

Organisational Culture and the Police

Keeping your head above the water.

Introduction

Research carried out in a Constabulary in the North of England suggests that the Police Service sees itself as a Performance and Service oriented organisation that is friendly and welcoming, with staff that have their customers' needs at heart. They see themselves as diligent, diverse and understanding of the needs of the community they serve. They concede a very strong culture lies within the organisation at all levels (Hesketh, 2010). The findings from research conducted by a 6th form college in the North of England ($n=120$) showed the police are generally well respected by young people, who thought they provided a good service and would generally *'like to see more officers on the streets.'*

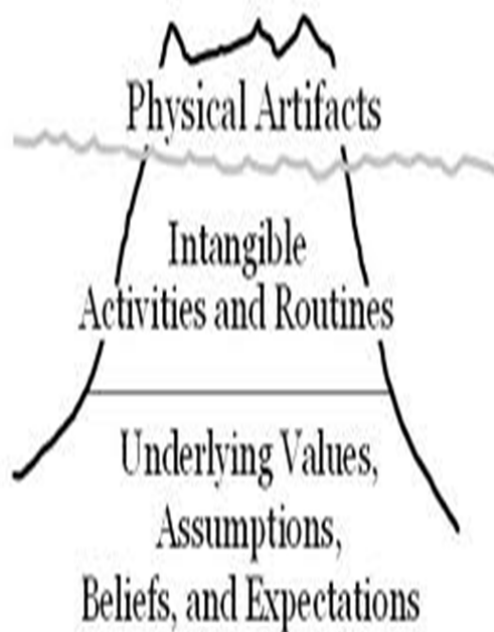
It is imperative that the police understand all their customers; and their diverse needs. Like any other customer facing business, it is vital that a positive relationship exists. This work proposes that if the culture is aligned, or the gap small; the relationship will prosper. To develop this theory further, one could hypothesise that getting it right will naturally lead to lower crime, reductions in anti-social behaviour, and higher levels of police confidence and satisfaction. *"Indeed, aligning strategic positioning and organisational culture is a critical feature of successful organisations"* (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008, p. 195).

Review of Literature

One definition of culture is, *"the collection of relatively uniform and enduring values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices that are shared by an organisation's members, learned by new recruits and transmitted from one generation of employees to the next"* (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007, p. 623). The importance of understanding the theory and being able to influence, or shape Culture plays a vital role in organisations. However, this is no easy task. Notwithstanding the plethora of academic viewpoints, the interpretation by managers appears to be a subjective exercise, matching your organisation to the most suitable theory, and aligning to that...*"searching for what they [managers] can understand and cope with"* (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008, p. 196).

There is a seemingly inexhaustible amount of academic literature surrounding the theory. This is roughly split into two trains of thought, *'have it; or do it.'* A managerial perspective (Schein, 2004) (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) defends the importance of culture, suggesting that an organisation *'has'* it, and that it may be changed or manipulated to suit a given circumstance; in much the same way as a strategy. And a Social Sciences view (Harris & Ogbonna, 1999) that questions whether culture exists at all, that it just *'is'*.

Firstly we examine what is generally considered the most prominent research in this field, *Schein's three levels of culture*; a popular viewpoint that is quoted in the majority of literature on culture. For Schein, *"culture consists of the assumptions about reality that are held by organizational members... cultures cannot be changed at the will or whim of individuals, but evolve through the shared experience of trauma and success, yet at the same time he accords leaders' a central role in the management of this learning process"*



(Nicholson, 1987, p. 87). Schein later developed this, suggesting that *"culture creation and management are the essence of leadership"* (2004, p. 1). This work proposes that as time passes leadership is influenced by culture, and culture is influenced by leadership; almost suggesting a continuous cycle (evolutionary perspective). Schein outlines the dangers associated with not understanding culture, which may lead to becoming a victim of its social and organisational effects. He promotes looking at an organisation through a *"cultural lens"* to become competent in cultural analysis (2004, p. 7).

Figure 1 Adapted from Schein's three levels of culture

The *Iceberg Model* depicts Schein's view on organisational culture. Physical artefacts represent what the outside world sees of an organisation, also known as the *surface manifestations*. The Iceberg model is particularly apt, as without further exploration these (surface manifestations) may be all anyone may experience of an organisation. Therefore if this is satisfactory, one may argue that culture is being managed. Below these sit the everyday routines which, in the case of the police, the general public may not see. However,

there may be exceptions, for example persons in custody, or embedded partner agencies. Situated beneath is the true organisational culture, the *hidden phenomena* according to Schein. This is the reality of the organisation. How those working for it think, feel and act. Schein concludes that these are the areas that must be understood if one is to understand an organisation.

