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THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Schein's (1985) model of organizational culture as assumptions, values, and artifacts leaves gaps regarding the appreciation of organizational culture as symbols and processes. This article examines these gaps and suggests a new model that combines Schein's theory with ideas drawn from symbolic-interpretive perspectives. The new model, called cultural dynamics, articulates the processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation and provides a framework within which to discuss the dynamism of organizational cultures. Implications of the cultural dynamics model for collecting and analyzing culture data and for future theoretical development are presented.

The concept of culture has been central to anthropology and folklore studies for over a century. Practitioners of these disciplines have produced an enormous body of literature, and during the 1940s and 50s some of their research dealt directly with the customs and traditions of work organizations (e.g., Chapple, 1941, 1943; Dalton, 1959; Messenger, 1978; Roy, 1952, 1954, 1960; Whyte, 1948, 1951, 1961). This trend was paralleled in sociology by Jacques (1951), among others, who wrote about the culture of the factory. Although organizational culture studies began to appear around the early 1970s (Clark, 1972; Pettigrew, 1973; Trice, Belasco, & Alutto, 1969; Turner, 1973), it was not until the 1980s that management scholars widely adopted the culture concept (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa, & Associates, 1985; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Sathe, 1985). In this regard, Schein (1981, 1983, 1984, 1985) was especially influential because he, more than the others (including anthropologists and folklorists), articulated a conceptual framework for analyzing and intervening in the culture of organizations.

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Since the establishment of the organizational culture construct, some organizational researchers have applied ideas directly from Schein (Pedersen, 1991; Pedersen & Sørensen, 1989; Phillips, 1990; Schultz, *In press*), whereas others have challenged his approach. For example, subculture researchers have disputed Schein's assumption that organizational cultures are unitary (Barley, 1983; Borum & Pedersen, 1992; Gregory, 1983; Louis, 1983; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Riley, 1983; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985; Young, 1989). Other researchers, noting the apparent ambivalence and ambiguity found in culture, have contested the idea that the function of culture is to maintain social structure (Feldman, 1991; Martin, 1992; Meyerson, 1991a, 1991b; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Still others, working under the broad label of symbolic-interpretive research, have pursued perspectives that Schein ignored. The symbolic-interpretivists generally follow traditions established by Berger and Luckmann (1966) or Schutz (1970), focusing on symbols and symbolic behavior in organizations and interpreting these phenomena in a variety of ways (e.g., Alvesson, 1987; Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Broms & Gahmberg, 1983; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988, 1992; Eisenberg & Riley, 1988; Kreiner, 1989; Pettigrew, 1979; Putnam, 1983; Rosen, 1985; Smircich, 1983; Smircich & Morgan, 1983; Turner, 1986; Wilkins, 1978). However, in spite of all these approaches to understanding organizational culture (for an overview see compendiums edited by Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985, 1991; Gagliardi, 1990; Jones, Moore, & Snyder, 1988; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983; Turner, 1990), Schein's formulation remains one of the only conceptual models ever offered.

Although arguments against conceptual models of organizational culture have been made on the grounds that they oversimplify complex phenomena, such models serve an important role in guiding empirical research and generating theory. I argue that Schein's model continues to have relevance, but it would be more useful if it were combined with ideas drawn from symbolic-interpretive perspectives. More important, I introduce dynamism into organizational culture theory by reformulating Schein's original model in processual terms. Four processes are examined: manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation. These processes are defined and presented in a new model called cultural dynamics.

Two of the processes included in the cultural dynamics model are widely recognized and have appeared in theories of organization before: Realization is part of Weick's (1979) enactment theory, and interpretation is a focal concern of symbolic-interpretive research. I will review and extend these ideas to the cultural dynamics model. Manifestation and symbolization processes, however, are relative newcomers and are proposed here to further specify organizational cultural theory. In introducing and examining these processes, my intent is to engage in theory building and to invite additional exploration and interpretation with the potential to redirect empirical research in organizational culture studies.

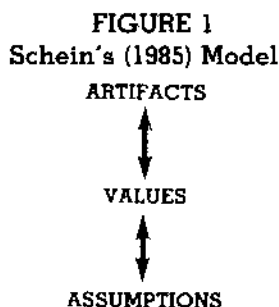
SCHEIN'S MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

According to Schein, culture exists simultaneously on three levels: On the surface are artifacts, underneath artifacts lie values, and at the core are basic assumptions (Figure 1). Assumptions represent taken-for-granted beliefs about reality and human nature. *Values* are social principles, philosophies, goals, and standards considered to have intrinsic worth. *Artifacts* are the visible, tangible, and audible results of activity grounded in values and assumptions. In Schein's (1985: 9) words culture is

[t]he pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have 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 these problems.

Schein claimed that basic assumptions hold the key to understanding (and changing) a culture. Recently he argued that assumptions are best examined using clinical techniques and recommended that a "motivated group of insiders" raise its own assumptions to consciousness with the aid of a clinically trained helper/consultant (Schein, 1987, 1991; see also Finney & Mitroff, 1986). However, researchers who want to pursue culture beyond this inner circle may find the clinical approach unworkable. Schein's model has value for nonclinical studies, but the underspecification of his theory hampers these applications. In particular, the usefulness of his model depends upon identifying the links among a culture's artifacts, values, and assumptions—links that Schein has not explained but that are the central topic of this article.

Although Schein has not discussed cultural dynamics in the terms used here, he has written about dynamics as group learning. He claimed that a founder's beliefs and values are taught to new members and, if validated by success (e.g., organizational survival instead of failure), undergo cognitive transformation into assumptions (Schein, 1983, 1985, 1991). Schein's view of dynamics differs from mine. I believe that underlying the process of leadership and socialization that Schein discusses,



culture is constituted by local processes involving both change and stability. These processes need to be explained in the mundane terms of everyday organizational life.

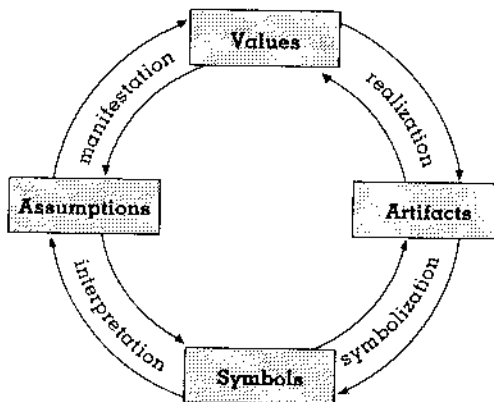
The term *cultural dynamics* originated in cultural anthropology, where it refers to such issues as the origins and evolution of cultures, enculturation processes, and the problem of change versus stability (e.g., through diffusion, innovation, cultural conservatism, and resistance to change). Thus, in borrowing the term *cultural dynamics*, and extending Schein's arguments from origins, evolution, and enculturation to the dialectic of change and stability, I follow the lead of eminent cultural anthropologists such as Redfield (1941), Kroeber (1944), Malinowski (1945), and Herskovits (1948).

THE CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATIONS

In developing the cultural dynamics perspective, I argue for two fundamental changes to Schein's model (Figure 1). First, symbols are introduced as a new element. The introduction of symbols permits the model to accommodate the influences of both Schein's theory and symbolic-interpretive perspectives. Second, the elements of culture (assumptions, values, artifacts, and symbols) are made less central so that the relationships linking them become focal. This move initiates the shift from static to dynamic conceptions of culture, whereupon I reformulate Schein's theory in terms of dynamism by describing the relationships between cultural elements as processes (see Figure 2).

The advantage of a dynamic version of organizational culture theory lies in the new questions it poses. Schein's view focuses on what artifacts and values reveal about basic assumptions. In contrast, the dynamic perspective asks: How is culture constituted by assumptions, values, artifacts, symbols, and the processes that link them? Whereas Schein ex-

FIGURE 2
The Cultural Dynamics Model



plored how culture changes or can be changed, the dynamic view recognizes both stability and change as outcomes of the same processes (cf. Herskovits, 1948). Cultural dynamics does not undermine Schein's interests; it reaches beyond them toward a more complex, process-based understanding of organizational culture.

