

# CONCEPTS AND MEASUREMENT OF CULTURE IN ORGANISATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*This is a literature review on organisational culture, which aim was to examine the definition of the concept of organisation's culture, its typology and tools for its measurement. Organisation's culture is the main determinant to many aspects of organisation's life such as organisation success, attractiveness, innovation, safety, leadership, productivity, performance and effectiveness, strategy, quality management, human resource management and information technology. Thus, we conclude that the knowledge of organisation's culture by continuous monitoring and management is central to the success of any management.*

**Key Words:** *Organisation Culture, Measurement, innovations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Organisations like people have distinct personalities. Robbins (1987) calls this organisations' cultures. Organisational culture is the personality of the organization. Every organisation has a culture of its own; which could be positive or negative, strong and unique or weak and indifferent.

Generally, an organisation desires a positive culture as a support for its growth and development or at least for avoiding failure. Culture comprises the assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs of organization members and their behaviours. Members of an organization soon come to sense the particular culture of their organisation. Culture is a term that is used regularly in workplace discussions. It is taken for granted that we understand what it means. Although we may not always be aware of it, we all work within organisational cultures that define how we relate to our fellow employees, how work gets done, and how customer needs are met.

In their noted publication “In Search of Excellence”, Peters and Waterman (1982) drew a lot of attention to the importance of culture to achieving high levels of organisational effectiveness. This spawned many subsequent publications on how to manage organisational culture (see Deal & Kennedy 1982; Ott 1989; Bate 1994). Robbins (1987) also observed that organisation's culture impacts positively on the organisations’ effectiveness. Defining organisational culture is, however, not an easy task, for while there is general agreement about the components of culture as a broad construct, there is considerable disagreement about: what constitutes organisational culture, whether the culture of a given organisation can ever be adequately described, whether culture could ever be effectively managed and, if so, which management strategies are most likely to succeed.

## **Determinants of Organisation's Culture**

Organisational culture, often simplistically referred to as "the way things are done," is in fact a complex concept. Johnson (1988) describes a cultural web, identifying a number of elements that can be used to describe or influence Organizational Culture. These elements or determinants are:

***The Paradigm:*** What the organization is about; what it does; its mission; its values.

***Control Systems:*** The processes in place to monitor what is going on. Role cultures would have vast rulebooks. There would be more reliance on individualism in a power culture.

***Organizational Structures:*** Reporting lines, hierarchies, and the way that work flows through the business.

***Power Structures:*** Who makes the decisions, how widely spread is power, and on what is power based?

***Symbols:*** These include organizational logos and designs, but also extend to symbols of power such as parking spaces and executive washrooms.

***Rituals and Routines:*** Management meetings, board reports and so on may become more habitual than necessary.

***Stories and Myths:*** build up about people and events, and convey a message about what is valued within the organization.

These elements may overlap. Power structures may depend on control systems, which may exploit the very rituals that generate stories.

## **Typology of Organisation's Culture**

Several methods have been used to classify organizational culture. Some of these methods are:

**Cooke and Lafferty (1986) and Cooke and Szumal (1993) Model**  
Cooke and Lafferty (1986) and Cooke and Szumal (1993)

develop a typology of organisational cultural norms that include constructive, passive/ defensive, and aggressive/ defensive sets or styles of behavioural norms. Constructive cultures encourage interaction with others and approach tasks in ways that would assist them meet their higher order satisfaction needs and are characterised by achievement, self actualising, humanistic encouraging and affiliation norms. This is what Ouchi (1977) described as clan controls in organisation and Etzioni (1961) called normative values.

Passive/defensive cultures are characterised by approval, conventional, dependent and avoidance norms. Aggressive/ defensive cultures are characterised by oppositional, power, competitive and perfectionistic norms.

### **Geert Hofstede Model**

Hofstede (1990) demonstrated that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect the behavior of organizations. Hofstede identified five characteristics of culture in his study of national influences. These are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, and long vs. short term orientation.