Parker & Lorenzini (1993) propose that many organisations believe culture is solely the actions of its employees. And to change culture is a simple matter of addressing its member's behaviour; a somewhat simplistic view. '*this Corporate Culture stuff is great*' the chairman raved at dinner following the talk. Then, turning to his president, he demanded '*I want one by Monday*'..... (Camerer & Vepsalainen, 1988, p. 123).

Deal and Kennedy (1982) posit [that culture is] "*the way we do things around here*". One would suggest this phrase encapsulates the paradigm within the Police Service, amongst officers that have had long service with the Constabulary (ie 25yrs and above).

Handy (1999) attempted to classify types of organisational culture, placing them into 4 categories: Power, Role, Task and Person. This work is helpful as an introduction to culture, as we may use it to illustrate how we can '*operationalise*' culture. Handy compares this to the work of Schein on *Career Anchors* (1984), where he studied graduates ($n=44$) over a 12 year period, positing that the "*concept has also been used to explain the different orientations of policemen*" (Handy, 1999, p. 231). Four further archetypal cultures were developed by Deal & Kennedy (1982) and labelled as Process, Tough- Guy, Work hard/Play hard and Bet-your-company. These typologies show some similarities with those of Handy.

Camerer & Vepsalainen (1988) propose that culture may be used to encapsulate all that is omitted from a written contract, offering it up as an all-encompassing '*psychological contract*' to address inundant contingencies, "*the way we do things around here – for appropriate action under unspecified contingencies*" (Camerer & Vepsalainen, 1988, p. 115). This is particularly relevant to the police, it being impossible to plan for every eventuality officers are faced with.

The theory of ‘*Organizational Socialization*’ (Pascale, 1985) develops these concepts further. This work explores the indoctrination of new entrants to an organisation, and attempts to map the process by which Organisational Culture is embedded, proposing the depth of culture corresponds with the length of time exposed to these experiences (length of service). Pascale identified a 7 step model to define his findings, and suggests that new entrants may respond to this process in one of three ways:

1. *Collude* – submitting entirely to the culture
2. *Capitulate* – changing outward behaviour, but not inner feelings
3. *Defensive* – resisting the culture (Pascale suggests the employee would leave the company)

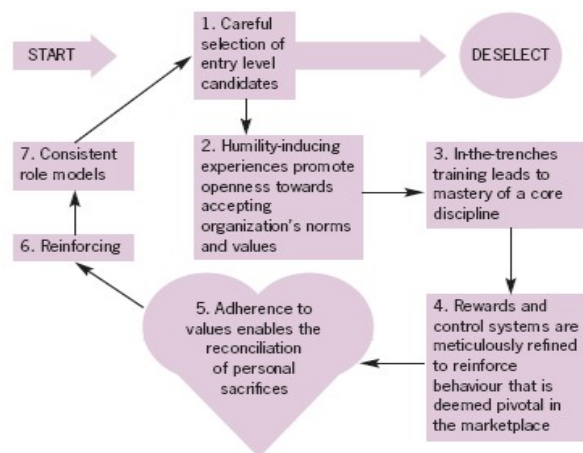


Figure 2 Seven steps of organizational socialization (Pascale, 1985)

Robbins (1983) suggests that an organisation may take this a step further, “*because organisations are constantly molding all employees so they reflect the organisation’s current culture, socialisation is going on all the time*” (p. 455). This perspective creates an obvious intervention opportunity. Robbins refers to a three step socialisation process involving Prearrival, Encounter and Metamorphosis; a punctuated version of Pascale’s model. Feldman’s model (1981) involves the stages of the Anticipatory Socialisation Process, Encounter, and Change and Acquisition; breaking down each stage in turn. He associates motivational factors as key to their success, “*we need to better understand the motivational patterns that can be used during organizational socialization, and the conditions under which motivations to different behaviors can be elicited*” (Feldman, 1981, p. 317). Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) propose there is a direct link between Organisational Culture and Performance and Satisfaction levels, but that this does not impact equally on the two areas; dependant on the congruence between individual needs and culture.

