5

The Cultural Approach

On both sides of the Atlantic, the cultural approach to organizational change becomes highly visible during the 1980s, even in the popular press (for example, *BusinessWeek,* October 27, 1980; *Fortune,* October 17, 1983). A phenomenal number of both academic and prescriptive writings on the topic of cultural change are published in the early 1980s.[1] The interest in the concept of culture is largely linked to the now fashionable view that the management of change requires particular attention to cultural phenomena in organizations and, particularly, that radical change implies a cultural revolution (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1985). In fact, this approach is characterized by a lively debate over the extent to which culture can be managed and changed (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985).

Although the interest in culture is sometimes described as a fad, for some scholars it represents a way to study organizations that offers a counterpoint to the dominant rationalistic view (Pondy & Mitroff, 1979; Smircich, 1983a). According to this group, the cultural perspective directs attention away from the technical and instrumental aspects of organizations, toward their social and symbolic dimensions (Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979). However, by the mid-1980s, the majority of writings associated with the cultural approach to change present an instrumental vision of culture (Barley, Meyer, & Gash, 1988; Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991). Culture, often defined as the shared values that hold the organization together, is seen as a critical element in the management of change because of its persistency (in other words, its resistance to change). However, it is also believed that managing a cultural revolution, that is, a management-driven change in core values, will lead to successful organizational transformation. In this dominant functionalist stream, culture thus becomes a tool, like strategy and structure, a powerful (although, for some, difficult to manipulate) lever to reorient organizational action. The objective is to

align culture with strategy and structure (Schwartz & Davis, 1980; Tichy, 1982). In this spirit, management is redefined by some authors as symbolic action (Pfeffer, 1981).

This dominant point of view is challenged by an influential group of researchers who adopt an interpretive perspective (Barley et al., 1988; Smircich, 1983a). For these scholars, what makes the cultural perspective interesting is that it allows us to conceive organizations as cultures, that is, as socially constructed systems of meanings. As a consequence, strategy, structure, and power relations are seen as expressions of this culture. While, in the preceding view, culture is one organizational element among others, here it becomes the overarching concept.

Culture is conceived as emerging from a group's history. Thus, while culture is viewed as a form of social control, it is seen as impossible for managers (or any other group) to control the culture unilaterally and to change it in a predetermined way (Barley et al., 1988). Because culture is the result of collective sense-making and action over time, there is always an unpredictable side to cultural evolution. Moreover, managers are considered to be inside the culture (not above or outside it). Cultural change is, therefore, conceived more as a natural, ongoing structuring process than as an episodic intervention by managers.

In the following pages, we will briefly discuss some of the issues involved in defining culture. Then, the conceptions of cultural change and processes of change underlying the two views will be presented, starting with the orthodox view, labeled the cultural change management perspective, and ending with the alternative view, the cultural dynamics perspective (see Table 5.1).

Culture and Change: Functionalist and Interpretive Perspectives

Although the study of organizational culture reaches a peak in the 1980s—in part, some suggest, because of the crisis many major corporations are now facing (Barley et al., 1988, p. 42)—the interest in cultural change is not new. In the 1950s, authors such as Jaques (1952) and Selznick (1949, 1957) develop a "cultural" view of organizational change. For example, Jaques, a psychologist, in his book *The Changing Culture of a Factory,* is one of the first to explicitly refer to organizational culture. Selznick (1957), a sociologist and founder of the institutional school, is included as a precursor in most discussions of the cultural approach. Writers in organizational development, starting in the 1960s, also define organizational development as cultural change, arguing that "the only viable way to change organizations is to change their 'culture'" (Bennis, 1969, p. v).

Part of the appeal of the concept of culture is that everyone intuitively knows what culture is: "the way we do things around here." In most definitions, one will

Table 5.1   Cultural Approach

CULTURAL APPROACH		
General model of change:	**REVOLUTION OR** Destruction and reconstruction	**INCREMENTALISM** Gradual renewal
Focus: Cultural change management versus cultural dynamics		
Antecedents: Anthropology, sociology		
	Cultural change management—Functionalist view	
Organization:	Tribe with shared assumptions, values, and norms	
Process of change:	Punctuated equilibrium as a radical process of undermining of old culture and conversion to a new one	
Authors:	Hedberg & Jönsson (1977, 1978); Gagliardi (1986); Schein (1985)	
	Cultural dynamics—Interpretive view	
Organization:	Tribe with shared patterns of thinking and behavior	
Process of change:	Gradual and emergent evolution of cultural patterns	
Authors:	Meyerson & Martin (1987); Hatch (1993)	

