

Cultural Paradigms in Management Sciences

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to present an idea for understanding cultural processes in the organizational discourse from the perspective of four paradigms in management sciences based on the concept of G. Burrell and G. Morgan.

Methodology: The author has elaborated a valuable list of structures of the scientific theory based on the respective paradigms and has compared cultural paradigms in management sciences. The methodology involves an analysis of classical and recent world literature. Nowadays there is no consensus on the definitions, types or research models of organizational culture.

Originality: In the literature on the subject we can find many, sometimes contradictory cultural research studies that require further analysis. Precisely because of the diversity and complexity of cultural issues in management sciences a multi-paradigmatic analysis is necessary. The paper presents a proposal for a pluralistic approach to the theory and methodology of cultural studies in management sciences.

Keywords: cultural paradigms, culture in management, organizational culture, comparative cultural studies.

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| Introduction

The issue of organizational culture is considered on the borderline between two discourses and many scientific disciplines. On the one hand, it is immersed in the theory of culture, which is the subject of such sciences as: cultural anthropology, sociology, social psychology, cultural studies and other humanities. On the other hand, it is also the subject of research studies in the field of management, both in terms of theory and methodology, as well as in terms of pragmatism. The consequence of this interdisciplinarity is an abundance of inspirations, as well as a multiplicity of approaches resulting in disparities and inconsistencies in many concepts of organizational culture (Sułkowski, 2009). Nowadays there is no consensus on the definition, types or research models of organizational culture. In the literature on the subject we can find many, sometimes contradictory cultural research studies that require further analysis. Precisely because of the diversity and complexity of cultural issues in management sciences a multi-paradigmatic analysis is necessary.

The purpose of this paper is to present the most important ways of understanding and researching culture in modern management sciences from the perspective of four different paradigms, which are inspired by the matrix proposed by G. Burrell and G. Morgan. The paper begins with a presentation of the concept of paradigms in management sciences, which leads to a demonstration of the different ways of theorizing based on the diversity of the paradigms. Subsequently, the paradigms of organizational culture are presented, including their epistemological and methodological implications. The research method used is an analysis of the literature on paradigms and cultural theory in modern management sciences.

| The Paradigms in Management Sciences

Management sciences are multi-paradigmatic, which means that there is no consensus between researchers as to the basic assumptions in this field of knowledge. One of the most common concepts of paradigms is the one suggested by G. Burrell and G. Morgan, which involves a division into four different approaches to social sciences, which are characteristic not only for management, but social sciences in general (Table 1).

Table 1 | Paradigms of Social Sciences

Epistemological assumptions regarding the science ideal	Preferred social orientation		
		<i>Regulation</i>	<i>Radical change</i>
	<i>Objectivity</i>	Functionalism	Radical structuralism
	<i>Subjectivity</i>	Interpretive-symbolic paradigm	Postmodernism

Source: modified based on Burrell and Morgan (1979).

The four-paradigm matrix has been described by Burrell and Morgan in a publication on organizational analysis, in which culture was the key element (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). According to them, the criteria for identifying the different paradigms are: social orientation (regulation vs. change) and cognitive assumptions (objective vs. subjective). Combining those dimensions, we can create four paradigms, the names of which I propose to modify as follows: functionalist (neopositivist-functionalist-system – NFS), radical structuralism (critical – CMS), interpretive (interpretive-symbolic – IS) and radical humanism (postmodern – POST) (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) (Table 2).

Table 2 | The Structure of Scientific Theory Based on Paradigms

Criterion	The functionalist-system paradigm	The interpretive-symbolic paradigm	The critical trend in management	Postmodernism in management
Theory Elements	1. Theorems and definitions 2. Hypotheses 3. Examples of facts 4. Variables 5. Causal relationships	1. Theoretical constructs 2. Interpretations 3. Interdependencies 4. Descriptions and studies	1. Theoretical constructs 2. Examples of facts 3. Actors and groups 2. Power structures and interests	No theory 1. Narratives 2. Discourses 3. Glossy
Theorizing results	Sequential relationships of causal variables	Interpretations of organizational actors immersed in networks of meanings	Revealing descriptions of disguised relations of power and oppression leading to action	Autopoietic discourse leading to ethical reflection
The objectivity of theory	Objectivity	Intersubjectivity	Intersubjectivity	Subjectivity
The role of the respective paradigms in management	Dominating	Increasing	Increasing	Marginal
Verification and falsification of the theory	Verificationism or falsificationism	Interpretivism and constructivism	Interpretivism or weak verificationism	Constructivism
Key theoretical notions	1. Strategy 2. Structure 3. Management functions 4. The theory of the organization	1. Language 2. Organizational culture 3. Organizational behavior	1. The man in the organization 2. Power, oppression, manipulation 3. Managerial ideology 4. Denaturalization of management	1. Textualism of the organization – rhetoric, poetry, archetypes, metaphors, paradoxes 2. The moral problems of managerism
The dominant methodology	Quantitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	None or qualitative
Attitude towards valuation	Axiological neutrality	Moderate axiological neutrality	Involved in valuation	Involved in valuation