I identified the processes of the cultural dynamics model by considering how cultural elements are related, that is, by asking what happens inside the arrows of Figure 1. According to the new model, I propose that culture is constituted by manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation processes. Although Schein (1985) used the terms *manifest* and *realized* (often interchangeably), he did not specify the definitions or the implications of manifestation and realization processes. A broader view led me to incorporate symbolic-interpretive approaches, which suggested the inclusion of symbols and the processes of symbolization and interpretation.

I should briefly explain the circularity of the cultural dynamics model (Figure 2). I could begin anywhere and move in either a clockwise or a counterclockwise direction. I will arbitrarily start with manifestation, considering both the clockwise and the counterclockwise modes of that process, and then proceed to realization, symbolization, and interpretation.¹ Such steps may lead to the conclusion that culture is the product of rather linear processes. This is not the case. The model in Figure 2 is much more dynamic: All of the processes co-occur in a continuous production and reproduction of culture in both its stable and changing forms and conditions. In other words, numerous instances of the cultural processes occur and recur more or less continuously throughout the cultural domain such that many different orders might be claimed, and I could even argue for simultaneity. Thus, none of the processes can stand on its own; each needs the perspective provided by discussion of the others to be fully transparent.

Manifestation Processes

Schein (1985) identified assumptions as the essence of culture, suggested that assumptions underlie values, and argued that humans infer their assumptions from known values. However, he did not address the active role of assumptions in constituting and reconstituting culture; consideration of the manifestation process provides this dynamic viewpoint. In general terms, *manifestation* refers to any process by which an essence

¹ Also, I have made two minor distinctions in terminology regarding the clockwise and counterclockwise modes, depending on whether these operate in the top or the bottom half of the model. In the clockwise direction, top-half modes are called proactive, whereas bottom-half modes are called prospective; in the counterclockwise direction, top-half modes are called retroactive, whereas bottom-half modes are called retrospective. Discussion of this aspect of the model is deferred until the processes have been defined and illustrations have been given.

reveals itself, usually via the senses, but also through cognition and emotion. In terms of the cultural dynamics framework, manifestation permits cultural assumptions (the essence of culture in Schein's theory) to reveal themselves in the perceptions, cognitions, and emotions of organizational members. That is, manifestation contributes to the constitution of organizational culture by translating intangible assumptions into recognizable values. This constitution occurs through the advantage that manifestation gives to certain ways of seeing, feeling, and knowing within the organization. The cultural dynamics model suggests that manifestation occurs in two ways: through those processes that proactively influence values (the arrow from assumptions to values in Figure 2) and through those processes that influence assumptions via the retroactive effects of value recognition (the arrow from values to assumptions in Figure 2).

Proactive manifestation. What organizational members assume to be true shapes what they value. This shaping occurs through the processes of proactive manifestation through which assumptions provide expectations that influence perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about the world and the organization. These perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are then experienced as reflecting the world and the organization. Members recognize among these reflections aspects they both like and dislike, and on this basis they become conscious of their values (without necessarily being conscious of the basic assumptions on which their experiences and values are based).

Consider the assumption that humans are lazy. According to the cultural dynamics perspective, this assumption produces expectations of laziness, which lead to perceptions of lazy acts. These perceptions, in combination with other manifesting assumptions, color thoughts and feelings about these acts. For instance, in an organization that assumes that success depends upon sustained effort, laziness is likely to be considered in a negative light, and perceptions of laziness along with negative thoughts and feelings about it can easily develop into a value for controlling laziness. Meanwhile, the laziness assumption also works to inhibit expectations of industrious acts (because humans are lazy, why would they act in this way?), and perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about these acts will be constrained. This inhibition suppresses a value for autonomy (because giving lazy people autonomy will almost certainly lead to little or no effort being exerted), which further supports the value for control by eliminating a potentially competing force from the value set. That is, although autonomy would be compatible with an assumption that organizational success depends upon effort, the laziness assumption interferes with an effort/autonomy value set and supports an effort/control value set.

As Schein made clear, the core of culture is a set of assumptions. On this basis, I argue that multiple assumptions engage in manifestations simultaneously, and interactively, to reveal values. As illustrated in the

example, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between particular assumptions and values, but rather assumptions are revealed in a holistic way. How then is their manifestation experienced by organizational members? Are values experienced one by one? Schein claimed that assumptions are taught to organizational members as "the correct way to perceive, think, and feel" (Schein, 1985: 9, emphasis added). This claim could imply that manifestation presents values in a more or less holistic fashion that partially reflects the gestalt of underlying assumptions.

Such a view is compatible with Schein's (1985: 15) reference to values as a "sense of what 'ought' to be, as distinct from what is." According to this definition, members who are under the influence of assumptions will notice and respond to some aspects of the organizational world more than other aspects. Their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings reveal a more or less holistic expectation, not of the organization as experienced, but of the organization "as it should be." It is important to note that "should be" can be understood either in the normative sense of "ought," or as general expectations. That is, values may be based in aspirations, or they may simply reveal what members assume is normal. In either case, values are not experienced one by one; they are experienced as a gestalt.

In his discussion of self-fulfilling prophesies as substitutes for strategy, Weick (1987) helped to clarify the proactive manifestation process with the idea of presumptions of logic. He defined *presumption of logic* as "general expectations about the orderliness of what will occur" (1987: 225). Weick claimed that order is evoked within chaotic situations by presumptions of logic that will be assumed to have structured and defined the situation from the outset. In other words, order is imposed on chaos and then discovered within it. He argued:

Most managerial situations contain gaps, discontinuities, loose ties among people and events, indeterminacies, and uncertainties. These are the gaps that managers have to bridge. It is the contention of this argument that managers first think their way across these gaps and then, having tied the elements together cognitively, actually tie them together when they act. (1987: 225)

Within cultural dynamics, the process of using general expectations to tie chaotic elements together prior to action is one aspect of the proactive manifestation process. The general expectations that make thinking across the gaps possible are grounded in cultural assumptions (e.g., about the nature of reality and the organization) and revealed as values (e.g., preferred ways of bridging the gaps). In the next step of Weick's argument, the expectations/values direct the action that actually ties the elements together, which, in the terminology of cultural dynamics, is the realization process (described in a following section).

Weick's focus is narrower than that of the cultural dynamics model. He referred only to managers rather than to all organizational members.

discussed decision making but not routine behavior, treated chaotic but not mundane situations, and considered only cognition, ignoring perception and emotion. Nonetheless, his characterization captures an important aspect of proactive manifestation. Cultural assumptions are experienced as general expectations that provide possible responses to a situation, responses that reflect and embody cultural values. Proactive manifestation is the process that generates values and expectations that are capable of organizing action and experience. The values themselves are constituted by perceptions, cognitions, and emotions activated by cultural assumptions.

Retroactive manifestation. The retroactive mode of manifestation addresses the contribution of values to assumptions (see Figure 2). This contribution consists of two possibilities: values retroactively maintain or alter existing assumptions. In retroactive maintenance, values and assumptions are harmonious, and no further processing is necessary. In this case, the alignment of assumptions and values reaffirms basic assumptions as organizational members experience an "all's right with the world" confirmation of their culture. With respect to retroactive alteration of assumptions, Schein (1985) argued that assumptions can be altered by the introduction of new values (usually by top managers) and the experience of success attributed to them. If new values provide successful outcomes, Schein argued, then their maintenance over time will lead to their being taken for granted, at which point they become part of the culture's core assumptions. What Schein did not discuss is that, in order for this to happen, the new values must be at odds with existing assumptions at the start of the process; otherwise no change would occur, and retroactive manifestation would reaffirm existing assumptions.

In the cultural dynamics perspective, once a value emerges from basic assumptions, it has a retroactive effect of reaffirming and buttressing the assumptions from which it emerged. Of course, if a value enters the cultural domain by another means (e.g., importation from another culture), culture can absorb the new value via the same retroactive manifestation processes that would ordinarily reaffirm the culture's preexisting assumptions. Because assumptions are not phenomena about which members are normally conscious, organizational members will find it difficult if not impossible to distinguish culturally based values from other values *once the values have been recognized as (or mistaken for) values of the culture*. The incorporation of new values will proceed as if they were being reaffirmed, but, instead, the presence of the new values among the old values will serve to realign the basic assumptions. However, if new values are not retroactively taken to be part of the culture, the manifestation process will ignore them.

