Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives
Schein, Edgar H
Administrative Science Quarterly; Jun 1994; 39, 2; Research Library Core
pg. 339

that one could benefit from it in different ways with repeated readings.

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Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives.
Joanne Martin. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. 228 pp. $32.50, cloth; $18.95, paper.

This provocative book argues that organizational research exhibits paradigmatic biases and that these biases influence how data are collected and analyzed. The book will be of some interest to epistemologists because it raises some fundamental questions about how we approach organizations, how we acquire data about them, and what kinds of problems become the focus for research. Though the paradigms reflect the biases of the researchers, Martin is careful to note that she is analyzing the research itself, not speculating about the attitudes or assumptions of the researchers.

Some researches, Martin argues, tend to look for strong commonalities in the phenomena studied—things that hang together and that, once identified, explain a great many other things. This approach reflects an "integration perspective" and, because of that perspective, magnifies certain phenomena and ignores others. A second group of researches is more focused on the conflict and dissensus one observes in organizations and operates from what is called the "differentiation perspective." A third group focuses more on how little consensus can actually be found in organizations and how reality is constantly being constructed and reconstructed—the "fragmentation perspective."

A further argument is that one of the perspectives, the integration perspective, fails to note diversity and conflict in organizations and that both the integration and the differentiation perspectives fail to note the ambiguities that exist within organizational life. By not noting such ambiguities and conflicts, Martin argues, researchers miss important problems that deal with gender and race issues in organizational life. By not realizing that each perspective biases the nature of their research, researchers of the integrationist ilk in particular fail to appreciate the political implications of what they are studying, or rather are not studying.

Martin illustrates the three perspectives by reviewing various researches on organizational culture and showing how a given company that she and various colleagues studied can be viewed from each of these perspectives, leading to quite different conclusions about the same company. Martin quotes from interviews with various managers and employees and reports their perceptions around the three most common themes that emerged in the interviews—

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egalitarianism, emphasis on innovation, and concern for employee welfare. To illustrate the integration perspective, Martin presents the reader with quotes that suggest a strong set of values, to treat everyone equally and well and to foster innovation. In describing the differentiation perspective, the author presents the reader with a set of quotes showing not only that there are hierarchical status differences but that different functional groups have different relative statuses. Thus egalitarianism is clearly thrown into question and innovation is, according to some, undermined. Many view concern for the welfare of people quite skeptically, suggesting the possibility that such perceptions are patterned by subgroup membership. Finally, in presenting the fragmentation perspective, Martin shows the reader quotes that suggest that some employees are simply not sure what the values are or how others in the company view some of these issues. The author provides a methodology for sorting the interview data into systematic categories and for inferring from that whether "the culture" is integrated, differentiated, or fragmented. She then analyzes each perspective from the point of view of its analytical strengths and weaknesses and describes the implications for cultural analysis and cultural change.

The data and the line of argument raise two fundamental questions. First, why apply these perspectives to the study of culture rather than to social research in general? And, second, if this is indeed intended to be a critique of culture research, is it on solid ground? Dealing with the second question first, it must be granted that the word culture is now used in a myriad of ways. If the intent of the book were to show how loosely the term is used, I would have no quarrel. But Martin argues that (1) organizational culture is being studied from each of these different perspectives, (2) none of them tell the whole story about culture, and (3) her multiperspective view is a better and more valid way to study culture.

Though Martin claims to have worried some about sampling, the database on which she hangs the argument is very thin. Every organization I have ever encountered produces the same range of responses if one interviews a variety of employees and managers. Interview responses of this sort are what I would call surface artifacts, and such artifacts are notoriously difficult to decipher if one does not dig deeper by systematic observation or more confrontive interviewing of informants to elicit why certain inconsistencies seem to be evident. Martin does not report any effort to dig deeper, raising the worst-case possibility that she has identified only the surface cultural artifacts and has not encountered the deeper values or shared assumptions at all. If that is so, we have here an interesting study of how artifacts can be viewed from different perspectives, but we have learned very little about organizational culture and how it may operate in this company. One could even argue that the conflict around gender that the quotes reveal suggests that one should look for a shared assumption that "men are more important than women" in this company, that "humanitarian values are subordinate to technical values," and that "innovation is important only if it does not interfere

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with other norms." By not adopting an integrationist perspective herself, Martin may have missed some very important shared assumptions that show a darker side of this company's culture.