Power distance is a measure of the inequality between 'bosses' and inferiors, and the extent to which this is accepted. This is degree to which a society expects there to be differences in the levels of power. A high score suggests that there is an expectation that some individuals wield larger amounts of power than others. A low score reflects the view that all people should have equal rights.

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which a society accepts uncertainty and risk. It is the degree to which one is comfortable with or feels threatened by ambiguous, uncertain situations, the extent one can or cannot tolerate uncertainty and tries to avoid it by establishing more structure.

Individualism is contrasted with collectivism, and refers to the extent to which people are expected to stand up for themselves, or alternatively act predominantly as a member of the group or organization. It is the degree to which a culture relies on and has

allegiance to the self or the group. In other words, it is the degree to which one thinks in terms of 'I' versus 'we'; either ties between individuals are loose or people are part of a cohesive group throughout their lives.

Masculinity vs. femininity refers to the value placed on traditionally male or female values. Male values for example include competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and the accumulation of wealth and material possessions. Masculinity - Femininity (also known as achievement versus nurturance orientation) is the degree to which a culture values such behaviour as assertiveness, achievement, acquisition of wealth or caring for others, social support and quality of life.

Long vs. short term orientation describes a society's "time horizon," or the importance attached to the future versus the past and present. In long term oriented societies, thrift and perseverance are valued more; in short term oriented societies, respect for tradition and reciprocation of gifts and favours are valued more.

In his research into organisation cultures, Hofstede identified six independent dimensions of practices: (a) process-oriented versus results-oriented; (b) job-oriented versus employee-oriented; (c) professional versus parochial; (d) open systems versus closed systems; (e) tightly versus loosely controlled; and (f) pragmatic versus normative. The position of an organisation on these dimensions is determined in part by the business or industry the organisation is in. Scores on the dimensions are also related to a number of other 'hard' characteristics of the organisations. These lead to conclusions about how organisational cultures can be and cannot be managed.

### **Deal and Kennedy Model**

Deal and Kennedy (1982) defined organizational culture as "the way things get done around here". They measured organizations in respect of: Feedback - quick feedback means an instant response and Risk - represents the degree of uncertainty in the organization's

activities. Using these parameters, they were able to suggest four classifications of organizational culture:

***The Tough-Guy Macho Culture:*** Feedback is quick and the rewards are high. This often applies to fast moving financial activities such as brokerage, but could also apply to policemen or women, or athletes competing in team sports. This can be a very stressful culture in which to operate.

***The Work Hard/Play Hard Culture:*** This is characterized by few risks being taken, all with rapid feedback. This is typical in large organizations, which strive for high quality customer service.

***The Bet your Company Culture:*** This is where big stakes decisions are taken, but it may be years before the results are known. Typically, these might involve development or exploration projects, which take years to come to fruition, such as oil prospecting or military aviation.

***The Process Culture:*** This occurs in organizations where there is little or no feedback. People become bogged down with how things are done not with what is to be achieved. This is often associated with bureaucracies. While it is easy to criticize these cultures for being overly cautious or bogged down in red tape, they do produce consistent results, which are ideal in, for example, public services.

### **Charles Handy Model**

Handy (1985) popularized a method of looking at culture which some scholars have used to link organizational structure to organizational culture. He outlines a simple framework for categorising cultures into four organisational cultures: power, culture, role culture, task culture, and a person (star) culture.

A ***Power Culture*** is a culture, which concentrates power among a few. Control radiates from the centre like a web. Power Cultures have few rules and little bureaucracy; swift decisions can ensue. This culture is often found in small entrepreneurial organisations and political groups but will frequently breakdown as

they grow since the web is more difficult to maintain with size. Alternatively, the culture may spawn subsidiary webs. In a ***Role Culture***, people have clearly delegated authorities within a highly defined structure. Typically, these organizations form hierarchical bureaucracies. Power derives from a person's position and little scope exists for expert power.