One question remains. Because values are manifestations of cultural assumptions, where would values that are not culturally based come from? Possibilities include contact either with other cultures or with some force independent of the organizational culture, such as nonsocialized

individuals producing random variation or innovation (Herskovits, 1948; Kroeber, 1944; Malinowski, 1945). In this case, the access point is not likely to be values, but artifacts (objects, ideas, or actions realized by others), which will be discussed in the following section on retroactive realization.

Studying manifestation processes. The study of manifestation processes calls for the study of how various expectations of "how it should be" come about in organizations. The proactive question that the manifestation process puts to culture data is to explain how certain values and expectations are carved from assumptions by activating perceptions, cognitions, and emotions. A related question is: What perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are constrained in the manifestation process? For instance, Weick (1987) suggested that strategy formulation is one organizational event in which manifestation processes and their associated expectations play a significant role. Strategy formulation processes could be studied using scenarios produced by strategists to reveal the perceptions, cognitions, and emotions that define values and expectations in this situation.

Other situations (especially those involving nonmanagerial employees) should be identified and examined from a process perspective, in order to bring researchers into contact with the full range of proactive manifestation processes and the expectations that they involve. The retroactive process explains how culturally manifested values reaffirm basic assumptions and how values originating outside the culture can realign basic assumptions. Studies that focus on interventions to manage organizational culture (e.g., Kunda, 1992) hold promise for revealing the retroactive manifestation processes.

To summarize, the manifestation process constitutes expectations of "how it should be" that can be specified as a list of cultural values. Expectations, specified as values or not, can then be taken up by realization processes to serve as cultural frameworks for organizational activity (see Figure 2). Proactive manifestation is an imaginative act in which an expectation of the situation and its potential is produced via cognitions, emotions, and perceptions grounded in cultural assumptions. Retroactive manifestation updates assumptions to align with values that are actively acknowledged within the culture, a process that feeds into retrospective interpretation, which is discussed in a following section.

Realization Processes

Schein (1985) pointed out that artifacts are the most tangible aspects of culture. Cultural dynamics claims that realization brings this tangibility about. In general terms, to realize something means to make it real (i.e., not pretended or merely imagined), to bring it into being. Williams (1983: 260) described it as an act of the imagination that serves as "the means and effect of bringing something vividly to life." In terms of the cultural dynamics model, proactive realization is responsible for the transformation of values into artifacts (e.g., rites, rituals, organizational

stories, humor, and various physical objects), whereas retroactive realization has the potential to transform values and expectations by making them appear differently than they did prior to their proactive realization as artifacts. Thus, *cultural realization* is initially defined as the process of making values real by transforming expectations into social or material reality and by maintaining or altering existing values through the production of artifacts.

Proactive realization. Proactive realization is related to Weick's notion of enactment and to the concept of materialization of ideas discussed by Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1990). In terms of enactment, Weick (1987: 225) claimed that "the lesson of self-fulfilling prophecies . . . is that strong beliefs that single out and intensify consistent action can bring events into existence." Similarly, Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1990: 50-51) argued:

Not all ideas are put into action. Obviously, to be put into action an idea must be supplied by an *image of action*, a mental picture of possible action. Ideas that were unrealizable for centuries slowly acquire an action-image resulting from the changes in other ideas and in things (technology). But an image of action is not yet an action. How can it be materialized? Not by decision as an act of choice. . . . Rather, it is an act of will, prompted by positive expectations concerning the process itself . . . its results, or both. . . . The cognitive process moves, then, prompted by an act of will, towards calibrating the "image of action" into something more like a "plan of action" (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960) and then into deeds. And this last element is the one that truly deserves to be called "materialization."

The materialization argument is restricted to cognition, whereas cultural dynamics considers perceptual and emotional processes as well. Furthermore, Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges confined themselves to discussing ideas as images of action that are capable of materializing in deeds, whereas realization in the cultural dynamics model focuses on cultural expectations and values realized through action in artifacts. Nonetheless, the parallels between the arguments are clear.

Proactive realization occurs through activity that gives substance to expectations revealed by the manifestation process. That is, realization follows manifestation only if expectations and their associated values find their way into activity that has tangible outcomes. Many different activities can contribute to the realization of expectations; among them are the production of objects (e.g., company products, official reports, internal newsletters, buildings); engagement in organizational events (e.g., meetings, company picnics, award banquets, office parties); participation in discourse (e.g., formal speeches, informal conversation, joking); and importation of objects, events, and language artifacts via imitation or physical transportation of cultural objects or members of other cultures.

Although activity produces artifacts, behavior itself is not culture. As Schein (1991: 251) argued, in addition to cultural influences, "overt behavior is also influenced by local circumstances and immediate events." Not everything that happens in organizations can be explained by culture because other forces contribute to the same activities that are open to cultural influence. Thus, *proactive realization* is defined as the process wherein culturally influenced activity produces artifacts such that a given set of values or expectations receives some degree of representation in tangible forms (shown by the arrow from values to artifacts in Figure 2). The representation of the expectation in the artifact will always be imperfect as a result of noncultural influences on behavior in organizations (e.g., genetic, idiosyncratic). Therefore, activity and the artifacts an organization leaves behind are infused with cultural values but do not unequivocally indicate them. Thus, the realization process helps to explain the difficulty of analytically recovering values from a collection of artifacts.

To use the humans-are-lazy example again, an assumption that the organization is filled with laggards contributes to a value for control that enhances the likelihood that certain social and material forms will appear. For instance, time clocks, daily productivity reports, performance meetings, and visually accessible offices are acceptable ideas in a culture that values controlling laziness. Proactive realization is the process by which manifest expectations are made tangible in artifacts. From this point of view, artifacts are left in the wake of culturally influenced activity. Thus, time clocks might be installed, daily activity reports requested and filed, performance assessed, and visually accessible offices built, all as partial means of realizing the expectation of "how it should be" in an organization assumed to be filled with laggards. The time clocks, activity reports, meetings, and accessible offices are left behind to take their place amid a pool of previously realized objects, events, and discourses, the "survivals" of earlier realization processes (Herskovits, 1948; Jones, 1991; Tyler, 1958/1871).

Retroactive realization. The retroactive mode of realization addresses the post hoc contribution of artifacts to values and to expectations of "how things should be." Similar to manifestation, two distinct possibilities should be examined. In one case, artifacts realized from values and expectations maintain or reaffirm these values and expectations, whereas artifacts produced by another culture or by forces not aligned with cultural values could introduce artifacts that retroactively challenge values and expectations.

In the latter case, two more possibilities emerge. The artifacts are ignored or physically ejected (e.g., destroyed or removed) by members of the organization, or they are accepted and incorporated alongside culturally produced artifacts to reflect back on the values. If absorbed into the culture, such artifacts work retroactively to realign values as the culture adjusts to their presence. To the extent that values are realigned, assumptions may also be adjusted via retroactive manifestation processes.

Successful avant-garde works of art provide an extreme example of retroactive realization processes. At first, a new work of art that challenges accepted values is resisted or denied its place in the art world, but over time it comes to be seen in new ways that allow for its acceptance. Retroactive realization explains this as a process of value realignment with a novel artifact. The artifact, by challenging established values, fosters an alteration in the values of at least some viewers, whose appreciation diffuses until the work is accepted by a wider audience. Within business organizations, a similar effect can be observed surrounding the introduction of radical innovations, daring strategic plans, and visionary reorganizations. As with avant-garde art, these novel artifacts live or die by their ability to transform established values enough to permit their acceptance into the culture. What is essential to value realignment is that a critical mass of appreciation for a new artifact be built up so that diffusion takes hold within retroactive realization processes. Of course, grand-scale value realignment on the order of these examples is rare; retroactive realignment more typically involves less obvious readjustments. You should also remember that manifestation and realization processes do not operate in isolation; they are complemented by symbolization and interpretation processes, which are explained in following sections.

Studying realization processes. The study of realization processes calls for the study of how values and expectations are used and maintained or transformed in the course of constructing behavior that has tangible outcomes. Studies of the production, reproduction, and transformation of artifacts through the daily activities of organizations could be used to examine how values and expectations unfold. For instance, Barley (1986) used ethnographic observation in a study of the introduction of new medical diagnostic equipment in two hospital radiology departments. Following Giddens (1979), Barley examined how everyday activity produced and reproduced the institutions in which it occurred, as revealed by the introduction of new technology. Cultural dynamics suggests interpreting Barley's data as a case of cultural importation of an artifact and retroactive value adjustment based on activity surrounding the new object and the events the object occasioned. The importation itself might be analyzed as a proactive realization of cultural values.

