call for attention to the function of language as a mediator between the world and perceptions of it. It also would fulfill the requirements of research models using "high variety" language reflecting the complexity of the system studied, as urged by Daft and Wiginton (1979). In fact, this proposed methodology comes close to filling all their specifications for useful research models: (1) a focus on general patterns instead of on details, (2) a reliance on a type of human observation with human thought processes creating the model of the system, (3) imprecision (fuzzy concepts) in the variables and their interrelationships, and (4) a research process relying on high variety language (Daft & Wiginton, 1979).

The Use of Cultural Themes

Another useful technique for organizational analysis would seem to be theme analysis. The view of themes proposed here is similar to those of Spradley (1979, 1980) and Agar (1979). They see the themes as recurrent and important principles (or bits of structure) occurring in a number of cultural domains (i.e., in different forms). Themes are used in this sense to link subsystems of cultural meaning because they are assertions of high generality that apply to a number of

situations. People use them to organize their behavior and interpret experience (Spradley, 1980). As Agar (1979) explains, themes deal with important beliefs, values, and rules of behavior that cross boundaries and context. The study of themes would be especially useful for analyzing organizations "as if" (metaphorically) they were cultural systems. Also, theme analysis would be especially compatible with the proposed research procedure discussed earlier and complies with the current emphasis on content and meaning. Theme analysis begins with the emic, or insider's, view of the organization. This emic data are then transposed into etic categories for analysis. Once defined, a theme has entered the etic realm.

Exactly what types of cultural themes occur in organizations is an empirical question. Preliminary research indicates they likely reflect such things as beliefs about the realities of particular kinds of interpersonal relations within the organization. For most employees the realities of organizational life revolve around interpersonal relations, not around the broad range of content issues found in cultural systems. If such content issues are found in organizations and treated as the "quality of work life," they will be reflections of the themes of the larger culture, and they will tell the organizational researcher little about the specific organization other than it is embedded in this larger cultural context. For example, cultural themes might be used in organizational studies because of what they reveal about the congruence of the organization with its environment and the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the membership of the organization.

General themes occurring in organizational settings could include such things as social conflict. There also may be themes involving cultural contradictions. An example of the latter may be organization members who want to project certain images to outsiders that seem to involve contradictions to what is observed within the organization, or within a portion of it. At times themes prominent in one functional area or level of the organization may conflict with themes prominent in another. Conflict among themes may frequently even take place within the same functional area or level of the organization. Furthermore, organization-wide themes may conflict with each other. When researchers find such contradictions,

unless the organization is in serious disarray they should understand that there will also be an accompanying theme that mediates the contradiction. The existence of contradictions means the researcher should search for mediating themes. A detailed example of such a mediated contradiction is provided in the next section.

Themes also may center around informal techniques of social control, such as gossip and informal reward and power systems. Among universal themes mentioned by Spradley (1980) and others are managing impersonal social relationships, acquiring and maintaining status, and solving problems. These all clearly deal with important aspects of organizational life.

A Specific Example of the Refined Use of Culture in Organizational Analysis

A specific illustration of a refined displacement of the concept of culture to organization studies based on Schon's (1963) four steps for displacement and Spradley's (1979) emphasis on the content and meaning dimensions of culture can be drawn from the study of a city transit organization.

First, to discover the acquired knowledge and how the transit employees use it to interpret experience and generate social behavior, the research started with an emic perspective. Accordingly, the research first defined and analyzed a wide variety of cultural scenes within the city transit organization. Using Schon's second step of *interpretation*, the concept of culture was first assigned to the limited scope of cultural scenes. This provided the needed framework for analysis by directing attention to the *meaning* of the particular situation for the people involved in it. It encouraged focus on meaning in "insider" (emic) terms and used stringent controls to guard against premature imposition of "outsider" (etic) categories on the cultural scenes. The controls used were multifaceted, but were based on the researchers strict adherence to expressed and emphasized ignorance. The person being interviewed is cultivated as a "teacher," the expert on what the researcher seeks to learn. Questioning is never direct in this approach. The overriding goal is to avoid problems created when researchers impose their own categories on the situation.

