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ABSTRACT

Using data from participants at a single organization, we employed a three-perspective meta-theory to move toward a more comprehensive description of organizational culture and examined how differing theoretical perspectives yield convergent, complementary, or contrary findings. Survey data (n = 124) combined with the results from 19 structured interviews indicated that employees shared consensus around some cultural values, but also suggested the existence of subcultures and general ambiguity around other cultural elements. That is, from an integrative perspective, there was clarity surrounding one set of values; from a differentiation perspective, subcultures existed; and from a fragmentation perspective, there was evidence of ambiguity and conflict regarding the meaning of some cultural manifestations. This study contributes to the literature on organizational culture enacting calls to conceptualize and examine culture from multiple perspectives and discussing the consequences. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of employing multiple methods in diagnosing organizational culture.

Ask individuals to describe their organization's culture and their responses might focus on shared values or understanding of artifacts, the presence of subcultures, and/or organizational inconsistencies. Similarly, organizational researchers employ varied definitions, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches when studying organizational culture and, in doing so, may arrive at conclusions that fail to capture the complexity of culture in organizational life (e.g., Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 1992, 2002; Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff, & West, 2017; Smircich, 1983). The search for organizational culture has led researchers and practitioners down varied paths with the hope of understanding the impact of culture on individual attitudes and behaviors, as well as organizational performance. The desire to manage, align, strengthen, and, in some instances, change organizational culture remains a challenge for many firms in part because organizational culture is a complex, multidimensional, and sometimes elusive social phenomena.

This article seeks to build upon organizational culture research by examining the culture of a single organization using multiple theoretical lenses and research methods. In doing so, this study answers the call to explore the simultaneous and sometimes competing foci of what comprises the gestalt of organizational culture (e.g., Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 1992, 2002; Schneider et al., 2017; Smircich, 1983). Additionally, this study responds to the call for organizational researchers to synthesize

research traditions by employing mixed research methods (e.g., Ashkanasy, Broadfoot, & Falkus, 2000; Ehrhart, Schneider, & Macey, 2014; Martin, 1992, 2002; Schein, 2015; Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

This research is bounded by the context of a single organization and serves as a discrete experiment (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). We do not seek to examine the relationship between an independent variable (e.g., organizational culture) and dependent variables such as satisfaction, organizational commitment, or organizational performance. Rather, this is an inductive study, designed to offer insight into a complex social process and subjective experiences that are not easily identified through quantitative data alone (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Locke, 2001). Specifically, we explore (a) the degree of consensus, differentiation, and fragmentation surrounding employees' perceptions of organizational values and other manifestations of organizational culture, (b) whether combining various theoretical lenses results in a unique and more holistic understanding of organizational culture, and (c) the degree to which a profile survey of an organizational culture and structured interviews with employees yields convergent, complementary, or contrary descriptions of organizational culture.

In order to answer these questions, we conducted an organizational culture study of a multi-office engineering firm using multiple methods. After administering a profile survey to assess individual perceptions of

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organizational values and perceived fit between individuals and their organizational cultures as a whole, we interviewed managerial and professional employees within the company. This approach allowed for a multilevel, multilocation (the company has six offices) analysis of a single organization's culture as experienced by various organizational members, providing what we believe to be novel and distinct insights into individual perceptions of organizational culture as well as implications for researchers and practitioners.

Multiple perspectives on organizational culture

Schein (1992) defines organizational culture as "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 12). Similarly, O'Reilly and Chatman (1996) define culture as "a system of shared values defining what is important, and norms, defining appropriate attitudes and behaviors, that guide members' attitudes and behaviors" (p. 160). While Schein's definition of culture focuses on shared, taken-for-granted assumptions, O'Reilly and Chatman (1996) emphasize shared values. Not all cultural researchers believe that one common organizational culture is shared across the organization (e.g., Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 1992, 2002; Meyerson & Martin, 1987), and neither do we. While there may be commonalities in the terms used by organizational members to describe the organization's culture, a shared vocabulary does not imply shared interpretation of organizational practices, policies, stories, and so on. Thus, within an organization, numerous subcultures with unique values and norms are likely to exist (e.g., Adkins & Caldwell, 2004; Martin, 1992, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Martin (1992, 2002) argued that the extent to which culture is seen as shared reflects the perspective of the researcher: that is, whether the researcher views culture from the integration, differentiation, or fragmentation perspective. The researcher's theoretical lens, whatever it is, may give way to relatively more simplistic, one-dimensional descriptive models of culture that do little to describe what individual organizational actors are actually experiencing. Thus, to capture a more nuanced and textured perspective of culture, we chose to study culture through a multidimensional theoretical lens—or, as Martin (1992) puts it, a "meta-theory"—that allows for "a holistic view of organizational life … that exists at a variety of levels and is sometimes shared collectively, sometimes shared within distinct groups, and sometimes is a source of conflict and ambiguity" (Metzler, 2005). We believe that by using a combination of cultural perspectives—integration, differentiation, and fragmentation—this more nuanced and textured perspective of culture is achievable.

Integration perspective

The integration perspective is characterized by the assumption that organizational actors have (or can have) clarity around a set of organizational values and norms and that this clarity can be directly linked to individual level and organizational outcomes (e.g., Denison, Nieminen, & Kotrba, 2014; Martin, Frost, & O'Neill, 2004; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). This clarity can be said to exist where there is behavioral consistency by organizational actors, as well as consensus among actors regarding the meaning of cultural manifestations. Characteristics of the integration perspective include a focus on leaders as cultural creators and transformers; the idea that value conflict and ambiguity are problems that need to be addressed; and the belief that organization-wide consensus and clarity increase organizational effectiveness in the form of greater employee commitment, control, productivity, and profitability. (For an expanded discussion, see Martin [1992, pp. 45–70].)