Cultural dynamics focuses observational studies like Barley's on the artifacts of action as well as activities. For instance, proactive realization studies might focus on how values and expectations of "how it should be" penetrate rituals such as quarterly review meetings (e.g., via preparations, arrangements, and presentations made by participants). Retroactive realization could be studied by observing how language use forms a verbal-action field in which cultural expectations and values are maintained or transformed via contact with organizational artifacts such as greetings, forms of address, stories, and humor. The field of organizational folklore (Jones, 1988, 1991; Jones et al., 1988) is rich with examples

of cultural artifacts used in ways that maintain values via retroactive realization. For example, see Arora's (1988) study of the uses of proverbial speech by a university committee. Studies of introductions of artifacts from other cultures should be particularly revealing of value transformations via retroactive realization. Cook and Yanow's (1993) report of a flute manufacturing company that adopted a competitor's innovation provides an example.

In summary, the cultural significance of an artifact is not set for all time at the moment of its production or importation. True, the artifact at this moment is infused with the assumptions and values that led to its proactive realization, but these are localized in the realization processes of the producing members. Other members, who participated in the production indirectly, if at all, when exposed to the product may accept, reject, or ignore it. In any case, the product itself becomes available to a much broader interpretive process than the one that formed the context of its inception.

Symbolization Processes

Those who follow Schein typically consider symbols to be part of the more comprehensive category of artifacts; thus, all symbols are artifacts. In contrast, many symbolic-interpretive researchers, such as Tompkins (1987), claim that every artifact has symbolic significance; therefore, all artifacts are symbols. Thus, from opposing theoretical points of departure both traditions draw the same conclusion—the distinction between artifacts and symbols is unnecessary. However, others have argued that not all artifacts are symbols (Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983), and I claim that eliding the distinction between artifacts and symbols buries the process of symbolization and blurs the boundary between Schein's perspective and the perspective offered by the symbolic-interpretive approach.

Symbolic-interpretive researchers defined a *symbol* as anything that represents a conscious or an unconscious association with some wider, usually more abstract, concept or meaning (e.g., Chapple & Coon, 1942; Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980; Gioia, 1986; Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983). Gioia (1986) offered a representative list of organizational symbols: the corporate logo, slogans, stories, actions and nonactions, visual images, and metaphors. Eisenberg and Riley (1988) added organization charts, corporate architecture, rites, and rituals. Because lists of artifacts offer identical items (e.g., Ott, 1989), it would appear that symbols and artifacts are indistinguishable, and, in the static sense of their physical forms, I would agree. However, when attention is turned to the dynamics of culture, the distinction is clarified. In the dynamic view, focus shifts from concern with physical forms to the ways in which these forms are produced and used by organizational members (Ortner, 1973). As Cohen (1985: 14) argued, symbols "do more than merely stand for or represent something else . . . they also allow those who employ them to supply part of their meaning."

Borrowing Barthes' (1972) example, a bouquet of roses is given, not only as a bundle of flowers, but also as an expression of appreciation. The objective form of the symbol (the flowers) has literal meaning associated with aspects such as its smell, color, texture, and arrangement. Beyond this objective form and its literal meaning lie, for example, subjective and figurative associations that add to the bouquet's meaning. These may include past gift-giving experiences, a person's history with and appreciation for roses, the significance friends attach to the roses, and perhaps lines of verse or scenes remembered from a play. Schutz (1970: 108-109) described this added meaning as "a kind of aura surrounding the nucleus of the objective meaning."

Prospective symbolization. Ricoeur (1976) recommended comparing the full meaning of a symbol to its literal meaning and called the difference *the surplus of meaning*. The notion of surplus meaning helps explain symbolization. Once realized, an artifact is an objective form with literal meaning. Symbolization combines an artifact with meaning that reaches beyond or surrounds it. Symbolization is thus a prospective response that links an artifact's objective form and literal meaning to experiences that lie beyond the literal domain. Cassirer (1946: 8) argued that symbolization produces reality: "Symbolic forms are not imitations, but organs of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension, and as such is made visible to us." Brown (1977: 40) built on Cassirer's argument, stating that "symbolic forms give existence to what, for us [emphasis added], otherwise would not be." Tompkins (1987) made the same point.

The genesis of symbolic forms is overlooked by arguments such as Brown's and Tompkins's. The cultural dynamics model suggests that these forms arise first as artifacts, and through additional cultural processing they come to be recognized as symbolic forms by organizational members. The production of the forms that will carry symbolic meaning occurs in the realm of proactive manifestation and realization. The forms are made real by culturally influenced action, not by symbolism. Once realized, however, they become "object[s] for intellectual apprehension" via the process of symbolization (and interpretation, which is discussed in a following section). Nothing in Cassirer's argument, however, indicates that symbolic forms are equivalent to what is "real." It is a mistake to interpret Cassirer as arguing that there is no reality apart from symbolic forms; his argument is that the ability to intellectually apprehend reality is limited by a person's recognition of symbolic forms. The ability to apprehend reality in other ways, such as through physical contact (e.g., bruising your leg on a table or desk), is not limited to symbolic events.

From the cultural dynamics perspective, these ideas suggest that artifacts must be translated into symbols if they are to be apprehended as culturally significant objects, events, or discourses. Such apprehension bestows the status of recognized existence on certain forms within the

culture with the implication that, although all artifacts can be symbolized, not all will be, at least not at all times and places, for all organizational members. Berg (1985: 285–286) explained Cassirer's notion of the "agency of symbolic forms," claiming that symbolization translates physical or objective reality into symbolic reality:

The symbolic field is not "reality" as it once appeared but the collective symbolization of that reality. The symbolic field is essentially the result of an attempt to interpret experiences in one reality using objects, properties, and symbols from another reality . . . when we talk about the organization, we refer to a metaphor of human experience . . . a complex symbolic construction with links to the physical or objective reality.

The previous discussion suggests that prospective symbolization involves a shift from the experience of things strictly in terms of their objective forms and literal meanings to an awareness of things as having objective form and both literal and surplus meaning. Thus, prospective symbolization might be defined as a sort of exploitation of artifacts by symbols via associations that project both the objects of symbolization and the symbolizers from the literal domain to a domain that includes surplus meaning as well as literal awareness. From within the symbolic field, organizational members then retrospectively (re)construct their artifacts as meaningful on the basis of their symbolic memory.

Retrospective symbolization. The retrospective mode of symbolization enhances awareness of the literal meaning of symbolized artifacts. The important point from a cultural dynamics perspective is that not all artifacts are given equal treatment within the symbolic field. The prospective symbolization process implies that some artifacts will acquire more significant associations across more organizational members than will other artifacts in a given moment and at a particular place. Thus, at each instant there is a state within the symbolic field that represents that moment's symbolic configuration of meaning relative to its cultural artifacts. The artifacts themselves remain as a field of potential symbolic material, but, on a moment-to-moment basis, only certain parts of the field are illuminated by the retrospective symbolization process.

The example of a corporate status symbol illustrates the symbolization process. A large desk is merely a piece of furniture within organizational cultures for which it has limited or no surplus meaning. When organizational members do not respond to the symbolic opportunity presented by such an artifact, the desk remains in the literal realm where it may be experienced as a surface on which to work, a place to store papers and supplies, or something on which to bruise a knee. In these circumstances, prospective symbolization does not take place, at least not in a culturally interesting way. When organizational members enter the sym-

bolic realm, however, they engage surplus meaning through prospective symbolization. This can be observed in the responses members give to their own desk in relation to the desks of their superiors, subordinates, and co-workers. In these circumstances, the members' experiences of the desk as furniture are inscribed within their memories and awareness of the surplus meaning associated with the artifact. The artifact now embodies the symbol, and this gives rise to retrospective symbolization in which the desk stands out among other artifacts by virtue of its enhanced symbolic significance.