By contrast, in a ***Task Culture***, teams are formed to solve particular problems. Power derives from expertise as long as a team requires expertise. These cultures often feature the multiple reporting lines of a matrix structure. A ***Person (Star) Culture*** exists where all individuals believe themselves superior to the organization. Survival can become difficult for such organizations, since the concept of an organization suggests that a group of like-minded individuals pursue the organizational goals. Some professional partnerships can operate as person cultures, because each partner brings a particular expertise and clientele to the firm.

### **Edgar Schein Model**

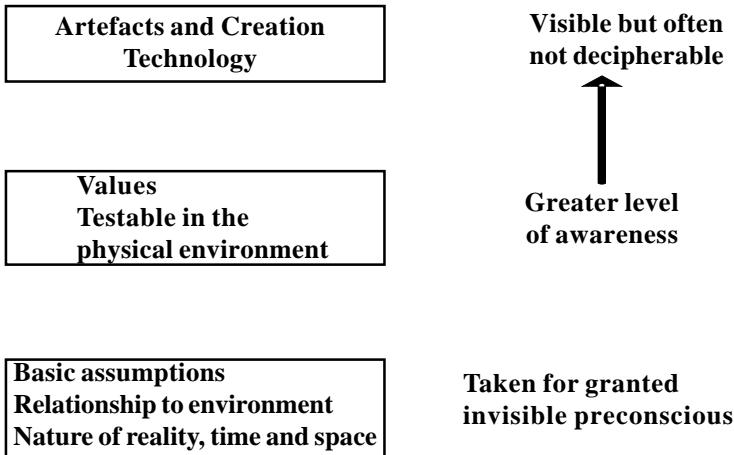
Schein (1989) defines organizational culture as "the residue of success" within an organization. According to Schein, culture is the most difficult organizational attribute to change, outlasting organizational products, services, founders and leadership and all other physical attributes of the organization. His organizational model illuminates culture from the standpoint of the observer, described by three cognitive levels of organizational culture. At the first and most cursory level of Schein's model is organizational attributes that can be seen, felt and heard by the uninitiated observer. Included are the facilities, offices, furnishings, visible awards and recognition, the way that its members dress, and how each person visibly interacts with each other and with organizational outsiders.

The next level deals with the professed culture of an organization's members. At this level, company slogans, mission statements and other operational creeds are often expressed, and local and personal values are widely expressed within the

organization. Organizational behaviour at this level usually can be studied by interviewing the organization's membership and using questionnaires to gather attitudes about organizational membership.

At the third and deepest level, the organization's tacit assumptions are found. These are the elements of culture that are unseen and not cognitively identified in everyday interactions between organizational members. Additionally, these are the elements of culture which are often taboo to discuss inside the organization. Many of these 'unspoken rules' exist without the conscious knowledge of the membership. Those with sufficient experience to understand this deepest level of organizational culture usually become acclimatized to its attributes over time, thus reinforcing the invisibility of their existence.

Surveys and casual interviews with organizational members cannot draw out these attributes--rather much more in-depth means is required to first identify and then understand organizational culture at this level. Notably, culture at this level is the underlying and driving element often missed by organizational behaviourists. In a sense, he classified these elements into three levels of culture (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Levels of culture and their interaction

**Source:** Schein, EH 1989, *Organisational culture and leadership*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, p.14.



## **Lundberg Model**

Lundberg (1985) offered a very similar view and distinguished four (4) separate levels of meaning for an organisation's culture (adapted from Schein (1981) and Dyer (1982)). See figure 2 for details.

### **Artifacts**

### **Perspective**

### **Values**

### **Basic Assumptions**

**Figure 2:** Organisational culture - levels of meaning

**Source:** Adapted from Lundberg, C. C (1985), On the feasibility of cultural intervention in organisations', Organisational Culture, Stage Publications, Beverley Hills, CA, pp 171-172

**Artefacts:** At the more visible or superficial levels of culture in Schein's and Dyer's formulation are artefacts. These are tangible aspects shared by members of an organisational group, including variable verbal, behavioural and physical attributes. Also included are such things as the language, stories and myths, rituals, symbols and ceremonies, technology and art used by an organisation.