Differentiation perspective

The differentiation perspective can be conceived as the study of subcultures that, as Martin (1992) writes, "co-exist, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict, and sometimes in indifference to each other" (p. 83). Subcultures frequently emerge around functional (Sackmann, 1992), hierarchal (Riley, 1983), geographic, or occupational (Gregory, 1983; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984, 1985) lines as subgroups of members working together face common problems, situations or experiences (Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). Differentiation studies view inconsistencies between subcultures as a given state of organizational life. They view organizational culture as a collection of nested, overlapping subcultures within the boundary of an organization (Martin, 1992). In terms of organizational effectiveness, differentiation studies vary in their assumptions about the benefits of organization-wide consensus.

Fragmentation perspective

The fragmentation viewpoint rejects the idea that individuals in organizations can achieve any lasting consensus or consistency (Payne, 2000). From the fragmentation perspective, culture is characterized by

pervasive ambiguity regarding cultural meanings (Meyerson, 1991). Relationships, ideas, needs, and motives change with changes in the environment. The emphasis of the fragmentation perspective is on a web of individuals who align temporarily around specific issues or problems (Murnighan & Brass, 1991). The issue-specific focus of the fragmentation perspective is evident in the following definition of culture by Meyerson (1991):

> Members do not agree upon clear boundaries, cannot identify shared solutions, and do not reconcile contradictory beliefs and multiple identities. Yet, these members contend they belong to a culture. They share a common orientation and overarching purpose, face similar problems, and have comparable experiences. However, these shared orientations and purposes accommodate different beliefs and incommensurable technologies, these problems imply different solutions, and these experiences have multiple meanings … Thus, for at least some cultures, to dismiss the ambiguities in favor of strictly what is clear and shared is to exclude some of the most central aspects of the members' cultural experience and to ignore the essence of their cultural community. (pp. 131–132)

Meyerson's conceptualization of culture does not deny the possibility of organization-wide consensus. Everyone, for example, may agree with the value of honesty. However, the fragmentation view focuses on conflicting interpretations of the value, how the interpretation may change over time, and how it differs from individual to individual or from group to group.

Combining perspectives

If organizational cultures are multicultural (Gregory, 1983) and only rarely share a single, overarching set of beliefs, then in order to achieve a more realistic and holistic view of organizational culture, it must be viewed from multiple perspectives (e.g., Howard-Grenville, 2006; Kristof, 1996; Martin, 1992; Martin et al., 2004; Westerman & Cyr, 2004). Organizational culture can be simultaneously viewed from the integration, differentiation, and fragmentation perspectives because "any culture at any point in time will have some aspects congruent with all three perspectives" (Martin et al., 2004, p. 32). When culture is viewed from all three perspectives, a more comprehensive and, we believe, accurate understanding of culture emerges. In our study, we employ a three-perspective meta-theory to move toward a more comprehensive description of organizational culture and to examine how differing perspectives within the same organization yields convergent, complementary, or contrary findings.

Setting and methods

N-Company is an employee-owned, specialty engineering firm founded in the late 1800s and defined by a legacy of high-profile projects dating back to 1893. Considered a leader in its industry, N-Company primarily offers design, building, and structure rehabilitation and maintenance services within the transportation sector. At the time of the study, they employed 148 employees across six offices in the Eastern and Midwestern United States. The corporate headquarters was located in Ohio; however, members of the top management team were geographically dispersed. The majority of the employees were engineering professionals, many with advanced degrees. According to the chief executive officer (CEO), the nature and philosophy of the business had changed little over the years. Their goal was to build long and trusting client relationships based on their expertise and tradition of "integrity and innovation."

In examining the culture of N-Company, we employed a "hybrid" or "mid-range" methodology (Sackmann, 1992). Hybrid studies employ methods from both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms and in this case were intended to draw out culture-specific knowledge with more generalizable results (Martin, 2002). It has been suggested that hybrid studies offer insights unavailable to researchers relying exclusively on survey data (Martin, 1990), and we embrace this view. In addition, organizational cultural researchers have suggested combining research methodologies, noting that qualitative and quantitative assessment methods enable a greater understanding of cultural artifacts, behaviors, and underlying cultural values and assumptions (e.g., Ashkanasy, Broadfoot, & Falkus, 2000; Ehrhart et al., 2014; Martin, 1992, 2002; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 2015; Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

Measures

We first used a profile scale survey to capture organizational culture from an integration or shared perspective. Profile scales are designed to determine what cultural values are salient to organizational actors and the relative intensity, or strength, with which those values are held (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). Profile scales assume important characteristics of organizational culture, such as values and behavioral norms, can be viewed as properties comprising distinct variables that reflect measurable dimensions (Likert, 1967; Schein, 1990). Capturing the culture of an organization or organizational subunit by measuring values is well established in the literature (e.g., Ashkanasy, Wilderom, & Peterson, 2000; Finegan, 2000; Meglino & Ravin, 1998; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). While values do not represent the whole of

organizational culture, values act as social principles that guide behaviors and set a broad framework for organizational routines and practices (Hatch, 1993; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Furthermore, values are considered more accessible than deeply held assumptions and more reliable than artifacts (Howard, 1998).