In summary, prospective symbolization is the process by which cultural symbols are made from associations between the literal experience of artifacts and surplus meaning. This process is represented by the arrow from artifacts to symbols in Figure 2. Aspects of the literal meaning of the artifact (e.g., large desks offer more convenient work surfaces) may be made more acute by feedback from the retrospective symbolization process represented by the arrow from symbols to artifacts. Symbolization involves an extension of consciousness beyond the literal realm. It translates some artifacts into symbols and projects those who use an artifact as a symbol into the symbolic realm. In the symbolic realm, surplus meaning joins, and at times dominates, members' consciousness of objective forms and literal meanings, leading some symbolic-interpretive researchers to claim that the literal domain is not a part of culture (e.g., Tompkins, 1987). The cultural dynamics perspective recognizes both the literal and the symbolic domains.

Studying symbolization processes. The study of symbolization processes as conceived in the cultural dynamics framework calls for direct involvement. One method of achieving this involvement is exemplified by ethnographers who submerge themselves in the cultural experiences they want to study and draw on personal meaning derived from these experiences in creating their ethnographies. For example, Van Maanen's (1991) study of Disneyland draws heavily on the experiences he had while working there. His admission that "it may just be possible that I now derive as much a part of my identity from being fired from Disneyland as I gained from being employed there in the first place" (1991: 76) attests to his involvement in prospective symbolization within this culture. Cultural dynamics also asks for specification of the surplus meaning associated with various artifacts (Disneyland's assigned jobs, uniforms, etc.). This is precisely what Van Maanen gives us by referring to his participation in the Disneyland culture, thus employing retrospective symbolization.

A second possible approach to the study of symbolization requires the adaptation of aesthetic techniques to the study of organization (e.g., Bjarkegren, 1991; Strati, 1990, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988; Witkin, 1990). When researchers study symbolization processes, they must use methods that create or simulate first-order experiences, such as aesthetic techniques

do (e.g., acting, writing, drawing, making photographs). For example, Witkin's evocative description of a meeting room at Unilever provides access to the aesthetic experience of this organizational space:

Behind the chairs, at one end of the table, there are two flip chart boards, white in colour and rectangular in shape. Their flat vertical planes rise above equally flat-looking metal frames. They are supported at their base by two pairs of tiny legs descending from two horizontal bars. The supports only serve to accentuate the flatness of the boards, a flatness which is echoed in the strong smooth white plane of the table and the white planes of the wall. (Witkin, 1990: 333)

Witkin's (1990: 333) interpretation that "it is as though the room has been purged of the appearance of volumes" practically leaps out of his prospective symbolization of the room and produces evidence of the retrospective mode of symbolization; however, the retrospective mode is admittedly difficult to distinguish from interpretation (which is discussed next) and is in need of further explication.

Self-reflective use of aesthetic methods could help to explicate the processes of symbolization and teach researchers to distinguish these processes from the processes of interpretation. Currently, researchers who focus on ethnography as a literary genre are making some headway in this direction (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988; Jeffcutt, 1991; Linstead, 1993). In this approach, ethnographers turn the interpretive gaze on themselves and their ethnographies. The self-reflective technique allows ethnographers to confront their assumptions, but it could also bring an awareness of self-as-author caught in the act of writing (i.e., making symbols). Although the practice of self-reflection can easily shade into self-interpretation, the technique suggests a developing possibility for studying retrospective symbolization.

To summarize, organizational members are symbol manipulators, creating as well as discovering meaning as they explore and produce a socially constructed reality to express their self-images and to contextualize their activity and identity. *Symbolization* refers to culturally contextualized meaning creation via the prospective use of objects, words, and actions. The objects, words, and actions are transformed (e.g., through communication) into symbols, the dynamic constellation of which constitutes the symbolic field of a culture. The symbolic field then retrospectively transfigures artifacts by imbuing them with the charms of surplus meaning.

Interpretation

Schutz (1970: 320) claimed that "the meaning of an experience is established, in retrospect, through interpretation." Cohen (1985: 17-18)

added that "by their very nature symbols permit interpretation and provide scope for interpretive manoeuvre [sic] by those who use them." In other words, the meaning that interpretation establishes involves the literal and surplus meanings combined by prospective symbolization processes. Ricoeur (1976: 55) offers further assistance with this point:

Only for an interpretation are there two levels of significance. . . . Symbolic signification . . . is so constituted that we can only attain the secondary signification by way of the primary signification, where this primary signification is the sole means of access to the surplus of meaning. The primary signification gives the secondary signification, in effect, as the meaning of a meaning.

This passage suggests that interpretation involves a second-order experience of symbolization. In other words, the meaning that is established by interpretation is derivative of the direct (first-order) association of literal and surplus meaning defined as the prospective symbolization process. However, this second-order experience is not simply a repetition of the first-order event, as Gioia (1986: 55) explained:

When an organizational event or action with symbolic possibility is experienced, it is related to existing knowledge to generate meaning. That is, as a current symbol becomes associated with symbolic networks, understanding occurs . . . understanding can only occur if new information can in some way be related to what is already known.

Gioia (1986) located the "already known" in scripts and schemas held in memory, but his ideas translate easily into the terms of culture theory. If assumptions are organized, at least in part, as knowledge structures, then the content of the scripts and schemas that structure and retain knowledge should reveal cultural assumptions (Barley, 1986; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Setkin, 1983). Thus, from the culture perspective, assumptions provide the "already known" of interpretation processes.

This notion brings us back to Schutz's two assertions. First, Schutz claimed that interpretation is retrospective. This claim implies that interpretation involves a move from the "already known" of a culture's basic assumptions to current symbols (retrospective interpretation). Second, Schutz asserted that interpretation establishes meaning. This assertion implies that current symbols have a reciprocal influence on basic assumptions (prospective interpretation). This reciprocity has been the central theme of the hermeneutic school of interpretation theory, where it is called the hermeneutic circle.

According to Wilson (1987: 385), the hermeneutic circle "involves successive revisions of interpretations of social phenomena as each new

level of understanding calls for revision of the basis on which that understanding is founded." He continued:

We do not build up a pattern of society from descriptions of single actions . . . but rather develop an account in a hermeneutic fashion, forming ideas about overall patterns on the basis of particular events and then using these same ideas to understand more clearly the particular events that gave rise to them. Of course, when we are already familiar with a society because we live in it, this interpretive process can be quite unselfconscious and implicit, but the basic interdependence between descriptions of singular events and understandings of the larger social order remains. (Wilson, 1987: 396)

The hermeneutic perspective suggests that interpretation moves us back and forth between the already known (basic assumptions) and the possibility of new understanding (inherent, but often dormant, in symbols). The possibility for revision of meaning exists throughout this cycle. Thus, there is potential for two results of interpretation: altered understanding of symbolic meaning via retrospective interpretation and revisions to cultural assumptions via prospective interpretation.

Interpretation involves countless engagements of the hermeneutic circle. Some of this interpretation reflects existing cultural assumptions, but some of it revises assumptions by establishing new meaning within the core. In the cultural dynamics view, interpretation reconstructs symbols and revises basic assumptions in terms of both current experience and preestablished cultural assumptions.

In summary, cultural dynamics suggests that interpretation contextualizes current symbolization experiences by evoking a broader cultural frame as a reference point for constructing an acceptable meaning. This is shown in Figure 2 as the arrow from assumptions to symbols. Meanwhile, cultural assumptions, momentarily exposed during the process of interpretation, are opened to the influence of new symbols. In this way, the moment of interpretation makes it possible (but not necessary) for culture to absorb newly symbolized content into its core. In Figure 2, this is represented by the arrow from symbols to assumptions. From the cultural dynamics perspective, the prospective mode of interpretation maintains or challenges basic assumptions, whereas the retrospective mode reconstructs the meaning of symbols via feedback from the same interpretive move (as explained by the hermeneutic circle). Of course, the prospective interpretation process then either meshes or collides with the retroactive manifestation process discussed previously, and the explanation has at last come full circle with respect to Figure 2.

Studying interpretation processes. The study of interpretation processes calls for investigating how symbols mold and are molded by existing ways of understanding. The results of interpretation processes

have been investigated using a variety of established techniques such as ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979), scripts (Barley, 1986; Martin et al., 1983), semiotics (Barley, 1983; Fiol, 1991), deconstruction (Calás & Smircich, 1991; Martin, 1990), and discourse analysis (Coulthard, 1977). At least two of these techniques—interviews and discourse analysis—can be used to reveal the interpretation process in action.