For final analysis, information was gathered from multiple sources (insider as well as outsider) to make interpretations of the experience of the employees within this organization more valid. Some of these interpretations have been validated in use, that is, tested for agreement in various ways within the organization studied, and others are at this writing in the process of being checked. In this context, meaning has more than one level. There is the subjective meaning expressed by participants in a cultural scene of which they are aware. There also are other levels of meaning, the functions of which may *not* be known to participants, but which can be seen by "outsiders." Emic and etic analyses are combined to understand both kinds of meaning.

This kind of study does not reveal a broad organizational culture. Instead, the application of culture to specific cultural scenes seems most profitable. At maximum, the cultural concept applies to particular small subunits within this organization. Rather than one overall organizational culture, there are several different systems of knowledge within this organization, and there are several different ways that the participants interpret their organizational experience and act on their interpretations. Behavior and experience of drivers, for instance, is quite different from that of mechanics, which is quite different from that of the driver supervisors, as they are different from the office workers, and so forth.

There are shared attributes, however, that cut across some, if not all, of these organizational units. Theme analysis was used to make sense of these shared attributes. Themes reflect, explain, and govern behavior. Thus, theme analysis proved to be a useful tool for understanding and explaining a variety of actions/behaviors found within this organization. For example, theme analysis helped resolve a seeming paradox in what appeared to be contradictory behaviors and attitudes. Borrowing the idea of mediating themes from theme analysis, it was discovered that there was really no paradox. A potential contradiction in themes had to be moderated by another powerful counter-theme or the organization would have had serious problems in its day-to-day functioning.

For example, two main themes occur among the six driver supervisors: a concern for *control* and a feeling of *competition*. (These are etic labels

given to the numerous emically derived expressions of these themes elicited during several months of research in this organization.) Driver supervisors feel, and state, that they are in competition with drivers and also with upper level management. With management, they compete for rights, privileges, and access to information they consider necessary to do their jobs. With drivers, they compete for control of driver behavior and for the respect they feel is due their positions. In addition, they compete with drivers for management's attention. The control theme obviously overlaps with the competition theme, specific circumstances of the moment determining which comes to the fore.

Examples of these themes are found in a large collection of statements gathered from supervisors, some of which indicate the ambiguity of the overlap between the control and competition themes. For instance, in relation to management, supervisors say they get no backup from management, management has a double standard, supervisors get no recognition, very little credit, and it makes no difference anyway. These statements are samples of their expressions of helplessness in control of driver behavior. Management does not back them up, and they are left in a vulnerable and fairly open adversary relationship with the drivers they supposedly control and supervise.

Obviously, such adversary relationships could not be allowed full expression or the system would have serious difficulties. In searching for the explanation why cooperation between drivers and supervisors does occur and why the system continues to run remarkably smoothly, a moderating theme emphasizing the importance of personal, one-to-one relationships between drivers and individual supervisors was identified. The potential extreme expression of the competition and control themes is moderated by a series of dyadic, reciprocal, one-to-one relationships between supervisors and drivers, often expressed in terms of mutual favors. Supervisors can rely on "partner" drivers when they need help in getting work done or in handling interpersonal difficulties. The friendliness of these relationships also offsets the frequent irritations and animosities fostered by the control and competition themes. Each of the six driver supervisors has a personal set of these relationships, such that between them they can set up networks that encompass almost all 81 drivers. These personal relationships also characterize their dealings with the maintenance/shop personnel, a group known for particularly assertive independence.

In other words, competition and control themes are kept from full expression in this organization by the theme of cooperative dyadic relationships that acts to moderate the effects of the first two. It is important to note that the existence of these themes was discovered through initial emic elicitation of information on specific cultural scenes. Their interpretation was accomplished through standing back from the emic analyses, taking an etic perspective on the functioning of the organization as a whole, and attempting to understand the implications for the organization of the specific experiences and meanings assigned by organizational members.