find a common core referring to a shared frame of reference, including, among other elements, beliefs, values, and norms, expressed in symbols and artifacts, through which organizational members make sense of their world and by which their action is guided.[2] From the preceding, one could argue that there is no significant difference between the cognitive and the cultural perspectives. In fact, some authors talk of a cognitive school within the cultural tradition (Alvesson, 2002; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Smircich, 1983a). Others include the study of culture within the cognitive perspective (Huff, Huff, & Barr, 2000; Walsh, 1995). This is not surprising, because there are numerous points of convergence between scholars who adopt an interpretive epistemology, whether they define themselves as belonging to the cognitive or the cultural school. Aldrich (1992), for example, includes both the cognitive and the cultural perspectives within what he calls the interpretive approach. However, a large number of researchers within each of these two schools are not interpretivists. Furthermore, the cultural approach does not reduce itself to the cognitive school. Most of all, I have chosen to present

the cultural and the cognitive schools separately because the cultural approach has its roots in anthropology and in sociology, as opposed to psychology in the case of the cognitive school. It thus offers a somewhat different vantage point from which to explore the topic of organizational change.

The one element that is inherent in the notion of culture is that it applies to a group, a collective. In contrast to cognition, a psychological concept first developed to account for individual mental activity, the notion of culture is used to explain the existence of collective patterns of thinking and behavior. In the cultural perspective, organizations are compared to tribes or societies. While culture is conceived to be a property of a human group, it has been used at different levels of analysis to study small groups, such as a work unit in an organization, as well as large ones, such as a multinational corporation, a profession, or even a nation, in the case of cross-cultural study. As will be seen later, the fact that culture can be used as a multilevel concept, or a concept "without scale," opens up interesting possibilities for the explanation of organizational change from a pluralistic perspective.

Apart from these common underpinnings, when one scratches the surface there is a diversity of definitions of culture and an even greater disparity in uses of the term in organization studies. Some authors have developed typologies linking these different definitions to relevant theories in anthropology (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Smircich, 1983a). One often cited basic distinction is the one made by Smircich (1983a, p. 347) between those who view culture as a variable, "something an organization has," and those who view it as a root metaphor, "something an organization is." It closely parallels the one already alluded to between functionalists and interpretivists. At one extreme are those authors who view culture as a managerial tool. According to them, building a "strong" culture, one that is coherent with the strategy pursued, is seen as an important role of managers. At the other extreme are those scholars who see culture as a collective sense-making process over which managers have very little control. Another interesting distinction is between those researchers who study "organizational culture" and those who study "culture(s) in organizational settings." The former tend to view culture as an integrating mechanism, while the latter look at cultural diversity, even fragmentation, within organizations (Meyerson, 1991; Meyerson & Martin, 1987).

But those distinctions are difficult to apply, as mentioned by several authors (Alvesson, 2002; Frost et al., 1991; Nord, 1985), because many researchers do not fit neatly into one or the other of these categories. For example, although some functionalists view culture as a variable, not all of them do. As well, not all of those who study cultural differentiation adopt an interpretive stance; some, for example, adopt a critical stance. This is all the more confusing because writers use broad definitions of culture that are very similar, but depending on their epistemological assumptions their interpretations and conclusions are totally

different. As mentioned by Alvesson (2002), there are "very different understandings of culture that are only to a limited extent reflected in differences in its formal definition" (p. 15).[3]

Furthermore, there is often an important difference between the definition of culture used and its application to empirical material. For example, authors will adopt a definition of culture as a shared set of values and beliefs, but will study cultural change in terms of logos, mission statements, ceremonies, and the like, which are relatively superficial changes. Finally, researchers differ a lot as to what they analyze when they study cultural changes. Some studies of cultural change focus mainly on symbolic forms, such as myths, stories, dramas, and rituals (Pettigrew, 1979; Trice & Beyer, 1984). Others emphasize what is sometimes called the deep structure of culture: basic assumptions (Schein, 1985) or shared understandings (Smircich, 1983b). For the purposes of this book, I will distinguish between the functionalist and the interpretive perspectives because they form the basis of two different approaches to change. Furthermore, they will allow us to more easily compare the cultural perspective to the other approaches.

A FUNCTIONALIST FRAMEWORK

The most popular writings on corporate culture at the time (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982), although they advocate change in order to develop a "strong" culture, don't really address cultural change in any detail. Actually, they more or less take the feasibility of cultural change for granted and focus on the outcome, that is, the kind of culture aimed at. They don't define culture very precisely either. Instead, they identify a list of values (e.g., being close to the customer, quality) and of behaviors (participation, risk-taking) that, according to them, make up a strong and successful culture, that is, one that is dominant and coherent.

One of the best-known definitions of culture is given by Schein (1985, p. 9). He develops a framework for explaining culture in management that is more sophisticated than most and representative of the functionalist approach. As assessed by Hatch (1993), "Schein's formulation remains one of the only conceptual models ever offered" (p. 658). Schein defines the culture of a group as "the collective or shared learning of that unit as it develops its capacity to survive in its external environment and to manage its own internal affairs" (Schein, 1990, p. 58).