Botti and Pipan (1991) used ethnographic interviews to explore interpretations of the service concept in two public service organizations in Italy—a registry office and a hospital. They offer rich descriptions of their subjects' interpretations of the symbols of service. For example, one group of registry office personnel defined service in terms of users, but the users were generally interpreted as unfriendly or threatening. The cultural dynamics model would ask how the symbol of "the user" participates in constructing and reconstructing assumptions about everyday life within the registry office and vice versa. One possibility would be to present alternative symbols (e.g., a warm and friendly customer on a cold and rainy day) and ask registry officer personnel to interpret them. The purpose would be to discover how interviewees respond to new symbols in the course of their normal interpretive activities. Is this "a user" in their view, or something else?

Another approach to studying interpretation processes is presented by Donnellon, Gray, and Bougon (1986). These researchers performed discourse analysis using a videotape of a group of students who were conducting an organizational simulation exercise. The taped material showed the students responding to another group's action that had resulted in layoffs within their group. Semantic coding of the recorded discourse allowed the researchers to study shifts in the focal group members' interpretations and in their inclinations toward proposed actions. They found that group members used four interpretive mechanisms in coming to a collective decision to strike: metaphor, logical argument, affect modulation (e.g., nonverbal behavior, fast pace, emotionally charged language), and linguistic indirection (e.g., passive voice, use of imprecise terms). The work of Donnellon and her colleagues could frame studies of how these interpretive mechanisms mold and are molded by symbols and assumptions. Furthermore, if their method could be adapted to the demands of field settings, it might reveal the uses of these as well as other interpretive mechanisms in organizations.

Although the collision of prospective interpretation and retroactive manifestation processes will require further development, one avenue of exploration might be found in studies of spontaneous humor in a management team (Hatch, *In press*; Hatch & Ehrlich, *In press*). The findings reported in the first study (Hatch, *In press*) indicate that ironic remarks (formulated as spontaneous humor) reveal contradictions between organizational practices and symbolic interpretations. This study suggests that where retroactive manifestation and prospective interpretation do not mesh, culture is constructed and interpreted as contradictory.

Summary

The preceding discussion maps the theoretical domain of a dynamic model of organizational culture, called cultural dynamics. Much work remains to be done to fully develop each of the four major processes defined by the model, and separate discussions of each process were aimed at directing future research toward this end. Within these discussions, a variety of promising methods was also reviewed as a first step toward developing a methodological repertoire for the empirical study of cultural dynamics (see Table 1 for a summary). Each method was presented in relation to empirical examples drawn from the organization studies literature (additional examples are recommended in Table 1 for those who wish to pursue these methods).²

APPLYING THE CULTURAL DYNAMICS PERSPECTIVE

Two applications of the cultural dynamics model will be presented in this section. First, Schein's explanation of a theoretical example will be compared to an explanation developed within the cultural dynamics perspective. This will allow the cultural dynamics model to be assessed in relation to its departure point in Schein. Second, using case data presented in the organizational studies literature (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), the ability of the cultural dynamics model to extend empirical analysis in informative ways will be demonstrated. Both demonstrations are intended to show that the cultural dynamics model offers a greater appreciation of cultural complexity and dynamism than researchers have enjoyed in the past.

Demonstration #1: Schein (1985)

In the previous presentation of manifestation and realization processes, I used as a theoretical example the assumption that humans are lazy. Schein (1985: 18–19) offered a related example that begins with the assumption that humans are opportunistic:

If we assume . . . that other people will take advantage of us whenever they have an opportunity, we expect to be taken advantage of and then interpret the behavior of others in a way that coincides with those expectations. We observe people sitting idly at their desk and perceive them as loafing rather than thinking out an important problem; we perceive absence from work as shirking rather than doing work at home.

² Most of the methods will require adaptation, and other appropriate methods will surely emerge from the continuing stream of research focusing on organizational processes. Furthermore, because the cultural dynamics perspective advocates attention to all four processes, workable combinations of these methods will need to be developed, perhaps through the use of traditional ethnography (which is built on multiple methods) as a prototype.

TABLE 1
Some Suggestions for Studying the Four Cultural Processes

Process (Focal Elements)	Methods	Illustration/ Added Inspiration
Manifestation (assumptions-values)	Visualization and scenarios	Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991 Witkin & Poupart, 1985 Kunda, 1992
Realization (values-artifacts)	Ethnographic observation	Riley, 1983 Barley, 1986 Aurora, 1988 Cook & Yanow, In press
Symbolization (artifacts-symbols)	Ethnographic participation	Van Maanen, 1991 Gioia, 1992
	Aesthetic techniques	Witkin, 1990 Strati, 1990, 1992
	Postmodern ethnography	Jeffcutt, 1991 Linstead, 1993
Interpretation (symbols-assumptions)	Ethnographic interviews	Botti & Pipan, 1991 Schultz, In press
	Discourse analysis	Donnellon, Gray, & Bougon, 1986 Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, In press

In regard to this example, Schein (1985: 18) explained:

When a solution to a problem works repeatedly, it comes to be taken for granted. What was once a hypothesis, supported by only a hunch or a value, comes gradually to be treated as a reality. We come to believe that nature really works this way. . . . What I am calling basic assumptions are congruent with what Argyris has identified as "theories-in-use," the implicit assumptions that actually guide behavior. . . . Basic assumptions, like theories-in-use, tend to be nonconfrontable and nondebatable. . . . Clearly, such unconscious assumptions can distort data.

The passage implies that assumptions are responsible for distorting perceptions and leading managers to false conclusions such as "hardworking employees are loafers." Thus, assumptions produce perceptions that conform to assumptions. This leaves open the question of the origin of assumptions. Schein argued that assumptions come about when top management proposes the solution to a problem:

If the solution works, and the group has a shared perception of that success, the value gradually starts a process of cognitive transformation into a belief and, ultimately, an assumption. If this transformation process occurs—and it will occur only if the proposed solution continues to work, thus implying that it is in some larger sense “correct” and must reflect an accurate picture of reality—group members will tend to forget that originally they were not sure and that the values were therefore debated and confronted. (Schein, 1985: 16)

In Schein's (1985) explanation there is only a one-way temporal chain of events. In his view, the possibility for change in assumptions is limited to “values that are susceptible of physical or social validation” and thereby “become transformed into assumptions.” According to cultural dynamics, assumptions are open to change on “both ends” (shown in Figure 2 by the arrows from both values and symbols to assumptions). That is, change can occur through reaction to alien or novel values (the retroactive phase of the manifestation process), or it can occur through ongoing processes of interpretation in which each interpretive event occasions an opportunity for change in assumptions (the prospective phase of interpretation). This can be illustrated through a cultural dynamics explanation for Schein's example:

An assumption that people will take advantage of others proactively manifests the expectation of workers being prevented from doing so by management. This expectation influences managers to be on the lookout for cases of loafing and shirking, and they find such cases (proactive realization) even where they do not exist, such as the motionless but thinking employee or the absent employee working at home. Such employees may be regarded as idle loafers and shirkers (prospective symbolization). This labeling conforms to and reconstructs (within the hermeneutic circle of interpretation) the assumption that humans are lazy. If, however, employees are seen in other ways (e.g., as a result of employees' efforts to influence managers' perceptions), the managers' assumptions may be challenged via prospective interpretation or through the retrospective/retroactive chain ending in a retroactive realignment of values and assumptions. In the retrospective/retroactive mode, the same interpretation process strengthens (or weakens) the meaning of the symbol of the loafer/shirker through comparisons with the “already known,” which enhances (or buries) awareness of the artifact via retrospective symbolization. Renewed awareness of the artifact presents opportunities for retroactive adjustment of values that can reaffirm (or further challenge) the assumption that people will take advantage of their employers.

In the cultural dynamics explanation, organizational members cycle back and forth between proactive/prospective and retrospective/retroactive influences. The difference between the two explanations illustrates the greater dynamism of the cultural dynamics model relative to Schein's theory, which is restricted to an evolutionary or a developmental

view of change. Those ideas that Schein represents are also represented in the cultural dynamics perspective; however, the cultural dynamics view goes beyond Schein's model to examine the symbolic-interpretive processes constituting cultural assumptions. Thus, cultural dynamics does not invalidate Schein's theory; it articulates the theory and significantly extends the range and power of its explanation.