Organizational culture was assessed using a modification of the O'Reilly et al. (1991) Organizational Culture Profile (OCP). The original version of the OCP contained 54 value statements, 26 of which loaded onto seven factors (1991). Factors included respect for people, team orientation, attention to detail, stability, innovation, outcome orientation, and aggressiveness. In addition, at the request of the organization's CEO, additional items were added to assess integrity and power orientation. The items for integrity were developed for this study based on a review of the organization's "Values and Practices" statement and in consultation with the CEO. The items included honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, keeps promises, and ensures quality. Power orientation represents the degree to which power is centralized with high formalization versus shared and loosely controlled (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000). Power orientation or the degree of managerial control is a value dimension considered critical in the organizational culture literature; so too is integrity (e.g., Detert et al., 2000; Enz, 1988; Howard, 1998; Jung et al., 2009). The items developed for power orientation included authoritarian, consultative, controlling, democratic, and participative. In total, there were 36 values, and respondents were asked to rate each value with respect to how well it described the organization's enacted values. According to Argyris and Schon (1978), researchers must be careful to distinguish between espoused values and enacted or "in-use" values. According to Martin (2002), espoused values are usually directed toward an external audience, often appear in public documents, and tend to be "abstract and somewhat platitudinous" (p. 89). As Schein (1992) explains, "a company may say that it values people and has high quality standards for its products, but its record in that regard may contradict what it says" (p. 21). Enacted or "in use" values tend to be inferred inductively by organizational actors and are what Schein (1992) refers to as basic assumptions. Participants were asked to respond to each item using a seven-point rating scale from (1) *very uncharacteristic* to (7) *extremely characteristic*. Given the social desirability effects associated with normative ratings of values (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987), using a Likert-type scale with increased gradation at the upper end is recommended (Kristof, 1996). Gradation represents varying the degree of agreement or disagreement from the neutral response point (neither agree nor disagree). In this study, we increased the positive gradation, thus allowing respondents to discriminate more finely between positive responses. The response options were as follows: (1) *very uncharacteristic*, (2) *uncharacteristic*, (3) *neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic*, (4) *slightly characteristic*, (5) *characteristic*, (6) *very characteristic*, and (7) *extremely characteristic*.

We assessed employee fit with the organizational culture (person–organization [PO] fit) using a direct measure of perceived fit. While some researchers argue that PO fit is an empirical relationship (e.g., difference scores, interactions, polynomial regression) between separate assessments of individual and organizational values (Kristof, 1996), others argue that perceived PO fit is a more proximal determinate of behavior and is thus a better predictor of people's choices than actual congruence (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Cable & Judge, 1996; Enz, 1988; Judge & Cable, 1997; Kristof, 1996; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001). Perceived PO fit was assessed using Cable and DeRue's (2002) measure: "The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values," "My personal values match my organization's values and culture," and "My organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life." Participants were asked to respond to each item using a 7-point rating scale from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. The measure of perceived fit provided us with a general, overall assessment of how well individuals believed their values corresponded with those of the organization.

Requests to participate in the study were sent via company e-mail to all 148 current employees of the organization. The materials sent to employees consisted of a cover letter and a two-page electronic questionnaire. Employees were given the option of completing the electronic form and returning it to the lead author's university e-mail account or printing the completed survey, placing it in a standard-size envelope, and returning it via post. To increase participation, the president and CEO of the company sent an introductory memo to the employees assuring participant anonymity and encouraging completion of the survey. Overall, 127 responses were received, a response rate of 85%. Of the responses received, three were eliminated because of excessive missing data. The total number of usable responses was 124 (84% response rate). The high level of participation suggested little if any respondent bias (see Table 1 for a comparison of characteristics of participants within the sample versus those of the company as a whole).

In the second phase of the study, we examined employees' perceptions of organizational culture using

Table 1. Sample and company population characteristics.

Characteristic	Sample population	Company population
Male	82%	77%
Female	18%	23%
Single	23%	25%
Married	74%	75%
Tenure: 0–5 years	26%	28%
Tenure: 5–10 years	23%	23%
Tenure: 10–20 years	19%	20%
Tenure: 20+ years	28%	29%
Job: principals	7%	6%
Job: management	19%	14%
Job: engineer/professional	48%	46%
Job: technician	15%	18%
Job: clerical	9%	16%

Note. n = 124.

structured, issue-focused interviews. Issue-focused interviews were used in an attempt to elicit a deeper understanding of individual perceptions of organizational culture, as well as to identify cultural artifacts, behaviors, and underlying cultural values and assumptions. Issue-focused interviews, when conducted with employees from a range of differing functions and a number of different levels of responsibility, offer insight into variations in perceptions of culture and experiences (McKinley & Starkey, 1988) and are a means of eliciting culture-specific knowledge that can be compared across individuals (Sackmann, 1992). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) suggest conducting interviews with "numerous and highly knowledgeable informants who view the focal phenomena from diverse perspectives" (p. 28).

In conducting our interviews, we followed the protocol outlined by McKinley and Starkey (1988), interviewing employees from a range of functional backgrounds and of different levels of responsibility. Specifically, the interviews were conducted with a selection of men and women in managerial and nonmanagerial positions at six office locations. Informants were chosen nonrandomly based on a discussion with the CEO, applying the informant selection criteria of Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007). While it cannot be assumed that the selection of informants was unbiased, the procedure for selection followed that suggested by Hofstede (1998). Participants included, in all cases, the unit manager and a combination of employees from each of the six offices. Interviewees varied in tenure, gender, and position. At least two interviews were conducted with employees from each of the six offices. Nineteen interviews were conducted in all.