Schein shares with other functionalists an integrative view of organizational culture that is in accord with their unitary conception of organizations. A culture has to be shared, consensual, and aligned with management's objectives to fulfill its many functions; among those mentioned in the literature are integration, commitment, and control. Many authors, such as Pettigrew (1979) and Lodahl and Mitchell (1980), also emphasize the uniqueness of the culture as a key to members' identification with the organization.

For functionalists (e.g., Gagliardi, 1986; Schein, 1985; Lundberg, 1985), the leader plays an important role in the development of those shared values that over time become the basic assumptions guiding organizational action. Schein (1990), more than others, emphasizes the fact that a group must have existed long enough, with a stable enough membership, and have had the occasion to develop shared assumptions (i.e., values and beliefs that have acquired a taken-for-granted status) for a culture to develop. For example, he asserts, "One cannot simply *create* a strong culture by executive action. Such a culture can evolve only through shared history and a consistent pattern of leadership over a long period of time" (p. 64).

In his view, some organizations have a culture, but others don't. As Schein reminds us (1990), the concept of culture was originally developed to explain permanence, not change: "Cultural assumptions are the things that survive through successive generations" (p. 57). In anthropology, the construct was used to explain the stability of traditional communities. Schein, like Pettigrew (1979), is as interested in understanding the origins of culture and the dynamics behind the persistence of culture as in studying cultural change (Schein, 1991, p. 246). In a sense, the ideas of culture and change stand in an ambiguous relationship for this author and other functionalists. Once a culture is created, it is difficult to change because it is taken for granted, but it must also be managed if it is to retain its vitality. In that regard, Schein's position is very close to that of Selznick (1957). Schein, like all functionalists, acknowledges cultural change and the possibility of managing it. However, his works contain more moderate claims of managerial control than do most of the managerial writings on cultural change in the 1980s (e.g., Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa, 1985).

In the functionalist view, the environment is viewed as an important catalyst for change. It provides a test for the functionality of the culture (i.e., "Is the culture effective as a solution to the group's survival challenge?"). If the organization succeeds in its environment, then the culture is reinforced; if not, the culture is undermined, and change can occur.

Change, as in the configurational and cognitive approaches, is typified as superficial or profound, and as incremental or revolutionary (Gagliardi, 1986; Schein, 1985). This follows from the definition of culture as hierarchical. According to many authors (Gagliardi, 1986; Lundberg, 1985; Schein, 1985), a culture comprises multiple levels, from the most visible to the most intangible. Schein distinguishes three levels from the superficial to the profound: artifacts (technology, symbols and rituals, shared behavior patterns) and values (discussable beliefs about why things are the way they are) are the observable manifestations of an underlying pattern of assumptions (implicit, taken-for-granted ideas about the nature of reality and truth, of human nature and activity, and of human relationships). He insists (1990) that the integration of these basic assumptions into a coherent pattern is what makes

up the organization's paradigm, the deep structure, "the most important layer of organizational culture" (p. 62).[4]

A cultural transformation requires a change in basic assumptions, while a change in artifacts, even values and beliefs, is seen as superficial cultural change. However, cultural change is viewed differently by functionalists according to what cultural elements they study. Those who view the management of cultural change as evident tend to equate organizational culture with more superficial and easy-to-control manifestations of culture, such as the espoused values of top management and symbolic artifacts (Tunstall, 1985). For others, who consider it as something risky and difficult to achieve, a cultural revolution is a modification of deep taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings (Schein, 1990). However, even those who consider cultural change difficult to manage advocate that managers should strive to achieve cultural control (Martin, 1985). In fact, what characterizes most the functionalist discourse on cultural change is its managerialism (Barley et al., 1988, pp. 53–54).

As we will see in the next section, Schein (1990) and other functionalists describe the process of cultural change as leader-driven within a life-cycle model. But first, the definitions of culture and cultural change from the interpretive perspective are presented.

AN INTERPRETIVE DEFINITION OF CULTURE

From an interpretive point of view, organizations are cultures. Most interpretivists define the concept of culture as dealing essentially with shared symbols and meanings. Frost et al., in the allegorical introduction to their now-famous book *Organizational Culture* (1985), propose that culture means "talking about the importance for people of symbolism—of rituals, myths, stories and legends—and about the interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences . . ." (p. 17). While some interpretivists also explicitly include patterns of behavior and practices as an important part of culture (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985), symbols and meanings are considered the "quintessential" content of any culture by Van Maanen and Barley. For some, symbols, meanings, and cultural patterns of behavior are considered more useful for cultural analysis than are assumptions and values, because it is through its enactment that culture exists and can be deciphered (Van Maanen & Barley, 1985, p. 35; see Schein, 1991, pp. 244–245 for a critique of this view). Ethnographic methods, borrowed from anthropology and sociology, are often used to study cultural change.

While symbols and interpretations are also part of the functionalist definition of culture, they are understood differently by interpretivists. As already mentioned, functionalists view shared interpretations as "solutions," that is, as ideas put forward by the leader and accepted by the group because they work.