Sources: own elaboration.

The division of paradigms suggested by Burrell and Morgan is certainly not perfect. It is only an approximate description of the main cognitive theories. It needs to be pointed out that each of the social sciences and humanities developed through many scientific schools of thought, which do not necessarily fit in this scheme. For instance, it is not at all obvious to classify the anthropological school of thought of F. Boas, the sociological school of thought of H. Blumer or the *Gestalt* school of thought of F. Perls in the field of psychology, and neither the *enactment* by K. Weick as one paradigm, namely the interpretive-symbolic one. The dependencies between the different schools of thought, the views of their founders as well as their apprentices are complicated and create a very complex, dense network of links with an irregular structure. However, if a comprehensive outlook is needed, then one has to come to terms with the loss of precision for the sake of a broader perspective. In this respect, the modified version of Burrell and Morgan's scheme seems to be quite effective cognitively.

The adopted assumption of using Burrell and Morgan's paradigms as a cognitive matrix in management sciences has its consequences. First of all, it is a fairly general approach that can be applied in several social sciences apart from management, i.e. in sociology, anthropology and psychology. This universality is an advantage, but at the same time a limitation. On the one hand, it emphasizes interdisciplinary notions. On the other hand, however, it blots out the specificity of the respective scientific disciplines.

| The Paradigms of Organizational Culture

When searching for the specificity of understanding culture based on Burrell and Morgan's paradigms, one can point out the diversity of: meanings, research methods and pragmatic methods, typologies as well as the used metaphors (Table 3).

In the neopositivist-functionalist-system paradigm an integrating approach to culture prevails, considering culture as one of the external or internal variables, which can be controlled and managed (Sułkowski, 2002; 2004). What is characteristic of this approach is the aim for coherence between the different elements of the organizational system and the fact that culture is interpreted as homogeneous, integrated and coherent with other subsystems (strategy, structure). Cultural research methodology calls for objectivity and quantification, and therefore it is dominated by the survey method. Good examples here are, on the one hand, studies of cultural dimensions, e.g. G. Hofstede, Ch. Hampden-Turner or R. Inglehart, and on the other hand, comparative studies of organizational cultures, e.g. K.S. Cameron and R.E. Quinn (2011) or G.A. Marcoulides and R.H. Heck (1993). According to the functionalist assumptions organizational culture can be improved in terms of the needs of the organization. The range of suggested methods of cultural management is rather extensive. Starting with the study of the cultural gap, i.e. the difference between the ideal and the actual cultural profile, the evolutionary change of values, norms and organizational behaviors, all the way through

Table 3 | Cultural Paradigms in Management Sciences

Criterion	The neopositivist-functional-system paradigm	The interpretive-symbolic paradigm	The critical trend in management	Postmodernism in management
The significance of culture in management	Integrity, holism, cultural cohesion	Networks of meanings, openness of interpretation, divisions and subcultures	Oppressiveness, domination, indoctrination, hidden threads of power	Relativity of interpretations, subjectivity
Culture research methods	Objectifying, quantitative, mainly surveys	Subjectivist, qualitative, mainly organizational anthropology and textual research methods	Engaged, qualitative, mainly <i>action research</i>	No research methods in the strict sense, glossy, metaphors, textualism
Methods of cultural change	Designing optimizing cultural changes	Creating and developing new cultural meanings	Implementing emancipatory changes, such as empowerment, denaturalization	No methods of change in the strict sense, deep reflection
Leading models and typologies	Based on the configuration of key values	Cultures are considered individually, generalizations are avoided	Based on the type of power exercised	No models or typologies, only metaphors
Key metaphors	Machine, organism	Text, language, language game	Prison, panopticon, the colonization of the mind	Happening, rhizome, metanarrative
Important representatives	E. Schein, G. Hofstede, Ch. Handy	G. Morgan, L. Smircich, J. van Maanen, M.J. Hatch	H. Willmott, M. Alvesson, N. Monin	G. Burrell, M.J. Hatch, B. Czarniawska
Source: own elaboration.				