The questions used for the interviews were based on a review of the literature and were intended to elicit employee perceptions of cultural manifestations such as organizational values and symbols. Symbols encompassed cultural forms (such as rituals, organizational stories, jargon, humor, and physical arrangements),

formal practices, and informal practices (Martin, 2002). In order to assess culture in this phase of the study, participants were asked, for example, to name their organization's three most important values, to provide stories or events that illustrated their organization's values, and to share their thoughts on formal statements of their organization's espoused values (mission statement, etc.), how their office was or was not different in its approach to work than other offices, and how well they fit within the culture of the organization and that of their office. In total, 17 questions were included in the interview. Interviews were transcribed, identifying information was removed, and then material was sorted by content. When sorting, answers to specific questions were less important than the specific content of the answer itself.

Survey results

Of the employees who responded to the survey, 18% were female, 23% indicated they were single, 74% married, and 3% did not respond. Twenty-six percent of respondents had worked for the organization for 0–5 years, 23% had 5–10 years of service, 19% had 10–20 years of service, and 28% had at least 20 years of service. Five individuals (4%) did not provide tenure information. Office location was reported in 98% of the surveys received (two individuals did not respond). Seven percent reported being members of the top management team. Nineteen percent identified themselves as members of management (associates, senior associates, or department/ office managers), 48% as engineers or other degreed professionals, 15% technicians, and 9% clerical. Seven percent had earned doctoral degrees, 24% master's, 45% bachelor's degrees, 11% attended technical school, and 8% had no more than high school diplomas. Five individuals did not list educational information.

Value measures

The factor structure of the organizational value measure was explored using principal component factor analysis. Principal component factor analysis was chosen because the previous factor structure found by O'Reilly et al. (1991) was not assumed to be present for the organization being studied. While similar values may be found across different organizations, values unique to each organization may exist. Of the original 36 organizational values included in our modified OCP instrument, 26 values loaded onto six factors. The

criterion for determining whether an item was salient to a factor was based on Floyd and Widaman's (1995) recommendations that factor loadings should be considered primary when exceeding .30 or .40 in an exploratory factor analysis. In Table 2, factors with loadings of at least .4 on the intended factor and no cross loadings of more than .4 on any other factor are included (Norusis, 1990). The values that loaded on the first factor, people oriented, team oriented, and works collaboratively, was labeled *team oriented* (α = .85). The second factor, labeled *integrity*, consisted of the values fairness, honesty, integrity, keeps promises, and trustworthiness (α = .93). The third factor, *innovative*, included the items risk taking, innovation, experimentation, and takes advantage of opportunities (α = .84). *Outcome oriented* consisted of the values achievement oriented, action oriented, aggressive, competitive, high performance expectations, and results oriented (α = .88). *Detailed oriented* included the values analytical, careful, consultative, detail oriented, precise, and quality orientated (α = .86). The sixth factor, labeled *authoritarian*, included the values authoritarian and controlling (α = .73).

While none of the mean scores indicated values that were either uncharacteristic (2 = *uncharacteristic*) or very uncharacteristic (1 = *very uncharacteristic*) of the organization, *innovative* had a mean score of 3.9 and *authoritarian* had a mean score of 4.1, indicating that employees, on average, viewed these values neutrally (as neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic of the organization). None of the mean scores exceeded 6.0

Table 2. Derived organizational culture values.

Factor	Items	Factor loading
Detail oriented	Detail oriented	.71
	Precise	.70
	Consultative	.64
	Quality orientated	.63
	Analytical	.62
	Careful	.57
Integrity	Honesty	.84
	Integrity	.78
	Fairness	.71
	Keeps promises	.70
	Trustworthy	.67
Outcome Oriented	Results oriented	.75
	Aggressive	.70
	Achievement oriented	.62
	Action oriented	.60
	Competitive	.59
	High performance expectations	.44
Team Oriented	Team oriented	.75
	Works collaboratively	.69
	People oriented	.54
Authoritarian	Authoritarian	.79
	Controlling	.78
Innovative	Risk taking	.80
	Experimental	.77
	Takes advantage of opportunities	.73
	Innovation	.68

Table 3. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Number of items	Alpha
Perceived fit	124	5.1774	1.20499	3	.93
Organization values					
Team oriented	124	4.6210	1.21963	3	.85
Outcome oriented	124	4.8884	1.01295	6	.88
Integrity	124	5.5565	1.02475	5	.93
Innovative	124	3.9073	1.16847	4	.84
Detail oriented	124	5.6048	.83414	6	.86
Authoritarian	124	4.1371	1.33182	2	.72

(6 = *very characteristic of the organization*). Two values, *detail oriented* and *integrity* had means scores above 5.0 (5 = *characteristic of the organization*). The mean scores of the remaining two values indicated that *outcome orientation* and *team orientation* were slightly characteristic of the organization.

Perceived fit

The mean score for perceived fit with the organizational culture was 5.1 (α = 0.93). This indicated that employees on average experienced some degree of fit with the organizational culture (5 = *slightly agree*). Descriptive statistics for perceived fit and the organizational values are presented in Table 3.

Interview results

In the second phase of the study, structured interviews were conducted with 22 employees at the organization; however, three interviews were not included in this analysis due to substantial missing data. Of the 19 interviewees from which this analysis was conducted, nine worked at the main office, which employed approximately 100 people. The remaining 10 interviewees worked at one of the firm's five other offices, two employees from each. Nine members of senior management and 10 non-management employees were interviewed. Both a managerial employee and a nonmanagerial employee were interviewed at each of the five satellite offices. Interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone. Responses were transcribed and read to the interviewee to ensure accuracy. In some instances, comments were paraphrased to the interviewees' satisfaction. As in the questionnaire phase of data collection, participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential.

Content analysis

Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts. In this instance, the transcripts from the interviews were the texts analyzed. Statements made by

interviewees were examined and grouped into categories corresponding to the value dimensions derived from the organizational profile survey. Statements indicating cultural values that did not fall into any of the predetermined categories were assigned to the "other" category. In total, 50 statements indicating cultural values of some kind were identified and placed in one of seven categories.