**Perspectives:** The next level involves perspectives, which are the rules and norms the members of a group or organisation develop and share socially in any given context. Perspectives may be viewed as the solutions to a common set of problems encountered by organisational members from time to time. They define and interpret situations of organisational life and prescribe the bounds of acceptable behaviour in such situations. They are relatively concrete and members are usually aware of them.

**Values:** The values are the evaluation base that members of an organisation use for judging the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of situations, acts, objects and people. Values reflect the real objectives, standards and goals in an organisation and define as well its transgressions, sins, and wrongdoings. Though more abstract than perspectives, they can sometimes be articulated by members in such statements as organisational 'mission' and 'philosophy'.

**Basic Assumptions:** At the deepest level of an organisational culture are the basic assumptions, which are the tacit beliefs that members hold about themselves and the world, their relationships to one another and the nature of the organisation in which they work. Largely unconscious, they underpin the first three levels above. They can be viewed as the implicit and abstract axioms that determine the values, perspectives and artefacts of an organisation's culture.

### **Graves (1986) Model**

While reviewing different approaches and perspectives on organisational culture, Graves (1986) referred to a study, which argued that organisational culture consists of five variables: **Communication** - for example how receptive are those above you to your ideas and suggestions? **Motivation** - for example how much do you look forward to coming to work each day? **Decision-making** - For example to what extent are the persons who make decisions aware of problems at lower levels in the company? **Control** - for example how much say or influence do the various levels of the hierarchy have on what goes on in your department? **Co-ordination** - for example to what extent do persons in different departments plan together and co-ordinate their efforts? These 5 variables were called 'climate variables', which were correlated with four (4) 'leadership variables', as follows:

**Managerial support** : This is the degree to which the manager increases his subordinates' feeling of being worthwhile and important people.

**Goal emphasis:** This is the degree to which the manager stimulates enthusiasm for getting the work done.

**Work facilitation:** This is the degree to which the manager helps his subordinates to get the work done by removing obstacles and roadblocks.

**Interaction facilitation:** This is the degree to which the manager builds the subordinates group into a work team.

The researcher also pointed out that **Managerial support** and **Interaction facilitation** deal with the employee as an organisational participant (people-concerned variables), whilst **Goal emphasis** and **Work facilitation** deal with the employee as a member of a production team (production-concerned variables) (Graves 1986, pp. 9-10).

### **Diagnosis or Assessment of Organisation's Culture**

The importance of measuring and diagnosing the culture of an organisation is born out of the fact that the appropriateness of a culture is critical to the success of an organisation. This is because organisational culture can determine the degree of organisational effectiveness and individual satisfaction, either through its 'strength', or through its type. There are wide variety of organisational culture measurement tools and methods. Thus, there is the need for careful selection of a relevant method, which should be made based on the goals, focus and the purpose of each particular study. Below are some of the common methods of measuring organisation's culture.

**Ghiselli Self Description Inventory:** Graves (1986) in his study on diagnosing corporate culture made use of Ghiselli Self Description Inventory. The inventory is a questionnaire consisting of sixty four pairs of personally descriptive adjectives, thirty two of equal positive, and thirty two of equal negative value to the subject. In half of the pairs, the respondent is asked to tick one adjective of each pair, which he believes most characterises him, both adjectives referring to socially desirable traits. In the other half of the pairs, he is to tick

the adjective he believes least characterises him, both adjectives in these pairs referring to socially undesirable traits. The answers are coded, scored, computed and analysed using the statistical package for the social sciences. The results are presented under ten (10) headings, which are the ten underlying management traits represented by the sixty four pairs of adjectives, namely:

* Need for achievement	* Need for self-actualisation
* Need for power	* Need for reward
* Need for security	* Supervisory
* Intelligence	* Initiative
* Self-assurance	* Devisiveness

The scores for each attribute are compared between subgroups of the samples and between levels of management. The frequency distribution and the correlations between the traits in general are evaluated. The correlations for each type of organisation are analysed to help identify a general model for its culture.