Why advocate a surface approach to an organizational concept whose primary utility is to push the researchers to dig more deeply into what may be going on under the surface? If we do not want to dig deeper, then why bother with the concept of culture at all? We have "norms," "climate," "espoused values," "corporate philosophy," "mission statements," and plenty of other more surface concepts with which to describe what is going on. One of the functions of research is to look for concepts and variables that help to make sense out of a lot of disparate pieces of information that the researcher comes across. Once we have higher-order variables, we attempt to tie them together through various propositions into a theory that at least explains things and, hopefully, eventually even predicts things. If one defines cultural matters as those experiences around which there is a fairly high degree of common understanding, shared meanings, or, as I would argue, shared basic assumptions, then culture can be quite useful as a construct. The concept loses its utility if we assume that all groups have cultures and that it is merely a matter of perspective whether we treat them as integrated, differentiated, or fragmented. It should be an empirical matter whether or not a given organization or group has some shared assumptions, whether or not it is differentiated into subgroups that have subcultures, or whether the fragmentation and ambiguity simply means that no culture has as yet formed.

Putting aside the question of perspectives on culture research, can one argue that organizational research in general reflects the perspectives identified? I believe the answer is yes, but not for the political and epistemological reasons Martin argues. An alternative explanation for the variation in research style is that researchers are driven primarily by the practicality of the research situation—to what kind of data do they have access and what skill set or research model do they have? The researcher trained in a strong positivist tradition is likely to want operational definitions and is willing to distance him- or herself from clinical data. This also happens to be convenient because it is much easier to gather formal interview or questionnaire data from willing volunteers than to infiltrate an organization as an ethnographer or to develop a consulting relationship that opens up some of the senior levels of the organization to clinical scrutiny (Schein, 1987, 1992). Validity issues are brushed under the rug by arguing that we cannot figure out what is "in the black box" anyway, and reliability is reified with protestations of careful sampling and statistical manipulation. But the fact remains that the data gathered may not reflect the phenomenon being studied except superficially.

The epistemological puzzle is, of course, that my critique can be labeled as reflecting an integrationist perspective and therefore be dismissed. If one examines the three perspectives from the point of view of the research method

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being used in each, however, one notes that the integrationists are more ethnographic and clinical, while the differentiationists and fragmentationists work more in the positivist quantitative and qualitative tradition. If one looks at the history of research on personality, one sees the same typological issue. Personality theorists differ in whether they see it as an integrative force, a set of conflicts, or a fragmented evolutionary coping process. Those differences often are directly correlated with whether they use clinical methods, observational methods, interviews, projective tests, or objective personality inventories. And we have not yet sorted out in that field which is the correct or most valid way to approach personality. We are probably in for the same kind of diversity in culture research, and though Martin's analysis may be useful in highlighting some differences, her typology is not as definitive as she might claim.

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Cultural Knowledge in Organizations: Exploring the Collective Mind.

Sonya A. Sackmann. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991. 221 pp. $42.00, cloth; $17.95, paper.

Cultural Knowledge in Organizations is primarily a book of author-constructed definitions. At the core of the definitional structure are four kinds of knowledge: dictionary knowledge, directory knowledge, recipe knowledge, and axiomatic knowledge. The exact boundaries between these different kinds of knowledge are subtle. For example, directory knowledge concerns "how things are done," and recipe knowledge concerns what people "should" do. Presumably, "how things are done" must assume a normative aspect, but this is the definition of recipe knowledge.

The ambiguous definitions could have been made clearer if the definitions had been used to organize and analyze data. But the method was the reverse: The data were used to create the definitions. There is not much data presented in the book, so we never get to see if the definitions actually help to make sense out of the data, and it is thus not clear whether the data even support the definitions, let alone if the definitions lead to insights about the data. The rationalist definitional structure is a monument unto itself as far as the reader can tell. Perhaps this is the strength of the book. The

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