In "saturating" the value categories (Martin & Turner, 1986), we relied on the answers to the first three open-ended questions: "What do you feel are your organization's three most important values?," "Can you think of a story or incident where you saw that value in operation?," and "What types of practices/rules/procedures reinforce those values?" Not all of the participants identified three values; however, for each value identified either a story, an incident, or a practice was described. We examined each identified value in light of the corresponding story, incident, or practice. Doing so helped us to determine into which category the values belonged. For example, one individual responded that technical competency was a primary value of the company. However, his example of a practice that reinforced the value suggested that technical competency should be placed in the detail-oriented category.

> Well, there's a level of expectation that your work will be done with accuracy and there's a process in place that ensures quality by review. There's also an ongoing dialog among the individuals involved in the project.

Results from the content analysis showed some convergence with the results from the survey portion of the study. The organizational values with the highest mean scores derived from the questionnaire were detail oriented and integrity. These were also the most frequently mentioned values from the interviewing phase of the research. Of the six values identified using the survey data, innovative had the lowest mean score (3.9). None of the employees interviewed identified innovative as one of the organization's three most important values. Table 4 shows the values that emerged from the responses to the first three interview questions, their frequency, and the corresponding value category.

Integration, differentiation, and fragmentation

In analyzing the answers from the open-ended questions for evidence of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation, respondents' answers to the interview questions were examined in a two-stage process. First, two coders independently transcribed each specific substantive response on an index card. Next, the

Table 4. Frequencies for values derived from interviews.

Category	Values	Frequency
Detail oriented	Quality product/service	19
	Quality employees	
	Technical competency	
	Analytical	
	Careful	
	Meticulous	
	Attention to detail	
	Accuracy	
	Expertise	
	Pride in our work	
	Passion for the work	
	Doing things correctly	
	Respect for clients	
	Commitment to our clients	
	Client satisfaction	
Integrity	Integrity	15
	Honesty	
	Trustworthy	
	Ethical	
	Financial accountability to our clients	
	Fairness	
Outcome oriented	Competitiveness	5
	Aggressiveness	
	Ambitious	
	Do what it takes to get the job out the door	
	Work through the night	
Team oriented	Respect for the individual	5
	Family environment	
	Friendly environment	
	Doing things to keep moral high	
	Employment security	
Authoritarian	Authoritarian	1
Innovative		0
Other	Longevity/seniority	5
	Staying independent	
	Commonsense approach to engineering	
	Practical solutions to complex problems	

statements (index cards) were assigned to three predetermined categories representing the three cultural perspectives. Agreement between the two independent coders was used as the criterion for retaining the statements in a category.

Following Martin (1992), statements from the integration, differentiation, and fragmentation perspectives are presented using a matrix approach. The first matrix (Table 5), representing the integration perspective, presents quotations from cultural members that appear to reflect the values and opinions of the top leadership. The second matrix (Table 6) presents statements representative of the differentiation perspective and includes quotations that acknowledge the presence of subcultures. The third matrix (Table 7) represents the fragmentation perspective and focuses on inconsistencies or the absence of consensus. We included only representative statements in these tables and not all statements made during the interviews.

Integration

From an integration perspective, cultural manifestations are said to be consistent with management's espoused values, little dissent is evident, and there is little mention of ambiguity (Martin, 1992). Statements classified under

Table 5. An integration perspective.

Values	Quotations
Detail oriented	"We are good at checking things before they go out of here." "We've always insisted that our basic practice and procedure is to do the best job possible." "There's a level of expectation and a process in place that ensures quality, plus and ongoing dialogue among team members." "When we discuss projects with the staff, we ask for proficiency. We expect them to do a really fine job and to think things through." "Quality takes precedence over everything." "Nothing gets completed without having it checked in detail by a PE (professional engineer), project manager, a principal, or a peer that's adequately informed on the subject."
Integrity	"We tell our employees and customers the truth—even if that means admitting we're wrong." "There have been times when we returned money to our clients." "From my perspective, we certainly seem to do what we say we'll do." "We are consistently honest, and if there's an error made we will come clean." "If we can save the client money, we do so and don't just bill the project for the allowed amount." "Our concern for our clients supersedes our concern for profit." "We don't accept anything less than ethical behavior towards our clients and staff." "As a rule we charge only for the work we do versus the amount of time estimated to do the work."
Outcome oriented	"We do everything we can to give our client a standard of care that exceeds that of the industry." "The CEO imposes more stringent criteria than what is required by our clients." "We always go the extra mile to meet a deadline and more than once we've worked around the clock and had midnight pizza parties." "We've always insisted that our basic practice and procedure is to do the best job possible."
Team oriented	"We do what's best for the employee even if it's not best for the business." "We have a reluctance to let people go—whether it is for lack of work or poor performance." "I was given the trust and support I needed when I was promoted." "I made a design error and I was told not to worry about it. The company was very loyal and supportive. We admitted the mistake and moved on." "We celebrate people's milestones, both personal and professional." "I feel a great amount of loyalty to the firm and feel that I have always been treated fairly." "Some companies would have unloaded people during a slack time like we're currently in, but we are trying to keep full employment even if it means that the owners won't make money."
Authoritarian	
Innovative	

Table 6. A differentiation perspective.