Demonstration #2: Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991)

Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) empirical study of strategic change was selected because it focuses on processes and employs ethnography, a methodology typical of much culture research. This makes the study ideal for illustrating how the cultural dynamics perspective can extend the analysis of ethnographic data.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) used ethnography (along with some innovative methods not described here) to study the initiation of a strategic change effort at a large American university. The university had just hired a new president who introduced his vision of a "Top 10 public university" immediately upon taking up his post. The researchers were able to recover the techniques the president used to formulate his vision (campus visits, consultations, interviews with stakeholders, past experience as chancellor of another university) and to follow its introduction within a task force that the president appointed to carry his vision forward. During two years of participant observation, Gioia and Chittipeddi found that the president used vision and hypothetical scenarios to introduce, support, and encourage change through a process they label "sensegiving."

Seen from the cultural dynamics perspective, Gioia and Chittipeddi's vision concept collapses expectations into symbols. In effect, these authors focus on the manifestation of an expectation (becoming a Top 10 public university) and on interpretation of the symbol they assume that the expectation became, without considering the process by which this transformation occurred. Thus, they ignore the domain represented by the right side of the cultural dynamics model. As a result, their approach underemphasizes artifacts, realization, and symbolization. This underemphasis leads to an unanalyzed connection between the president's vision and the actions of other members of the organization. If the case is analyzed from the cultural dynamics viewpoint, Gioia and Chittipeddi's analysis can be extended to offer some suggestions about what was probably going on, given the cultural dynamics model.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991: 445) wrote:

Perhaps the key occurrence in this case was the devising of an overarching symbolic vision, expressed in evocative images ("a Top-10 public university"). This vision provided an interpretative framework within which thinking and acting could be viewed in terms of their consistency with the requirements for achieving such a vision. The president himself later said

that this symbol "took on a life of its own" and became a more powerful guiding image than he ever would have imagined.

In this passage, the authors equate the president's vision with an interpretative framework, whereas the cultural dynamics model suggests that the vision plays two distinct roles. At least initially, it is used by the president as an expectation of "how it should be" in terms of his values and personal aspirations for the organization. Others use the president's vision as a symbol of his intentions and retrospectively interpret it in terms of their own assumptions and understandings of how it has ("always") been. Later, if the vision is adopted by other organizational members, it may alter assumptions and reorganize cultural understanding. As an expectation, the vision lies within an action framework rather than an interpretive framework. It is as a symbol that the vision contributes to interpretation.

Recognizing the dual role of the president's vision as expectation and symbol permits us to address how the vision "took on a life of its own." Cultural dynamics suggests that the president's vision was taken up through a complex of processes described by the right half of the cultural dynamics model as understood from the perspective of organizational members (especially the task force). Accordingly, when the president's actions were influenced by his expectation/vision, he created the possibility that the products of his action (e.g., artifacts such as decisions taken, people hired or fired) would be symbolized and interpreted by others in a way that would retrospectively portray aspects of his vision within their symbolization and interpretation processes. However, the model also indicates that it was the expectations of those others, whether they reflected the president's vision or not, that guided *their* actions via proactive realization processes.

This analysis can be taken a step further if the possible effects of the lower level members' use of negotiation and resistance to the president's vision are considered. Gioia and Chittipeddi observed that organizational members resisted, attempted to change, or ignored the president's influence attempts. The cultural dynamics model suggests that the product of these actions then became available as artifacts for prospective symbolization. For instance, the president could have used the symbols he made from these responses to form interpretations that altered (or reinforced) his assumptions, thus absorbing him within the culture along with his vision for change.

This application of the cultural dynamics model implies that, although the president was a major player in the initiation of strategic change, his influence depended heavily on the ways in which others symbolized and interpreted his efforts. The outcome of the president's influence ultimately rested on others' interpretations and the effect these interpretations had on cultural assumptions and expectations. In this light, it is worthwhile questioning whether the president was as central to

the initiation effort, or the organizational culture, as he at first appeared to be. At least it seems clear that a "bottom-up" analysis of the strategic initiation effort is needed to complement Gioia and Chittipeddi's "top-down" point of view.

Further evidence of the need to question the centrality of the president comes from the circumstances surrounding the initiation of strategic change. The decision-making body undoubtedly chose its candidate at least partly on the basis of their expectations for the university and its future president. The artifact of their selection decision (the new president) proactively realized something of their values and expectations. In the president's words: "I was told in no uncertain terms by the people who hired me that they wanted strong leadership, and that they wanted the university to move to another plane" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 439). Thus, the unending circularity of the cultural dynamics model provides the stimulus to consider the cultural history of the situation. In this case, the model suggests that the hiring of the new president was a proactive realization that led to importing an artifact of another culture (the president) with the potential to be symbolized and interpreted in an influential way within the university.

In proposing the cultural dynamics perspective, I advocate a balance of interest in all of the cultural elements and the processes that link them, thus pushing for more complete and complex cultural analyses. In the case of Gioia and Chittipeddi's study, this meant complementing their rich description with attention to artifacts and to realization and symbolization processes. This attention brought additional aspects of the case into view and recognized more complexity in the data than was indicated by the strategy formulation framework. In the case of Schein's example, the cultural dynamics model extended the developmental view of change by acknowledging the fluctuations and indeterminacies that underlie both stability and change in organizational cultures. The analyses illustrate the value of the new perspective and suggest that there are data to support the cultural dynamics model. The Gioia and Chittipeddi demonstration also indicates the need for studies that consider bottom-up as well as top-down points of view. These illustrations are given to demonstrate the logic of the cultural dynamics model and to encourage other readings using this perspective.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Some readers have criticized the cultural dynamics perspective on the grounds that the level of analysis is ambiguous. These readers want to know whether the processes described by the model occur within individuals or among them and whether the processes are cognitive or social in nature. In large measure, it is through culture that a person constructs the sense of individual and organizational identity and creates images that are taken for the self and the organization. Within the cul-

tural dynamics framework I assume that individuals cannot be conceptualized apart from their cultures and that cognition cannot be separated from social processes. In other words, the processes of cultural dynamics are simultaneously cognitive and social (as well as perceptual, emotional, and in some cases aesthetic), and individuals and their interrelationships are not usefully distinguished within this frame (see also Berger & Luckmann, 1966, on the notion of intersubjectivity). Therefore, cultural dynamics cannot be described in the either/or terms presented by such questions.

In order to see these and other implications of the model more clearly, the following discussion explains cultural dynamics as a contribution to organization theory. First, the theoretical domain of the model and its implications for bridging (Gioia & Pitre, 1990) objectivist and subjectivist perspectives are presented. In this context, the distinction between activity and reflexivity that separates top- and bottom-half processes is discussed. This distinction will be combined with the distinction between objective and subjective theoretical orientations to form a two-by-two matrix for analyzing the theoretical domain of cultural dynamics. Finally, some concluding thoughts about the cultural dynamics model and its implications for further development of organizational culture theory are offered.

The Theoretical Domain of Cultural Dynamics

Cultural dynamics brings together in one model ideas that have traditionally been kept separate in organization theory. For instance, whereas Burrell and Morgan (1979) drew barriers between functional and symbolic theories, cultural dynamics presents opportunities to view and explain culture from both perspectives. I do not, however, attempt to integrate these separate theoretical domains; instead I connect, bridge, and associate them. The cultural dynamics model may be thought of as a collage of some of the most compelling ideas about organizational culture found in the literature.

As in a collage, I have placed bits of other works together in a new (frame)work in which arrangement forms a basis for new insight. I do not deny that objectivist and subjectivist theories rest on incommensurable assumptions (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). Instead, I accept both as theoretical views of reality, acknowledge their differences, juxtapose their contributions, and examine and draw implications from the result. Thus, cultural dynamics incorporates both objectivist (some things about culture can be reasonably discussed as if they exist independent of human observation) and subjectivist perspectives (some aspects of culture cannot be objectified and are better theorized in terms of subjective experience).