to the revolutionary change associated with the rejection of the existing culture. The tools of these changes are based on acquiring knowledge about the culture with the help of surveys, as well as on shaping the culture through the actions of managers, which consist in, for example: redefining the mission, training, and structural changes as well as changes in the field of human resource management and personnel policy. The models that are usually used are the “iceberg” and the “onion” model. The most frequently used typologies by functionalists are one-dimensional typologies that categorize organizational cultures based on the following criteria: strength (strong versus weak), effectiveness (positive versus negative), innovativeness (innovative versus conservative), pragmatism (pragmatic versus bureaucratic). In these culture divisions also multi-dimensional typologies are used: Ch. Handy, G. Harrison, T.E. Deal and A. Kennedy, G. Hofstede and E. Schein.

Looking at organizational culture in terms of the interpretive-symbolic paradigm emphasizes the significance of culture in management as a community of meanings characteristic of the members of the organization. The emphasis is placed on creating communities based on mutual identification. The key components of organizational culture are: subcultures and organizational identity. The dominant approach to the organization is multiculturalism associated with a complex network of multiple identities based on differences: ethnic and national, language, religion,

profession, gender, work experience and position in the structure (Glinka, 2010). Values, norms and models in organizational culture are inherently intersubjective or subjective and arise in processes of communication and negotiation of meanings, which resemble temporary consensuses. According to the representatives of the interpretive trend culture is a rather amorphous and difficult to control phenomenon. In fact, one can hardly speak of managing culture, since it is indeterministic. The main element of the research methodology is anthropological field research as well as text analysis. The interpretive methodology is fairly widespread in the study of cultural processes in management and includes various techniques, such as: in-depth interviews (narrative, biographical), group interviews (e.g. focus groups), participatory and non-participatory observation (e.g. shadowing), reflective text analyses, in-depth case studies and many more. The common assumptions of the interpretive methodology is reflectivity and the search for meaning, i.e. striving to understand as opposed to quantification. The organization is being studied as well as its participants in the process of operation based on colloquial categories. The emphasis is placed on understanding the situation by the engaged researcher, who is involved in valuation (he is not axiologically neutral). The cognitive method is often fused with the method of implementing changes and improving the organization. Interpretivism is hardly about models or typologies, as the idea is to seek for a description of the respective cultures. Avoiding generalizations and focus on an idiographic, “thick” (emic) description means that cultures are specific and must be studied individually and in depth. Often a textual or linguistic metaphor is used, which exploits the concept of the “language-game” by L. Wittgenstein. Some of the most important researchers of culture in management that use the interpretive-symbolic approach are: G. Morgan, L. Smircich, J. van Maanen and M.J. Hatch.

Organizational culture began to be of interest to critical researchers in the 1990s as a result of the work of H. Willmott (1993). According to the assumptions of the representatives of the critical approach, organizational culture is a tool of organizational governance, which is based on “symbolic violence” and indoctrination. H. Willmott and M. Alvesson interpret organizational culture as yet another sophisticated tool of domination. The term coined by Willmott – “corporate culturism”, means an instrumental notion of culture understood as a variable that is subject to management control. The representatives of radical structuralism criticize this approach to organizational culture, indicating its manipulative and indoctrinative nature. This entails a systematic implementation of practices integrating the organization as well as the promotion of conformity in the pursuit to create a strong and thus homogeneous organizational culture. The representatives of *Critical Management Studies* (CSM) criticize the use of instrumental, manipulative and sociotechnical methods of managing culture, people, meanings, pointing out their bases that are associated with maintaining the *status quo* (Alvesson, 2002). Research methodology of organizational culture as seen from the perspective of the critical approach is characterized by an absence of axiological neutrality of the researcher, which entails not only valuations but also commitment to changing the unjust order. A culture researcher should expose the instrumental and manipulative approach to culture that is dominant in management. A suggested method here is the “denaturalization” of the management discourse, i.e. discovering and challenging the