Further, the supervisors react to feelings of lack of control through a fierce in-group cohesion expressed in sticking together and covering their backs. This cohesiveness is developed in a variety of implicit and explicit ways and persists in spite of some distinct individual differences among the supervisors. For instance, the supervisors have uniforms, different from those of the drivers, with which they all wear similar boots. When asked casually about why they all wear the same boots, they deny that they do. It is likely that this is, in fact, an unconscious expression of their solidarity. They also have many subtle and not-so-subtle ways of controlling access to the room out of which they work, which affects not only drivers, but also upper level management.

Obviously, these are not the only themes that have been identified in this organization, nor are they necessarily even the most prominent. For example, an interesting theme that cuts across the separate groups of drivers, driver supervisors, and maintenance personnel is expressed in the statement: "Only fools talk to management alone." Management, it may be noted, reciprocates with a corresponding caution about talking to these groups of workers alone. Needless to say, the theme analysis, only briefly touched on as an example here, can and will be expanded to deal with broader concerns such as problems of communication in this organization.

Conclusions

The preceding example is intended to represent a refinement of the displacement of the concept of culture from anthropology to organizations. Consideration of secondary concepts, such as cultural scenes and themes, with brief mention of the research methods required for this kind of displacement, demonstrates just one way of analyzing an organization "as if" it were a culture. It is recognized that this analysis is incomplete. In particular, the roles of the identified themes within the total organization must be categorized and analyzed. In addition, this example demonstrates one way to interpret culture as a useful metaphor in organizational analysis. In particular, cultural themes are one way to analyze "cultural structure" within an organization, but they do not play quite the same role in organizations as they do in specific cultures of the "simple society model" depicted in Table 1.

In complex organizations (as well as complex societies) themes often are products of experience more than shapers of it. Themes may develop as expressions of commonly felt (shared) experience, and the extent and force of their expression is a measure of the extent and importance of this shared experience. The themes of competition and control discussed in the example have a particular historical development in the organization studied. They could, in fact, be traced back to their origins and reasons for them determined. Their existence indicates certain areas of fission in the organization. Whether the fission is expressed in a dysfunctional way is a separate question. The theme merely indicates its existence and something of its strength. Development of the mediating theme in this organization shows that an equilibrium is currently operating to minimize the devisive tendencies that exist.

The secondary concept of themes could be used within cultural analysis of organizations to identify and interpret common concerns of organization members and perhaps to diagnose areas of potential problems within the organization. Themes as products of shared experience, once etically described and named, are also available for a variety of different kinds of analyses and comparisons. This analysis could be used to compare different groups within given organizations that express the same or different themes. Examination of the extent and expressive strength (amount of verbalized or symbolic expression of the concerns of the theme) could reveal many interesting things about the functioning of an organization. It could provide a useful tool for organization development work: themes are identified in extent and groups within the organization are compared in terms of their themes and the intensity of expression of them.

Across organizations, themes may be found to have certain patterns of occurrence depending on different contingent factors, such as type of organization or industry, geographic setting, and age of the organization. There may be themes common to production departments, other themes common to marketing, and so on. Comparisons of theme expression across organizations, and development of etic categories to make these comparisons useful, would be very helpful in furthering the understanding of organizations in general. For example, perhaps certain situations or common factors that result in particular types of anti-management themes could be identified. Are there certain themes that can be associated with dysfunctions such as poor communication or coordination within the organization? Are some themes associated with a more productive organization? These are important research questions that can be answered by appropriate displacement of this derivative from the concept of culture.

A final important point about cultural analysis of organizations is that it need not develop into another analytical approach that goes its own way and fails to contribute to a unification of organization theory. There are indications that this currently is happening, but it need not. There are many ways in which traditional concerns of organizational theory can be addressed by a cultural approach as well as by a sociological, macro approach or a psychological, micro approach. In fact, a cultural perspective may provide the necessary linkage between traditional macro and micro analyses of organizations. The driver supervisors in the example can illustrate this linking potential of cultural analysis. This is a classic case of the problems of first line supervision. These driver supervisors had responsibility, but

no authority. It also provides an example of handling superior-subordinate conflict (a micro perspective) and the structure of relationships between hierarchical levels, both upward and downward (a macro perspective). The mediating cultural theme also operated in this organization to handle power relationships (a micro or macro perspective) and coordination between departments such as operations and maintenance (a macro perspective). This analysis could be expanded into a discussion of organizational communications, both overt and symbolic. In terms of other micro issues, the example of the driver supervisors could be important data to analyze the "substitutes for leadership" (Kerr & Jermier, 1978) or "vertical dyad linkage theory" (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975).