On the other hand, interpretivists consider meanings to be continually (re)created collectively and to be "fundamental to the very existence of organization" (Smircich, 1983a, p. 353). As for symbols,[5] functionalists view them as artifacts, that is, as observable manifestations of culture, and as means to maintain social order. In contrast, within the interpretive perspective, symbols are of interest as "generative processes that yield and shape meanings" (Smircich, 1983a, p. 353). As stated by Morgan et al. (1983), this point of view "takes the existence of all aspects of the culture as problematic, and seeks to understand the methods and practices by which its elements are created and sustained" (p. 19).

Discussing symbolism and organizational change, Gioia (1986) contends that culture "is both expressed and learned through symbolic processes" (p. 67). In the same vein, Hatch (1993) contends that what is neglected in Schein's (1985) framework is the place of symbols, which Schein equates with artifacts, the most superficial manifestation of culture. While there are divergences as to the relationship between symbols and artifacts in this literature (Hatch, 1993), a symbol is defined (Gioia, 1986) as "a sign (for example, a concept, event, or action) that serves as a meaningful representation of some significant element of the organizational experience" (p. 52). In other words, a symbol is a sign that derives its significance from its association to some other concept or entity that gives it added meaning (Gioia, 1986; Morgan et al., 1983). For example, the resignation of an experienced manager becomes the symbol for the beginning of a new era, rather than just the decision of one executive to benefit from retirement. For this event to be an organizational symbol, it must have the same meaning for most organizational members. In this view, the creation and emergence of new organizational symbols thus becomes a crucial aspect of organizational change.

This conception of culture suggests a vision of organization and change that can be quite different from the one adopted by functionalists. In contrast to the functionalist tradition, the interpretive perspective views the development of a culture as problematic, as something to be explained. Scholars within that stream are more sensitive to the existence of multiple interpretations of reality within an organization and, as a result, of the difficulty of developing shared symbols and meanings.

However, very few authors within the interpretive tradition develop an explicit conception of change. And those who do, such as Scandinavian scholars Hedberg and Jönsson (1977, 1978) and Berg (1985), tend to have an integrative vision of culture and a managerial focus. Berg, for example, articulates an explicit cultural-symbolic model of organizational change based on the idea of a unitary culture. He views organizations as symbolic fields and considers that organizational change is a transformation of the form and content of the symbolic field that makes up the organization. He develops an interesting definition of culture incorporating both dynamic and static elements. He distinguishes

between symbols and sagas (described as points of reference, which allow an organization to adapt by redefining past experiences and creating new collective experiences) and root metaphors and myths (the stable pattern of underlying assumptions that provides the code for interpreting the different points of reference). And although he rejects planned change, arguing that "a serious strategic change program is . . . an exploration of the unknown" (p. 297), he advocates symbolic management, particularly through the development of a corporate identity (the significant properties of a culture in a given context), as a way to promote collective understanding. As can be seen, the definition of culture as unitary pushes these authors into the same ambiguous position as the functionalists with regard to the management of cultural change.

On the other hand, the possibility of an organization being constituted not of one integrated culture but of a mix of differentiated cultures, particularly in the case of large, complex organizations, is acknowledged by several researchers (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Nord, 1985; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). For some, these subcultures can be embedded within a dominant organizational culture, while others view the existence of a homogeneous organizational culture as a rare phenomenon. For example, occupational groups, functional units, and hierarchical groupings can all be sources of differentiated, even antagonistic, cultures within an organization.[6] In contrast to the functionalist point of view, which tends to see culture as an integrating force and assume the existence of harmonious values, an interpretive point of view doesn't necessarily equate culture with consensus and harmony. Although few interpretive accounts of cultural change describe such organizational culture, shared meanings and symbols could emphasize diversity, individualism, and competition, for example.[7]

Moreover, this conception of culture allows for the possibility of cultural change having multiple sources, both internal and external, and for a view of change as continuous, rather than as an episodic event. For example, organizational subcultures are seen as possible sources of change. Changes in the group's composition and dynamics can alter the organizational culture. As explained by Nord (1985), "The existence of the larger entity depends as much on a dynamic tension among the parts as it does on their similarity" (p. 195).

Furthermore, as argued by Meyerson and Martin (1987), pluralist views of culture "emphasize environmental (or external) catalysts for change that have localized impact on many facets of organizational functioning" (p. 634). Thus, the environmental context as construed by organization members is considered as a potential source of change, through, for example, new ideas and practices. However, it is not an important part of most studies on cultural change.

In this approach, cultural changes are conceived to be incremental and local. Therefore, organization-wide cultural changes are viewed as almost impossible to realize according to managerial intentions. Expressions such as "riding the wave" and "exploration into the unknown" are used to suggest that cultural

change is about making the most of what is already there and being open to changing one's objectives as the process unfolds (Berg, 1985; Turner, as cited in Hassard, 1999). Indeed, the existence of differentiating forces within an organization means that cultural dynamics are, by definition, more or less unpredictable, unstable, and subject to constant revision. However, as will be seen in the section on the process of cultural change, few empirical studies of cultural change explore the possibilities that this conception offers.