deeply rooted assumptions about the positive aspects of the functionalist approach to organizational culture (Duberley and Johnson, 2003). An example of such denaturalization could be the method of reflective and critical text analysis leading to the discovery of the hidden assumptions of the notion of management (Monin, 2004). The axiological engagement of the researcher and the process of denaturalization of the concept of organizational culture result in proposals for the implementation of emancipatory methods leading to a change of the unjust order, and thus an improvement of the situation of disadvantaged groups. Some examples of such method that are used in the critical approach are *action research* and *empowerment*. Critical researchers also use interpretive methods, such as: cultural studies, comparative analyses, discourse analyses, methods of organizational anthropology, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, methods of dramaturgy and narrative analysis. In the descriptions of organizational culture critical researchers resort to many metaphors that are supposed to reflect the oppressive and indoctrinative aspect of culture in management. The most popular metaphor is the “panopticon” used by M. Foucault and the prison metaphor used by G. Morgan (Hatch and Schultz, 1996). Other examples of the used metaphors include: “colonization of the mind” and “neocolonialism”. Analyses of organizational culture from the perspective of the critical approach have been conducted since two decades by researchers such as: H. Willmott, M. Alvesson, N. Monin.

Postmodernism is a very significant trend of humanistic reflection, which, however, is not all that important in terms of management sciences. The key problem of reflection for postmodernists is culture, which is typically described using a variety of metaphors (Morgan, 1997). Organization researchers rarely deal with organizational culture in the strict sense, seeing it rather as an integral part of the organization (core metaphor) or as a part of a broader cultural formation. The source of postmodernism are poststructuralist concepts, such as the earlier mentioned metaphor of culture as a panopticon (Foucault, 1995). Another well-known postmodern metaphor of culture is the “rhizome” in which the discourse emerges, develops and crosses in unpredictable ways (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972). Therefore, culture is a discourse, which means that it only exists in terms of language. Some researchers are even more radical and believe that it only exists in terms of text (Derrida and Kamuf, 1991). J.F. Lyotard believes that culture generates “metanarratives”, i.e. “great illusions”, which constitute self-referential and contingent stories circulating in an unpredictable way in texts and social communication (Lyotard, 1983). Also modern science is such a metanarrative, which postmodernists refer to in a very skeptical way and consider it to be part of culture. Postmodernism, in its criticism of epistemological fundamentalism, refers to critical philosophers of science as well as sociologists of knowledge. M. Polanyi believes that the emotional, impersonal ideal of rational knowledge should be replaced by a post-critical philosophy. The source of personal knowledge, in terms of this culturalist perspective, is intellectual passion, tacit knowledge, irony and a common language. Liberation from the obsession with objectivity is supposed to force a person to accept full responsibility for beliefs and contribute to the enrichment of ethical knowledge. P. Feyerabend criticizes the neo-imperialism of modern science, indicating that it has colonized other areas of culture, such as religion and ethics (Feyerabend, 1993). The representatives of the Edinburgh school of thought, following the

trail of submission of science to culture, considered scientific research to be a social process and they tried to interpret the emergence of theories in basic sciences in terms of the social world. In postmodernism one can hardly speak of a research methodology in the strict sense, because it is a formation of thought, which by definition is anti-systemic, anti-theoretical, and the radical version even anti-scientific. A proposition for discourse analysis is the deconstruction suggested by J. Derrida. In postmodernism, as well as in management, often metaphors, paradoxes (Perechuda, 1999) and archetypes of the organization are used (Kostera, 2010; Krupski, 2000; Perechuda, 2000). A few of the authors using postmodern ideas when referring to cultural processes in management are: G. Morgan, G. Burrell, M.J. Hatch, S. Clegg, B. Czarniawska, M. Kostera, J.L. Krzyżanowski (Morgan, 1997; Hatch, 1996; Krzyżanowski, 1999). Nowadays, it seems that the postmodern perspective of understanding culture is no longer as popular in management worldwide as it seemed at the turn of the century, when the number of publications kept within the postmodern discourse was clearly still growing. Nevertheless, there are still quite a few researchers that clearly believe the perspective of postmodernism developing in management to be the most promising one (Godwyn and Gittell, 2011).

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