***Joint exploration through interactive interviewing:*** Schein (1989) developed a ten-step method, which is based on the argument that the pattern of assumptions that underlie what people value and do in an organisation are the basic cultural essence of that organisation. This conception led to his next argument that you have to uncover the underlying assumptions in an organisation to reveal its cultural paradigm. The ten steps involved are listed below:

1. Entry and focus on surprises	6. Formalising hypotheses
2. Systematic observation and Checking	7. Systematic checking and consolidation
3. Locating a motivated insider	8. Pushing to the level of assumption
4. Revealing surprises, puzzlements, hunches	9. Perpetual recalibration
5. Joint exploration to find explanation	10. Formal written description

The underlying cultural assumptions, around which the cultural paradigm of an organisation forms, are assessed by its positions on specific dimensions. The five dimensions for organisational culture diagnosis and analysis proposed by Schein (1989) include:

**Dimension 1:** Organisation's relationship to its nature

- Basic identity and role: who, what, why...
- Relevant environments: Economic, Political, Technological, Sociocultural ...
- Position vis-a`-vis those environments: e.g. dominance, submission, harmonising, finding a niche...

**Dimension 2:** Nature of reality and truth, basis for decisions

- Physical, social and subjective reality: e.g. The nature of time, the nature of Space
- Criteria of verifiability - Moralism-Pragmatism: Basis for taking action: e.g. Tradition; Religious/moral dogma; by wise man or authorities; Rational/legal process; Conflict resolution/open debate; Trial and error; or scientific test.

**Dimension 3:** The nature of human nature

- Basic human nature: e.g. good, bad, neutral
- Mutability: e.g. fixed at birth or mutable and perfectible

**Dimension 4:** The nature of human activity

- Proactive, "Doing" orientation
- Reactive, "Being" orientation
- Harmonising, "Being-in-becoming" orientation

**Dimension 5:** The nature of human relationships

- Human relationships: e.g. Lineality-tradition, hierarchy, family; Collateralitygroup cooperation; or Individuality-competition
- Organisational relationships: power distribution, involvement, structure, conflict resolution.

***Denison organisational culture survey:*** The Denison organisational culture survey (Denison 1990) is another instrument

for which evidence of sensitivity to organisational change has been presented. This tool assesses organisational culture along the four basic cultural traits, which are presented by certain organisational dimensions. The tool consists of 60 items, which are used to assess and measure the dimensions. Table 1 below gives a brief description of the structure of the instrument.

**Table 1: Denison Organisational culture survey (adapted)**

TRAIT	DIMENSION	EXAMPLES OF ITEM
INVOLVEMENT	Empowerment	Decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available.
	Team orientation	Cooperation across different parts of the organisation is actively encouraged.
	Capability development	There is continuous investment in the skilled of employees
CONSISTENCY	Core values	The leaders and managers "practice what they preach
	Agreement	When disagreement occur, they work hard to achieve win-win-solutions.
	Coordination and integration	It is easy to coordinate projects across different parts of the organisation.
ADAPTABILITY	Creating change	The way things are done is very flexible and easy to change
	Customer focus	customer comments and recommendation often lead to changes
	Organisation learning	They often view failure as an opportunity for learning and improvement.
MISSION	Strategic direction & intention	There is a clear mission that gives meaning and direction to our work.
	Goal & objectives	There is widespread agreement about goal
	Vision	They have a shared vision of what the organisation will be like in the future.

**Source:** Adapted from Denison, D.R (1990), Corporate culture and organisational effectiveness, Wiley, New York.

Denison's Organisational culture survey offers a quantitative multi-dimensional assessment of the main organisational cultural traits.