Cultural Change Processes

As mentioned before, in the 1980s, the study of cultural change processes is generally framed around the question of whether culture can be managed or not, that is, whether it can be changed by managerial action. The orthodox point of view, or cultural management discourse, emphasizes issues related to radical change, while the interpretive perspective, or cultural dynamics discourse, depicts change as incremental.

As will be seen, the picture of organizational change that emerges from both these perspectives on cultural change shows similarities, as well as interesting differences, with the configurational and cognitive perspectives.

MANAGING CULTURAL CHANGE:
REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION?

The most popular model of cultural change in the 1980s is based on the idea that organizational transformation implies a cultural revolution (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1985; Gagliardi, 1986). It is the work of writers who adhere to a functionalist perspective and a managerial point of view. This work has spanned a number of empirical studies of cultural change, most of them qualitative case studies (for typical examples, see Frost et al., 1985; Kilmann et al., 1985).

As described by Meyerson and Martin (1987), in this perspective, change is viewed as "a monolithic process, as an organization-wide phenomenon" (p. 628). As such, it describes cultural change as the destruction of a shared worldview that is then, if change is well managed, replaced by a new one. This process is assumed to be under the control of top managers, although many authors suggest more or less important constraints on their action.

Schein (1985, 1990), for example, develops a life-cycle model to identify the conditions that make cultural change more likely and the methods to be used according to circumstances and stages of development. He describes the birth of an organizational culture as a process of collective learning driven by the founder. The leader's beliefs and values, which guide the behavior of group members, become their own as they are validated through shared experiences of

success. Over time, these values and beliefs are idealized and take on a "sacred" quality (Gagliardi, 1986, p. 124), that is, they are transformed into assumptions. Both scholars stress the importance of success in the development of shared assumptions, an argument similar to the one made by Tushman and Romanelli (1985) in their discussion of punctuated equilibrium, where they suggest that convergence is strengthened by success.

Schein also suggests that in the growth period, culture is usually a positive force, and if change is required, it usually is in the form of managed evolutionary change. This type of change is convergent, enhancing the existing culture. In midlife, however, because of cultural erosion or fragmentation, and at maturity, due to cultural stagnation, more substantial changes might be needed, ranging from incrementalism to turnaround and rebirth.

Schein (1990) proposes a general three-stage model of cultural change that is an extension of Lewin's popular unfreezing-moving-refreezing model (Burke, 2002). Lewin's three-step model has been very influential, particularly, in the Organization Development movement. Developed from action research projects with groups, it is based on the idea that individuals will resist a change that deviates from the group's behavioral norms. To achieve change, therefore, one must change the values of the group—normally, through discussions where individuals can experience others' views and come to question their own. To "refreeze" or fix the change, ways must be found to make the new behavior "relatively secure against change" (Lewin, 1947, p. 344, cited in Burke, 2002, p. 151).

Schein (1990) elaborates Lewin's model, expanding each of the three stages and adapting it to the organizational context. First, he develops the unfreezing stage into three elements: (1) disconfirming evidence, which (2) produces guilt, which must be combined with (3) psychological safety to allow people to move to the next phase. The second phase, cognitive redefinition, allows the development of new assumptions. Finally, a refreezing phase at both the individual and interpersonal level is necessary to stabilize the new learning. Schein cautions, however, against wholesale cultural changes because of their traumatic impact, warning that one of the most difficult aspects facing managers is the choice of what to change and what to preserve.

In the same vein, Gagliardi (1986), whose vision of culture is very close to that of Schein (1985, 1990), proposes that the culture, which he calls a symbolic field, can be compared to a fan of options. The base of the fan comprises the assumptions (for Gagliardi, they are sacred and not open to discussion), which can be manifested in a number of primary and secondary strategies. Some assumptions permit a wider range of options than others. Gagliardi views the primary strategy of the firm as preserving the culture and makes the point that a "firm must change to remain the same" (p. 127). He labels this apparent cultural change a change in cultural manifestations that leave the assumptions and values untouched. In talking of cultural revolution (i.e., real cultural change),

which according to him can only be brought about by new leadership, he claims that only if the new values are not antagonistic to the old values will cultural change be possible. If the new values are perceived to be opposed to the old ones, the culture must be destroyed and rebuilt anew. On the other hand, if the new values are perceived as different, then a broadening of the range of options can be accomplished and cultural change can ensue. Tunstall's (1985) story of the divestiture of AT&T offers an interesting description of the cultural change process as conceived by these authors. He stresses the role of leadership in promoting new values and the positive effect of advertising successful actions reflecting such values. But Tunstall also talks of the importance of highlighting continuity with the past through the affirmation and reinterpretation of traditional values.