The above theories detail the culture that an organisation has, also called its *functional perspective*. A contradictory view explores what an organisations culture is, also known as the *symbolic, social construction or shared cognitions perspective* (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007). This concept proposes that culture is generated entirely through the interactions of employees, and rejects the idea of manipulating or influencing culture. The opinion is developed further in Harris & Ogbonna (1999), who argue that managing, or developing culture to fit with the market place is problematic. To change culture, or adapt it to a ‘trend’ is not without difficulties; if possible at all. One could suggest “.... *the study of organizational culture requires a detailed appreciation of the richness and complexities of organizational interaction and as such the understanding of depth and uniqueness*” (Harris & Ogbonna, 1999, p. 190).

In later work Robbins (2005) proposed that senior managers alone carry the culture, incorporating it into procedures and practises, suggesting that employees don’t need to necessarily understand or believe in it; but portray it to the outside world (Elvis day analogy). This somewhat mid ground could be construed as shaping the visible parts of the iceberg, ie the physical artefacts. It does provide a further hint of the feasibility to shape Culture, albeit not in its entirety (truly). The web (Fig 3) illustrates the various aspects that make up the organisational culture, ‘The Paradigm’, according to Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington (2008). The paradigm is discussed in Doherty & Horne (2002), who badge it as

“the way we see things around here” (2002, p. 90), suggesting that cultures reflect Paradigms. It provides a means by which we can capture and analyse culture, and the various behavioural, physical and symbolic manifestations that emerge.



Figure 3 Cultural Web - (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008, p. 198)

Findings & Interpretation

What is clear about culture in organisations, is that it is extremely unclear! *"Even though I have worked on culture as a variable for over 10 years, I keep being surprised by how little I understand its profound influence.."* (Schein, 1996, p. 229). It appears culture is littered with conflicting views on what it is, if it can be altered, developed or manipulated. The majority appear to concede that the basic assumptions, according to Schein (2004), cannot be changed with any amount of ease. However, there does seem to be opportunities to change some areas of culture. For example, by intervening in the process of '*Organizational Socialization*' (Pascale, 1985) at an early stage. As discussed in Harris & Ogbonna (1999), French, Rayner, Rees, & Rumbles (2008), Deal & Kennedy (1982) and Huczynski & Buchanan (2007); it is not an easy notion to manipulate. There is a further issue as to whether or not the Police, as a body, wish to change culture; or simply portray a different persona? Are they concerned only with the visible aspects, to which Robbins (2005) alludes, using socialisation to decrease extremes in behaviour and attitudes (1983)? In the context of Schein's observations on career anchors (1984), many officers see the police culture as an attractive area of the work, not many leave; and recruitment has never been difficult. These attractions to service, such as an *exaggerated sense of mission, craving of exciting work, and a willingness to use force* (Reiner, 2000) provide an addictive draw for officers. The argument is taken a step further by Phillips, Sobal, & Varano (2010), who propose that the socialisation process detailed by Pascale (1985) may begin as a potential recruit is raised within a police family; where the cultures are ingrained as they grow up (pre employment). This is further strengthened by strong portrayals in the media, TV dramas and the plethora of Police based films. These phenomena, taken collectively, go some way to explaining the strong culture that exists within the Police service.

Conclusions

The work has an overall conclusion that sides with the managerial perspective, but acknowledges the perspective of social scientists; that culture is very difficult to change. It appears comparatively straightforward to influence the outgoing persona, what Schein refers to as the '*Physical Artefacts*' (Cited in Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007). Can manipulating this level of culture, largely what the public sees bridge the gap on its own? Schein suggests *"culture creation and management are the essence of leadership"* (Schein, 2004, p. 1). He promotes looking at an organisation through a *"cultural lens"* to become competent in

cultural analysis (2004, p. 7). Therefore managers need to be conversant with cultural issues, and ensure behaviours incongruent with the organisational philosophy are addressed at every level. It would appear 'Basic Assumptions' are an extremely difficult area to address; and are ingrained in officers as they progress, or even on occasion before they join the service according to Phillips, Sobal, & Varano (2010). One would propose the key to changing or manipulating this area of culture is to make significant interventions in the 'Socialisation' process. This would require purging *root and branch* over time. To conclude, the police may be content, for the time being; to *keep their head above the water!*

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