**Organisational Culture Profile (OCP):** Organisational culture profile (OCP) was originally developed to measure person-organisation fit but later has been used extensively in various researches as an instrument for assessing cultural characteristics of organizations (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell 1991). The OCP

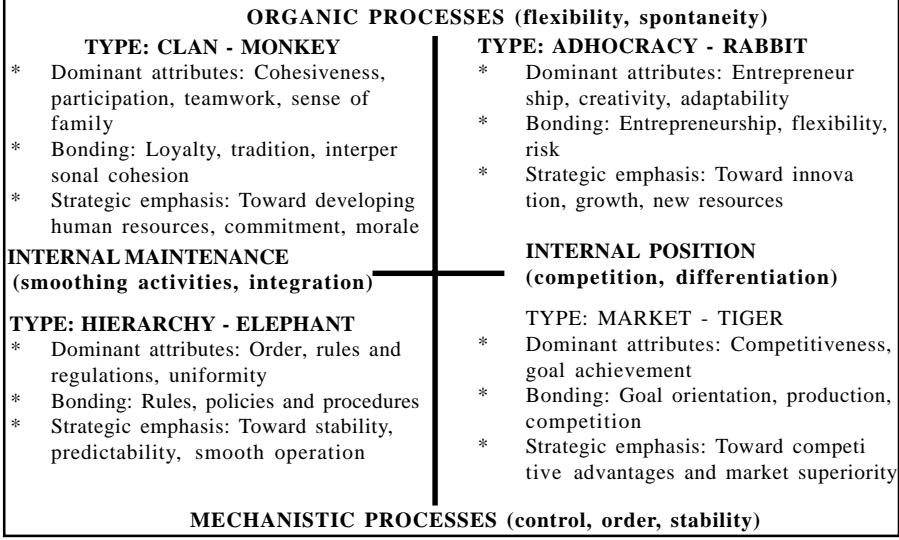
contains 54 value statements (also called OCP items - Organisational culture profile item set) that can generically capture organisational values and characteristics. The general procedure is to ask respondents familiar with the organisation to sort the 54 items into nine categories ranging from least to most characteristic of the organisation. Scores are allocated accordingly. The OCP is further tested and developed which lead to the identification of seven organisational culture dimensions underlying the OCP: Innovation, Stability, Respect for people, Outcome orientation, Detail orientation, Team orientation and Aggressiveness. The same seven dimensions have been found to characterise firms across various industries (Chatman & Jehn 1994) and also among a sample of international firms (Hofstede et al. 1990).

***The Competing values framework (CVF):*** The Competing values framework (CVF) was originally presented by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) who were interested in determining the values that employees held as valuable with regard to organisational effectiveness. Their research indicated that the values of organisational effectiveness clustered into four groups. From this, Quinn (1988) presented a model of organisational culture based on two dimensions: (1) organisational process (organic vs. mechanistic) and (2) organisational orientation (internal vs. external), which resulted in four types of organisational culture (See figure 3).

The 'clan' culture (organic, internal) is characterised by an emphasis on cohesiveness, teamwork and commitment to the organisation where as the 'market' culture (mechanistic, external) is characterised by competitiveness and goal achievement. The 'adhocracy' culture (organic, external) has as its focus creativity, entrepreneurship, and dynamism. Finally, the 'hierarchy' culture (mechanistic, internal) is characterised by order, rules and regulations, uniformity and efficiency. The CVF was further developed and adapted by Cameron and Freeman (1991) and Deshpande, Farley and Webster (1993) which allows the tool to examine organisational culture at a deeper level and identify further

implications. The four culture types: Adhocracy, Clan, Hierarchy and Market are assigned to the CVF quadrants. In Asian studies, the researchers describe these four cultural styles respectively as Rabbit, Monkey, Elephant and Tiger (Jacobs 2002).

Figure 3: CVF-based model of organisational culture types



Source: Adapted from Quinn, RE & Rohrbaugh, J.(1983).