As mentioned by Meyerson and Martin (1987), the process described by those who adopt a managerialist perspective is often very similar to models of individual cognitive change. Because their model focuses on cognitive redefinition as the basis for cultural change,[8] it blurs the differences between the cognitive and the cultural approaches. In fact, it is the cognitive change, viewed as the first step in cultural change, which is conceived as manageable.[9] This conception reaffirms both the vision of change as radical and the model of punctuated equilibrium. However, it should be noted that cultural theorists are more cautious than configuration theorists with regard to the likelihood and benefits of cultural revolution.

Furthermore, there is another side to the cultural process as described by some of these authors, which distinguishes it from the cognitive approach and challenges the punctuated equilibrium model. Schein (1990), Lodahl and Mitchell (1980), and Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm (1985), for example, distinguish between the process of cultural change itself and the deliberate management of that process. While these authors stress the influence of the leader on culture, they also acknowledge that the cultural process left to its own will lead to differentiation (the birth of subcultures) or drift (the erosion of the dominant culture). In a later article, Schein (1996) argues that organizations are made up of a number of subcultures (i.e., the engineering, operational, and executive subcultures), which makes global cultural change very difficult to achieve. A study by Lodahl and Mitchell (1980), for example, shows evidence of cultural drift in an innovative university. However, few studies actually document this process because they focus exclusively on management's actions.

In contrast, the process of cognitive development is generally described as leading to a reinforcement and refinement of cognitive frames. From a cognitive point of view, "natural" evolution leads to convergence, which is coherent with individual development. On the other hand, from a cultural point of view, such unmanaged evolution can lead to divergence, which reflects the fact that modern organizations, unlike traditional societies, are subject to numerous influences.

While the functionalist school, with the metaphor of culture as glue, tends to view these competing influences as problems to overcome, Nord (1985, p. 195) suggests viewing culture as a magnetic field to develop a more dynamic vision of culture. The latter metaphor is more in tune with the interpretive view of cultural change processes, which we discuss next.

CULTURAL DYNAMICS: FROM INTEGRATION TO FRAGMENTATION

The interpretive perspective on organizational culture, as discussed previously, allows for a more differentiated and dynamic view of culture. However, as mentioned by Nord (1985) and Meyerson and Martin (1987), very few authors pursue such a path in the 1980s. Nord, for example, comments, "Current views of organizational culture underemphasize the tensions and dynamism of organizations" (p. 194). Meyerson and Martin, for their part, who develop models of cultural change based on nonintegrative views of culture, note that few researchers "have attempted to articulate a systematically dynamic view of culture" (p. 633).

In fact, as discussed previously, a number of authors within the interpretive tradition have an integrative vision of culture and focus on managers' concerns. For example, Swedish scholars Hedberg and Jönsson (1977, 1978) are among the first to develop a framework explaining the dynamics of discontinuous strategic change in terms of a cultural analysis. They explain that when the organization's ruling myth (i.e., the theory of the world of the dominant group) is undermined by anomalous information, a cognitive crisis ensues. According to Hedberg and Jönsson, the replacement of a myth is not a mental process based on a rational assessment of the situation. Instead, the acceptance of a new myth is described as a leap of faith. It is based on emotional and speculative arguments, because the new myth still has to prove itself in action. When organizational members adhere to a new myth, anxiety and confusion are replaced by enthusiasm and wishful thinking. It is only in the development of the new myth that the existence of different cultures within the organization is alluded to, as the new myth is either imported by an outside group of managers or developed within the organization by a group challenging top management. As can be seen, such a model of cultural change is not very different from the ones elaborated by functionalists.

As a pluralist theory of organizational change, this approach is therefore less systematically developed, but two streams of work will be presented here. The earliest one, the differentiation studies (Meyerson & Martin, 1987), is characterized by work that elaborates a view of organizational change based on the study of the continuous interplay of cultures within organizations. The second and later group, labeled the fragmentation perspective (Meyerson & Martin, 1987), includes the writings of authors that present culture as inconsistent, in a state of constant flux.

Differentiation Studies

According to Meyerson and Martin (1987), the picture of the cultural change process that characterizes differentiation studies emphasizes "fluctuations in the content and composition of subcultures, variations in the structural and inter-personal relations among subcultures, and changes in the connections between subcultures and the dominant culture" (p. 634).

Such a vision draws attention to the emergent nature of change because it highlights diffuse and unintentional sources of change, as opposed to studies that concentrate only on deliberate attempts by management to influence culture. As a consequence, organizational change is viewed not as an organization-wide, monolithic process but as the more or less loosely coupled interaction of multiple local processes. While a change can be revolutionary for some subcultures, its effects on the whole are likely to be incremental.