More work is needed on the concept of culture in order to find out more about the range of possible assignments of this metaphor. As the recent *Administrative Science Quarterly* special issue (1983) evidenced, such studies are finally being done, and there is a growing body of applications to analyze, compare, and evaluate. It is hoped that this interest will continue and accelerate to create the base of knowledge necessary for the development of a true cultural theory of organization and of organizations.

References

Agar, M. Themes revisited: Some problems in cognitive anthropology . *Discourse Processes*, 1979, 2(1), 11-31.

Barley, S. R. Semiotics and the study of occupational and organizational cultures. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983, 28, 393-413.

Cohen, M.D., March, J. C., & Olsen, J. P. A garbage can model of organizational choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1972, 17, 1-25.

Daft, R. L., & Wiginton, J. C. Language and organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 1979, 4, 179-191.

Dansereau, F., Jr., Graen, G., & Haga, W. J. A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership within formal organizations: A longitudinal investigation of the role making process. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 1975, 13, 46-78.

Driggers, P. F. Theoretical blockage: A strategy for the development of organizational theory. *Sociological Quarterly*, 1977, 18(1), 143-159.

Graen, G., & Cashman, J. F. A role making model of leadership in formal organizations: A developmental approach. In J. G. Hunt & L. L. Larson (Eds.), *Leadership frontiers.* Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1975.

Haviland, W. A. *Cultural anthropology.* 4th ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983.

Hofstede, G. *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980.

Jelinek, M., Smircich, L., & Hirsch, P. Introduction: A code of many colors. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983, 28, 331-338.

Kelley, L., & Worthley, R. The role of culture in comparative management: A cross-cultural perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 1981, 24, 164-173.

Kerr, S., & Jermier, J. M. Substitutes for leadership: Their meaning and measurement. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 1978, 22, 375-403.

LeVine, R. S., & Campbell, D. T. *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes, and group behavior.* New York: Wiley, 1972.

Manning, P. K. Metaphors of the field: Varieties of organizational discourse. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1979, 24, 660-671.

Meyer, A. D. Mingling decision making metaphors. *Academy of Management Review*, 1984, 9, 6-17.

Miller, J. C. Living systems: Basic concepts. *Behavioral Science*, 1965, 10, 193-237.

Morey, N.C., & Luthans, F. An emic perspective and ethnoscience methods for organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, 1984, 9, 27-36.

Morgan, G. Paradigms, metaphors, and puzzle solving in organization theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1980, 25, 605-622.

Schon, D. A. *Displacement of concepts.* London: Tavistock, 1963.

Schwartz, H., & Davis, S. M. Matching corporate culture and business strategy. *Organizational Dynamics*, 1981, 10(1), 30-48.

Smircich, L. Concepts of culture and organizational analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983, 28, 339-358.

Smith, K. K., & Simmons, V. M. A Rumpelstiltskin organization: Metaphors on metaphors in field research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983, 28, 377-392.

Spradley, J. P. *The ethnographic interview.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979.

Spradley, J. P. *Participant observation.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980.

Spradley, J. P., & McCurdy, D. W. *Anthropology: The cultural perspective*. 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, 1980.

Van Maanen, J. The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1979, 24, 539-550.

Whorton, J. W., & Worthley, J. A. A perspective on the challenge of public management: Environmental paradox and organizational culture. *Academy of Management Review*, 1981, 6, 357-361.

Nancy C. Morey is Assistant Professor of Management in the College of Business Administration, Western Illinois University.

Fred Luthans is George Holmes Professor of Management in the College of Business Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.