**Human Factors International's (2004) Organisational Culture Questionnaire (OCQ):** The Human Factors International's (2004) Organisational Culture Questionnaire (OCQ) was designed as a practical instrument of measurement and management of organisational culture change. It is a tool used for identifying the culture, which is at present operating in the organisation. The OCQ does not categorise the organizational culture into a particular type but describes it in terms of its predominant characteristics, behaviours and attitudes. The OCQ comprises 130 questions relating to 13 different dimensions of organisational culture: Leadership, Conflict management, Productivity, Innovation, Participation, Communication, Decision Making, Organisational Goal Integration, Organisation Structure, Human Resources Management, Customer Focus, Professionalism and Fun. Members of an organisation are asked to decide whether the statements describe a predominant



feature of their organisation or not. A further option in the OCQ is to choose to use a five point scale instead of the simple 'Yes', 'No', and 'Don't know' options. Respondents are asked to rate whether the statements predominantly describe the behaviour and/or beliefs in their organisation and are given five options from 'Almost always' to 'Rarely'. The responses can be analysed for the whole organisation or for individual departments.

***Organisational Culture Inventory (OCI)***: is another tool for measuring organizational culture. Basically, the OCI provides a profile of an organisation's operating culture in terms of the behaviours that members believe are required to 'fit in and meet expectations' within their organisation. It measures 'how things are done around here'. The OCI examines how members of an organisation experience its operating culture. Through members' answers, the OCI measures twelve (12) distinct patterns or styles of behavioural norms and expectations that members of an organisation might be expected to adopt in carrying out their work and interacting with others.

The 12 patterns are classified into 3 groups of "styles" with Achievement, Self-actualising, Humanistic encouraging and Affiliative belonging to the 'Constructive Styles'; Approval, Conventional, Dependent and Avoidance belonging to the 'Passive/defensive Styles'; Oppositional, Power, Competitive and Perfectionistic belonging to the 'Aggressive/defensive Styles'. The 12 patterns are also categorised in terms of members' needs: Perfectionistic, Achievement, Self-actualising, Humanistic-encouraging, Affiliative and Approval represent 'Satisfaction Needs'; Conventional, Dependent, Avoidance, Oppositional, Power and Competitive represent 'Security Needs'.

The 12 patterns are also used to measure an organisation's culture in terms of its orientation with some patterns distinctively related to the 'People orientation' such as Self-actualising, Humanistic encouraging, Affiliative and Dependent while some other

patterns are related to the 'Task orientation' such as Competitive, Perfectionistic, and Achievement. Combined OCI scores are then transferred to a circular graph to form a visual profile, or picture, of an organisation's current culture.

## CONCLUSION

From the above, it is evident that there are many issues in the study of organisational culture. The concept of organisation's culture has been viewed variedly by many authors. Common to these views is the fact that culture is a characteristic of the group, which is shared among the people in the organisation. This may constitute what is known as core values and dominant culture as distinct from other values which may not be dominant but regarded as subcultures. There is a controversy as to whether there exists a single culture in an organisation or there are many cultures. This led to three perspectives on culture, namely; the unitarist, the pluralist and the anarchist.

We subscribe to the fact that there could be more than one forms of culture within organisation but only dominant one would constitute the core values of the organisation. As per how an organisation's culture is formed, sustained and transmitted, we discovered that the founders/ entrepreneurs have unique role to play in the formation of what would eventually become the way the things are done in the organisation. Their personal ways of lives may influence the ways of doing things by those that are employed in the organisation. With time these become entrenched and become the culture of the organisation.

The main determinants of culture include the paradigm, control systems, organisational structures, power structures, symbols, rituals and routines and stories and myths. Many attempts have been made to classify organisation's culture. Some of these classificatory schemes were considered in this paper. There are many

techniques for diagnosing and measuring organisation's culture. These include the Ghiselli self Description Inventory, Joint exploration through interactive interviewing, Denison organisational culture survey, Organisational culture profile, the Competing values framework, Human factors international, Organisational culture questionnaire, and organisational culture inventory.

We also discovered that organisation's culture is a main determinant to many aspects of organisation's life such as organisation success, attractiveness, innovation, safety, leadership, productivity, performance and effectiveness, strategy, quality management, human resource management, information technology etc. Thus, we conclude that the knowledge of organisation's culture is central to the success of any management.

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