Empirical research on cultural change done from this perspective stresses the impact on the change process of different cultures in organizations. Some, which are very close to integration studies, focus on organization-wide cultural change but take into account the impact of different subcultures on the process. The longitudinal study by Dent (1991) of the cultural transformation of a railway company through the emergence of a counterculture falls within this category. Others examine the way subcultures influence change interventions. Bartunek and Moch (1991), for example, describe the often negative reactions of different subcultures to a Quality of Working Life intervention.

But overall, there is little empirical work on cultural change done during the 1980s from the differentiation perspective. It remains marginal compared to the functionalist studies. Furthermore, in the late 1980s, some scholars begin to put forward a conception of cultural change that is even more marginal than the preceding: the fragmentation perspective.

Fragmentation Studies

Meyerson and Martin (1987) present the fragmentation perspective as a third way that has yet to be explored in cultural studies. From this point of view, ambiguity is a way of life and culture is continuously changing. In fact, "any change among and between individuals, among the patterns of connections and interpretations, *is* cultural change (at the organizational or sub-organizational level)" (p. 639).

In a sense, culture is thus seen not as stable and permanent but as constantly being enacted and changed. Change is not viewed as a period of transition between periods of stability but as constant flux. It goes without saying that in such a view, cultural change is uncontrollable, the result of simultaneous inter-locking local processes.

In the early 1990s, a few empirical studies, including one by Feldman (1991) and another by Meyerson (1991), show among other things that cultural fragmentation is experienced by organizational members as everything always changing yet remaining the same. As well, Hatch, in the early 1990s, proposes a fine-grained theoretical description of the dynamics of organizational culture that is compatible with the fragmentation view. She develops a complex model of cultural dynamics that articulates the processes of manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation, linking assumptions, values, artifacts, and symbols (Hatch, 1993).

Actually, the view of cultural change put forward by these latter scholars remains a very marginal part of cultural change studies of that period, but it echoes the conception of change that is prevalent in the third period and that we will discuss later. It emphasizes the fact that organizational life is complex and dynamic and that ambiguity and contradictions are important dimensions in the study of change.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite its popularity (or because of it), the cultural school is the subject of a lot of debates in the late 1980s, most notably concerning the conception of cultural change. Many of the attacks come from within the field itself, researchers from different traditions being the most vocal in their comments (see Martin & Frost, 1996, for an historical account of "the organizational culture war games").

For example, advocates of the interpretive perspective accuse some functionalists of having too superficial a view of cultural change, focusing on easy-to-change variables such as symbols, logos, and espoused values, and reducing culture to the level of a managerial tool (Berg, 1985; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Wilkins and Dyer (1988) argue that, except for Schein (1985), researchers develop generic models of cultural change that are not sensitive to differences in culture. Smircich (1983a), an influential cultural researcher, states, "The notion of 'corporate culture' runs the risk of being as disappointing a managerial tool as the more technical and quantitative tools that were faddish in the 1970s" (p. 346). Smircich, with her colleague Calás, questions the future of the field in the late 1980s, arguing that the culture concept is in danger of being dominant but dead (cited in Frost et al., 1991).

Those who defend a differentiation perspective disapprove of functionalists and those interpretivists who assume an overly homogeneous view of cultural evolution (Alvesson, 2002; Martin et al., 1985; Nord, 1985; Turner, cited in Hassard, 1999). Martin et al., for example, comment, "Unfortunately, the social

construction of reality is generally used as a descriptive phrase, a synonym for assumed consensus, rather than as a topic for systematic empirical investigation" (1985, p. 103). On the other hand, Schein (1991, pp. 244–245), a functionalist, berates interpretive scholars (practitioners of what he labels the ethnographic approach) for their poor conceptualization and definition of culture and the limits of their empirical work with regard to the holistic nature of culture. He also argues for culture being consensual, by definition: "The concept of sharing or consensus is core to the definition, not something about which we have an empirical choice" (p. 248). Others, among them Alvesson, a scholar in the critical tradition, discuss the limits of the fragmentation perspective: "Conceptually, even though ambiguity may well be an important aspect of culture, it is hardly the dominating one" (2002, p. 164). Trice and Beyer (1993, p. 14), for example, argue that ambiguity, fragmentation, and constant changes are the opposite of culture as it is commonly defined.

Another line of criticism comes from those who find that the cultural literature concentrates too much on ideational aspects of culture such as visions, slogans, and ceremonies, neglecting its material dimensions related to the organization of work and the development of procedures (Gregory, 1983; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). For example, Alvesson (2002, p. 147) argues that the interest in symbolic activities, as opposed to "substantive" activities, comes from their appeal to managers who view them "as inexpensive means" to realize their preferred outcomes. More important, critical theorists (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Willmott, 1993) disapprove of the neglect of power issues and conflict of interests even in pluralist accounts of culture. Adding to this criticism, Martin and Frost (1996) write, "It is surprising to note that few differentiation studies go beyond the delineation of subcultural differences to examine processes of organizational change that might . . . benefit those who are at the bottom of the hierarchy" (p. 605).