Values	Quotations
Detail oriented	
Integrity	
Outcome oriented	
Team oriented	"The office in Ohio functions as a barrier to communication."
Authoritarian	"The larger offices seem more formal while we are more laid back and personable."
Innovative	
Subcultures	"Some offices appear to be exempt from standard operating procedures." "I don't see an organizational culture. I see us as a collection of satellite offices that resist being systematic and corporate." "The management committee may vote on a decision, but Florida does what it wants." "We're a bunch of different companies with the same name." "My local office is most important to me. We operate separately from the rest of the organization." "I feel like we are a bunch of step-children. We all have a different mother and Dad doesn't come around much." "Our organization is a collection of six different fiefdoms; however there are three overarching values present in every office: loyalty to the employee, commitment to the client, and being trustworthy." "The comment has been made that what's in the staff manual, only pertains to Ohio." "We have some general overarching cultural values but we are more of a collection of subcultures." "I don't agree with the idea that the culture of the Ohio office is the default organizational culture."

integration reflected the espoused values of management, behavioral consistency by organizational actors, and consensus among actors regarding the meaning of cultural artifacts. The value around which there was the greatest consensus was *detail oriented*. For example, one employee stated, "Nothing gets completed without having it checked in detail by a PE (professional engineer), project manager, a principal, or a peer that's adequately informed on the subject." There was also a high degree of consensus on integrity as an overarching value. One employee stated, "We tell our employees and customers the truth—even if that means admitting we're wrong." Some statements were found to support the values outcome oriented

and team orientation. No statements supporting innovative and authoritarian as shared values were identified.

Differentiation

The differentiation perspective presumes the existence of subcultures that, as Martin (1992) writes, "co-exist, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict, and sometimes in indifference to each other" (p. 83). Differentiation studies focus on the group, rather than on the entire organization. In the interview phase, participants were asked, "How does the culture of your office differ from the culture of the organization as a whole?" and "How does your office differ from the

Table 7. A fragmentation perspective.

Values	Quotations
Detail oriented	"I understand the way it's supposed to work, but the way it actually works is different. What happens is that work goes out and we end up back checking."
	"Some jobs go out of here and they're not checked as thoroughly as they should have been. It has a lot to do with time constraints."
	"There's a fine line between over engineering and doing excellent work. We cross that line too often."
Integrity	"I don't think our smaller clients get the same level of attention as our bigger clients."
Outcome oriented	"We don't really have a metric for measuring performance."
Concern for employees	"Employees are not treated fairly or equally. Expectations for employees differ vastly but without compensation."
	"We're less stringent with our older employees than we are with our younger employees."
	"Sometimes we're too demanding, too focused, too crisp with employees and that may impinge on their feeling of being respected."
	"We have a performance appraisal process in place but we don't hold supervisors responsible for completing the appraisals."
	"Management doesn't seem interested in my professional development, just my skill set."
Authoritarian	
Innovative	
Individual-based perspective	"There's a tendency to establish rules, but not a willingness to follow-up and confront rule breakers."
	"A lot of people complain about the pay and about the management."
	"I think the people out front (top management) are unaware of what's going on."
	"There's a joke around here that the reason why the office is so quiet is because we don't want to wake up the people who are sleeping."

other offices?" They were also asked, "What's more important to you, the culture of your local office or the culture of the whole organization?" Responses reflected some evidence of differentiation. For example, some employees saw a difference between the offices in terms of formality and access to management. One employee stated, "The larger offices seem more formal while we are more laid back and personable." Another employee expressed the opinion that the organization is best characterized as a collection of subcultures. "I feel like we are a bunch of step-children. We all have a different mother and Dad doesn't come around much." Similarly, an employee from another office stated, "Our organization is a collection of six different fiefdoms; however, there are three overarching values present in every office: loyalty to the employee, commitment to the client, and being trustworthy." These data suggest the existence of subcultures within N-Company, and thus cultural differentiation around some values.

Fragmentation

The fragmentation viewpoint focuses on ambiguity and conflict. Martin and colleagues (2004) defines ambiguity as including "irony, paradox, and irreconcilable contradictions, as well as multiple meanings" (p. 17). While the integration perspective focuses on consistency, consensus, and clarity, the fragmentation perspective looks for unexplained inconsistencies, multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations of cultural manifestations, and issue- versus value-specific consensus among individuals (Martin et al., 2004). For example, the performance evaluation process was seen as being inconsistently administered. One employee commented, "We have a performance appraisal process

in place, but we don't hold supervisors responsible for completing the appraisals."

Another example of fragmentation was in regard to the inconsistency in how clients were treated. One employee stated, "I don't think our smaller clients get the same level of attention as our bigger clients." Interviewees also noticed inconsistencies in how employees were treated. One participant said, "Employees are not treated fairly or equally. Expectations for employees differ vastly but without compensation." According to Martin and colleagues (2004), ambiguity need not only manifest itself in policies and practices. Ambiguity can also be found in the interpretation of cultural symbols (stories, rituals, and humor). One employee told a story of working "around the clock" to meet a deadline while another employee said, "There's a joke around here that the reason why the office is so quiet is because we don't want to wake up the people who are sleeping." Contradictions of this nature are inherent cultural phenomena, and, according to Meyerson (1991), should be examined when studying organizational culture; otherwise, an illusion of cultural clarity may emerge from the study of an organizational culture.

Much of the evidence for fragmentation was in response to the question "Do you see a difference between formal policy and informal practice?" Of the 17 interviewed participants who responded affirmatively to the question, 10 cited an example of some discrepancy, such as differences in how employees are treated, or the perception that some offices are exempt from standard operating procedures. There appears to be no pattern based on office or employee status for those who espoused these beliefs. The absence of a pattern suggests a fragmented perception of culture,

which is to say that culture manifests itself uniquely from the perspective of each participant.