The matter of the objectivity or subjectivity of organizational culture itself is undecidable. This is because researchers work within a conceptual system that constructs the phenomena to which they then assume the conceptual system refers. Although theorists cannot escape this diffi-

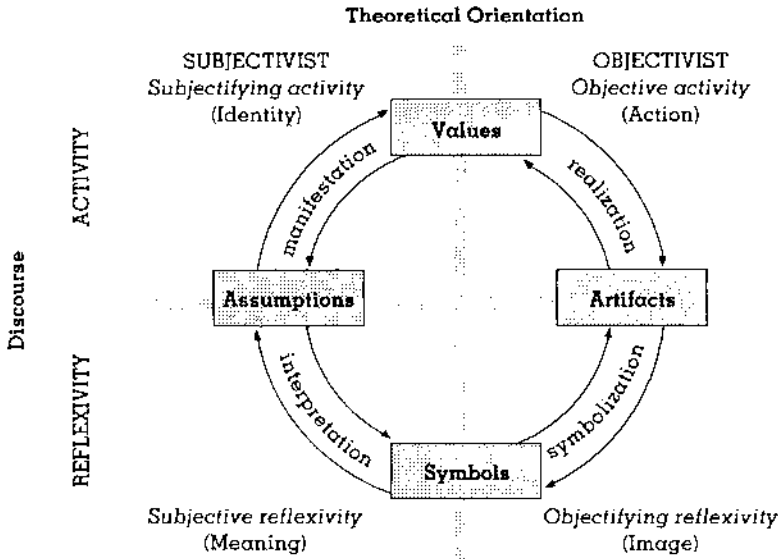
culty, it is still possible to regard the objective/subjective dialectic as a useful theoretical distinction. Its usefulness lies in the existence of different appreciations of organizational reality. For example, theories of environmental determinacy such as resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) are evidence of objectivist appreciations of organizational reality, whereas social constructionist theories such as enactment theory (Weick, 1979) evidence subjectivist appreciations. Thus, even though researchers cannot know if there are different realities associated with the objective perspective and subjective experience, they can feel confident that these are two distinct ways of theorizing about reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Gioia & Pitre, 1990). Furthermore, it has been the thesis of this article that both of these ways of theorizing have made significant contributions to the development of organizational culture theory, and it is the stated ambition of the cultural dynamics approach to explicitly acknowledge both views.

An implication of the distinction between objective and subjective theorizing is that the concepts of values and symbols lie on the border (Alvesson & Berg, 1992, also make this observation). That is, these concepts have the capacity to represent the qualities and characteristics of both domains, and, thus, values and symbols offer transformation/translation points between these "two worlds." This idea further implies that the concepts of values and symbols provide the means by which subjectivist and objectivist orientations can be made to communicate and coexist. Symbols and values invoke objectivist theorizing because of their relationship to artifacts experienced as external, and they invoke subjective theorizing by referring to basic assumptions that have no direct external referent. The cultural dynamics perspective attempts to move the discussion beyond the limiting assumptions of these two theoretical orientations by suggesting that culture can be represented equally well (or equally poorly) within either perspective, but that bridging them creates a more satisfying picture than either offers on its own.

In terms of the cultural dynamics model, I place cultural assumptions in the regions of experience that have been most adequately theorized from the subjectivist position (see Figure 3). Artifacts, conceived as externalized aspects of culture, have been better theorized using the objectivist perspective. The processes constituting assumptions and artifacts are also explained with reference to these different theoretical domains. Assumptions, constituted via prospective interpretation and retroactive manifestation, are theoretically aligned with a subjectivist orientation. Artifacts, constituted by proactive realization and retrospective symbolization, are theoretically aligned with an objectivist orientation.

This argument raises the additional question of why researchers should distinguish either between prospective interpretation and retroactive manifestation processes or between proactive realization and retrospective symbolization. I argue that theorizing about interpretation and symbolization is built around a discourse of reflexivity, whereas theoriz-

FIGURE 3
The Domain of Cultural Dynamics Showing Objectivist and Subjectivist Theoretical Orientations Subdivided by the Discourses of Activity and Reflexivity



ing about manifestation and realization is couched in the discourse of activity. Values and symbols can be similarly distinguished; values are associated with an action frame, and symbols generally invoke reflexive discourse. Both of these discourses add depth to the understanding of organizational culture, and I offer the cultural dynamics model, which makes use of this distinction, as evidence of this claim.

To summarize these ideas, Figure 3 shows the domain of the cultural dynamics model segmented into objectivist and subjectivist theoretical orientations, subdivided by discourses of activity and reflexivity. As the figure suggests, I believe that prospective interpretation is a form of subjective reflexivity, whereas retroactive manifestation is a kind of subjectifying activity, in other words, activity that creates identity (i.e., a sense of self and organization as coherent entities). Thus, cultural dynamics complements the more well-known cultural processes of interpretation through an appreciation for retroactive manifestation that occurs via the subjectifying aspects of identity formation, cultural self-maintenance, and adjustment. Similarly, the more well-known process of proactive realization of artifacts via objective action is complemented by an appreciation for retrospective symbolization processes that objectify reflexive understanding by associating artifacts with the images formed by projecting symbolic content onto them and taking this projected content for reality.

In this way, the cultural dynamics model offers a definition of culture as constituted by continuous cycles of action and meaning-making shadowed by cycles of image and identity formation. This model introduces a more dynamic sense of culture than has heretofore been considered, and it helps to explain my previous refusal to distinguish individuals from their cultures. Further development of the model to more adequately address and incorporate the concepts of image and identity is needed.

The Dynamism of Cultural Dynamics

Although the development of the cultural dynamics model pushes organizational culture theory into new territory, especially with respect to achieving a new level of complexity, I am not satisfied that a truly dynamic view of culture has yet been offered. This is because the separate treatments by which the processes of culture were developed ultimately interfere with the holistic appreciation of the dynamism of the total model. For a more truly dynamic view, consider the relationships among manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation processes.

Dynamism can be approximated if the connections among the processes of the cultural dynamics model are made focal. Thus, Figure 2 is seen, not as four separate processes, each with forward and backward modes of operation, but as two wheels of interconnected processes, one moving forward and the other backward with reference to the standard concept of time. Picture the forward (pro) processes forming one wheel within which a second wheel of backward (retro) processes turns. A truly dynamic appreciation of culture is found in the counteraction of the two wheels.

This image of culture suggests some directions for future theory building using the cultural dynamics approach. I believe that the forward turning wheel constructs the physical world insofar as culture rather than nature influences realization. I conceptualize this wheel in terms of its creative potential as a producer of human geographies, including the artifact level of organizational cultures. Similarly, I suggest that retrospective/retroactive processes produce the historical context from which organizational members draw the meaning that imbues their lives and their geographies with significance. Furthermore, the wheels are not really separate. Their counteraction implies that each process refers to the others; in effect, they form one wheel that simultaneously spins both ways.

To build organizational culture theory in the direction of this more dynamic image will require another dramatic shift similar in magnitude to the shift from elements (assumptions, values, artifacts, symbols) to cultural processes (manifestation, realization, symbolization, interpretation) proposed in this article. Based on the implications discussed previously, I suggest that the new goal be an explanation of organizational culture as the dynamic construction and reconstruction of cultural geography and history as contexts for taking action, making meaning, con-

structuring images, and forming identities (Figure 3). At present, cultural dynamics only points in this direction.

CONCLUSION

Schein's (1985) model of organizational culture as assumptions, values, and artifacts leaves gaps regarding the appreciation of organizational culture as symbols and processes. This article has attempted to fill in these gaps and to suggest a dynamic model of this important organizational phenomenon. The proposed cultural dynamics perspective reformulates Schein's model by making a place for symbols alongside assumptions, values, and artifacts; by articulating the arrows linking assumptions, values, and artifacts; and by defining these links as processes having both forward (proactive/prospective) and backward (retrospective/retroactive) temporal modes of operation. It was further suggested that the proactive/retroactive modes represent the role of activity in culture, whereas the prospective and retrospective modes represent the possibility of reflexivity and cultural consciousness.

Because it represents culture as a wheel, the cultural dynamics model can be entered at any point on Figure 2—at least in principle. In practice, the point of entry for a particular analysis will be determined by the research question and the method of study. Nonetheless, the cultural dynamics model is intended for use in its entirety, and an analytical framework for doing this was offered via two demonstrations. The framework and suggested methods were proposed as starting points for researchers wishing to pioneer the cultural dynamics approach using empirical studies. Future directions were also suggested for theorists wishing to contribute to further theoretical development of the model.

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