This challenge to the cultural approach, as will be seen in Chapter 8, is taken up by scholars within the critical tradition who emphasize issues of power and domination associated with culture and change.

In short, from the standpoint of a theory of organizational change, one of the main critiques that can be addressed to the cultural approach is that very little systematic conceptual and empirical work is done on cultural change as a collective process in the 1980s. Despite its promise of looking at change from the point of view of different organizational stakeholders, for all intents and purposes the cultural approach remains a top-down view of change.

After its period of glory in the 1980s, cultural change as it is represented in the work of most scholars in "mainstream" functionalist and interpretive approaches ceases to dominate the literature on organizational change.

However, cultural analysis becomes the preferred approach of scholars adopting critical and postmodern perspectives to organizational change (Alvesson, 2002;

Martin & Frost, 1996). Moreover, a preoccupation with cultural processes, in general, is pervasive in all organizational change literature since then, as researchers and practitioners move from a concern with change as an episodic radical transformation to an interest in change as an ongoing process of learning, innovating, evolving, and becoming. In this context, a growing number of authors (Chreim, 2005; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Eisenhardt et al., 2000; Gioia & Thomas, 1996) turn to the concept of organizational identity, which is closely intertwined with organizational culture, to explain change. The impact of change on organizational identity, which is traditionally defined as what is enduring and central in the organizational self-concept, is increasingly analyzed. For example, Hatch and Schultz (2002) discuss the interplay among organizational identity, organizational culture (internal context of identity definition), and image (external context of identity definition) in terms of ongoing dynamics. At the same time, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, critical authors become concerned with issues of individual identities as (re)constructed by new managerial practices that attempt to transform the existing organizational culture.

In conclusion, the cultural approach to organizational change is the success story of the 1980s. As a top-down approach to organizational change, its appeal comes from its focus on the symbolic, emotional, and expressive facets of organizational change, as opposed to rational and technical ones. As such, it contributes to a richer understanding of change. An attention to culture highlights the importance of symbolic management in the context of change and, more so than the cognitive approach, it underlines the collective nature of change in an organizational context. The less "mainstream" work, by addressing the issue of diversity in organizations, challenges monolithic, organization-wide revolutionary models of organizational change. However, its potential is not fully realized in the 1980s in terms of a theory of change. Most empirical studies are still accounts of radical top-down changes. Yet the literature on cultural change, particularly the debates on the limits to managerial control over the change process, opens the door to a challenge of the dominant view. Finally, the more incremental vision of change put forward by differentiation theorists finds a stronger voice in the political approach that will be presented next.

Notes

1. On the academic side, a good example is *Organizational Symbolism,* a volume edited by Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge (1983). A well-known practitioner-oriented book is *Gaining Control of the Corporate Culture,* edited by Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1985).

2. As will be seen later, scholars in the functionalist school emphasize assumptions and values, while those in the interpretive school tend to focus more on symbols and meanings (Frost et al., 1985; Hatch, 1993; Pondy et al., 1983).

3. I agree with Martin and Frost (1996), who distinguish between a critical and an interpretive orientation in differentiation studies. However, I have chosen to include authors who are concerned with politics and domination in the political and critical approaches rather than the cultural approach. In a sense, for them, culture is a context in which to uncover conflicts of interest and/or expose exploitation and oppression, rather than a core concept. In contrast, for interpretivists, culture defined as meanings and sense-making is central as both concept and object of study.

4. This view of culture raises important methodological issues. If the most important cultural layer is inaccessible to observation, how can it be studied? Schein (1991) favors the use of clinical methods through which insiders surface their own assumptions, guided by an outsider using the above framework.

5. Actually, one could say that it is the importance given to symbolism in the cultural perspective (Hatch, 1993) that differentiates it most from the cognitive approach to change. Another difference, which will be discussed later, is the existence within the cultural school of a small stream of work emphasizing cultural differentiation, and even fragmentation, while the cognitive school focuses only on dominant frames of reference.

6. Van Maanen and Barley (1985) argue that the concept of culture can more usefully be applied to workgroups within organizations than to the whole. But this view is by no means shared by all interpretivists. In fact, in the 1980s, most study culture at the organizational level and explain the existence of organizations by the constitution of common systems of meanings, even though this is viewed as problematic and an ongoing process (Smircich, 1983b).

7. Members of an organization could all agree that they disagree about many things, that they compete with one another, and so on. They would have a conflictual culture, but a culture just the same.

8. This is not surprising, because the author who developed the most popular model of cultural change, Schein (1990), is a psychologist who was himself inspired by another psychologist, Kurt Lewin.

9. For instance, these authors emphasize the management of meaning through the creation of ambiguity and the development of a vision that inspires action to bring about organizational members' cognitive redefinition. That is why I include authors such as Brunsson (1982) and Gioia and colleagues (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994) in the cognitive school, even though they are included in the cultural school by other writers. It is important to note that Gioia himself positions his work in the cognitive school (see Gioia, 1986; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994).