The interview data showed values around which there was consensus, as well as tension or disagreement. For example, one employee described the organization as friendly and casual, while another described a lack of cohesiveness and the need for more "after work activities" to encourage employee socialization. In describing the organization, one employee explained, "Decisions are made and sent down the organization without any input or feedback from those lower on the organizational chart." In contrast, another employee stated that even though new to the organization, she felt empowered to contribute to projects in meaningful ways and respected by her managers for her expertise.

Discussion

Results from our survey data suggested the presence of six organizational values. Organizational members agreed that two of the six—detail oriented and integrity—were characteristic of their firm. Outcome oriented and team oriented somewhat described the organizational culture of the firm. Individuals were ambivalent about the remaining two values—innovative and authoritarian—regarding how well the values described the culture of the firm. Innovative was an espoused valued of the firm; however, neither the survey data nor interview data indicated that employees perceived innovative as an enacted or in-use value at N-Company. On average, organizational members felt some degree of fit with the cultural values of the organization.

A content analysis of interview data substantiated these conclusions. Nineteen statements by interviewees highlighted the importance of detail orientation and 15 statements focused on integrity in the lived experience of culture within the firm. Outcome orientation and team orientation were also emphasized by interviewees when asked to describe the organization's values. Furthermore, authoritarianism was only mentioned once relative to differences in formal practices among offices, and innovative was not mentioned at all.

Martin (1992, 2002) has argued that when a researcher adopts an integration perspective to studying culture, results generally show clarity around a set of organizational values, and that from this clarity researchers conclude behavioral consistency by organizational actors and consensus regarding the meaning of cultural artifacts. Digested through this lens, Martin's words seemed more prophecy than observation; the results of both our survey data and interview data are fulfillment of that prophecy. In fact, Martin and colleagues (2004) argued that defining and measuring culture from an integration perspective create a kind of tautology because "evidence that is not congruent is ignored or dismissed as not part of the culture or not part of a strong culture" (p. 30). Indeed, were we to stop there, it would have been easy to conclude from our results that the culture of N-Company emphasizes detail orientation, integrity, an outcome and team orientation, and ambivalence toward innovation and authoritarian leadership. However, further evidence from the interview data suggests these conclusions may be too simple.

Had our exploration of culture at N-Company ended with merely a survey of employees' values or our interviews with questions only of values that describe the culture at N-Company, we might have happily and justifiably concluded a relative cultural unity. But, when pressed, many interviewees shared their observation that N-Company's six offices did not function as a cohesive body. Interviewees offered that "some offices appear to be exempt from standard operating procedures" or "My local office is most important to me. We operate separately from the rest of the organization." Others described the organization as a "collection of . . . fiefdoms" or "a bunch of different companies with the same name," or mentioned a particular office by name, explaining how its values or behaviors were different from the others. With this evidence, we are forced to question the tidy conclusions the integrative paradigm offers. In fact, these comments suggest the presence of subcultures within N-Company, or that N-Company's organizational culture is differentiated. Differentiation studies reveal organizational inconsistency and subculture clarity (e.g., Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 1992, 2002; Meyerson & Martin, 1987), and this is what we found. Differentiation studies can also be subject to tautologies where researchers look for subculture and in doing so find subcultures (Martin, 2002; Martin et al., 2004).

Taken together, the evidence suggests value consensus (integration) and differentiated subcultures at N-Company. Organizational cultures can be described as both having a unified culture and being a collection of subcultures (e.g., Martin, 1992, 2002; Schein, 1996), and examining an organization's culture and subcultures together yields insight into a more complex picture of the corporate environment (Howard-Grenville, 2006). As Alvesson (2013) suggests, it cannot be assumed that all employees share the same views across levels of the hierarchy or that management has "attained a monopoly of the definitions of appropriate values and ideals" (p. 158). At N-Company, some offices, because of varied and complex power dynamics within the firm, may "appear to be exempt from

standard operating procedures," yet still agree that a focus on details is part of what it means to be an employee at N-Company. Indeed, not all subcultural groups are expected to be equally powerful, especially those groups with access to powerful players or those more closely connected to the centrality of organizational work (e.g., Alvesson 2013; Howard-Grenville, 2006; Kunda, 1992; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). An unequal distribution of power across office locations seemed evident based on the interview data. For example, an employee reported, "The management committee may vote on a decision, but Florida does what it wants."

When examined through the fragmentation lens, still another picture emerges. Interviewees complained about unequal treatment, and suggested different standards of quality for different clients, or a gap between the way things are "supposed to work" and "the way it actually works." These data suggest the presence of ambiguity (contradiction and confusion) and that N-Company's members may possess individually unique understandings of organizational reality, each in conflict one with another. Alvesson (2013) cautions researchers regarding the search for ambiguity, suggesting that uncertainty and even confusion are common, albeit often denied, within organizations. The fragmentation lens sees ambiguities as a central component of organizational culture. Indeed, the more closely one examines organizational life for ambiguities, the more ambiguities emerge (Alvesson, 2013; Martin et al., 2004). Employees often possess limited knowledge about happenings beyond their division or level of hierarchy; however, it is questionable whether the lack of understanding is related to culture or general confusion based on limited knowledge (Alvesson, 2013; Martin & Meyerson, 1988). Examining N-Company through a fragmentation lens alone, one might conclude a lack of any shared understanding of cultural elements; however, this conclusion, again, is too simple, as the evidence for integration and differentiation around other cultural elements is, of course, also present.

Implications

We began our study by identifying a set of shared values in order to arrive at a description or profile of the organizational culture at N-Company. We did not assume that the results of the survey captured all of the organizational culture or that our findings were generalizable to other cultures, even engineering cultures. Rather, we used the values identified as a starting point to further explore whether employees interpreted their experiences in a manner consistent with the survey results. We also sought to understand how varying the theoretical lens would shift

our understanding of organizational culture, and how combining three perspectives into a meta-theory would provide a unique and more complete picture of organizational culture. Finally, we proposed that combining multiple research methods when studying organizational culture would yield more nuanced findings. Employing a meta-theory framework provided a lens for viewing culture in all of its complexities. When a single theoretical lens is employed in diagnosing culture, a rather simple, incomplete, and untextured picture of organizational culture is manifested. Using the data from our study, a description of N-Company from an integrative perspective would look very different from that of a study completed from a differentiated perspective and still again different from a study completed from a fragmented perspective. But our study, and specifically the results from the content analysis of the interview data, indicates that all three theoretical paradigms must be employed jointly to conjure a complete picture of the organization's culture.

By varying research methodologies and altering our assumptions, we gained new insight into the culture of an organization, and these insights have implications for practice. For example, one goal of N-Company is to strengthen their employees' commitment to two values: detail orientation and trustworthiness. The results from the survey data showed that employees perceived both values reflected in the culture and practice of the organization. However, the results from interviews indicated some ambiguity and inconsistency relative to practice. These results provide management with an opportunity to deploy targeted interventions to strengthen their organizational culture.

This conclusion would not be possible were our data limited to profile survey data alone. This suggests that when managers rely on only cultural profile survey tools to understand culture, they may be missing information that informs a more nuanced understanding of their organizations. Thus, our study provides further evidence that methodological choice may bias results. As suggested by Alvesson and Gabriel (2013), "Data are inseparable from the theoretical assumptions and vocabularies that inform all work" (p. 255). We attempted to use the different types of data generated in our study to generate alternative understandings of an organizational culture. In doing so, we hoped to align our study with the call to use less formulaic research and more diverse forms of inquiry (e.g., Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). It should be noted that we do not believe that our study captured the culture of N-Company in all of its levels, depth, and complexity. We chose to examine employee perceptions of values and the practices that employees felt either reinforced or stood in contrast to those values. Other cultural manifestations may have

told another story, given that the relationship among manifestations of culture can be weak or uncertain (Alvesson, 2013). However, even this narrow operationalization of culture as values revealed the benefits of deploying multiple perspectives and multiple methods in the study of culture to clarify findings with both details and contradictions (Ehrhart et al., 2014).

Our findings further challenge the idealistic notion that culture is only a set of shared meanings, ideas, and values communicated by senior management, or that culture can be captured through quantitative methods alone (Alvesson, 2013). Rather, our study suggests that organizational culture should be understood from the perspectives of consensus, subculture differentiation, and ambiguity (Martin, 1992, 2002). We believe that researchers, educators, and organizational leaders interested in understanding, managing, or changing organizational culture should expand their conceptualization beyond those elements around which there is collective consensus, so as to develop a more complete picture of organizational culture. For example, a focus on values needs to encompass the values that are espoused and the values that are experienced (and not experienced) in the everyday organizational life of employees at different levels, in different locations, and in different occupations. If culture is to be changed, we need to understand where to direct our interventions. Do subcultures need to be aligned? Do ambiguities need to be addressed? Is the consensus around certain values intentional and desired? We add our voice to those encouraging culture researchers to employ, as we did, methods from both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms to facilitate a greater understanding of organization culture (e.g., Ashkanasy et al., 2000; Ehrhart et al., 2014; Martin, 1992, 2002; Marshall, Metters, & Pagell, 2016; Rousseau, 1990; Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

Organizational leaders need to understand that culture is dynamic and influenced by a broad range of social–organizational issues (Schneider et al., 2017). Most organizational leaders understand that culture matters; however, they often struggle with how to manage or change culture (Marshall et al., 2016). In a summary of organizational climate and culture literature appearing in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Schneider and colleagues (2017) argue that while researchers have made considerable conceptual and empirical progress with important practical applications, there remains a need to understand how culture changes over time and how organizations can implement cultural change when necessary. If culture is narrowly conceptualized as what is shared and subcultures and ambiguity are ignored, attempts to manage or change culture may be less than successful.

Finally, we encourage those tasked with teaching management to abandon simplistic conceptualizations of culture and replace them with conversations about the messy realities of organizational life; to ask questions about why certain values may or may not be relevant to different organizational members; to move beyond founder and leader influence in discussing the factors that influence organizational culture; and to acknowledge diversified subgroups and ambiguity as integral elements of culture.

Limitations

Due to the unique nature of an organization's culture, we do not assume the findings to be generalizable to other firms. This study provides a snapshot—a picture of a single firm at a single moment in time—but we believe this snapshot illustrates the benefits of examining organizational culture from multiple perspectives using multiple methods. The quantitative portion of the study was designed to elicit an organizational culture profile suitable for estimating prevalent values in N-Company at a single point in time. As such, these findings should not be used to describe the culture of other engineering firms. Furthermore, it would also be inappropriate to use these results to form expectations about what the culture of N-Company will look like at some other point in its history. Culture is recreated by its members daily as they reweave the webs of meaning that guide their actions (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, the construct validity of the profile scale developed from this study should be confirmed through the collection of additional data and confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, because the data on values were only recorded once, it would be difficult to infer causality between organizational culture and any outcome variables; such a conclusion would require the collection of longitudinal data. So too should the qualitative efforts be expanded to allow us to get closer to the theoretical construct of organizational culture (Siggelkow, 2007). Indeed, it matters which part of the elephant one touches when attempting to learn about the nature of an elephant—but to discover the truth, one must touch the leg, the trunk, the tail, and be able to synthesize three seemly disparate conclusions. Only then can we reach a conclusion that approaches reality.

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