

Chapter 10. Understanding Your Organization's Character

Introduction

This paper was published in 1972 in the Harvard Business Review, where it must have been one of the earliest contributions on the subject of organization culture. The model presented here was the outcome of a conversation with Charles Handy, then at the London Business School, and now a famous British writer on work, business, and the future. Our talk took place under a tree in Bethel, Maine, at NTL's Program for Specialists in Organization Development in 1970. I was on the program staff, and had volunteered to give a session on organization culture. I had been interested in such things since my involvement in the Peace Corps in the sixties in cross-cultural issues, and I was currently thinking a lot about my own awkward process of adaptation to living and working in Europe and the UK. Charles was a participant in the program. He had been very helpful to me during the previous year or two as I built a consulting practice in London, and struggled to come to grips with British business folkways. I enlisted his help in framing my talk, knowing that I could always count on him for conceptual clarity and stimulating ideas. The model we came up with was a modest success with the program participants, but we were thrilled with it, because it seemed to encompass so much of what we saw in the changing face of business management. Charles went on to write a book on his version of the model (Handy, 1985). Perhaps due to his classical training, he used Greek gods to symbolize the four cultures. I prepared the following paper, which I hoped would put me on the map as a leading edge thinker about organization culture. I also developed a quick-and-dirty little

questionnaire which I used to help managers think about the culture of their own organizations. It evolved much later into a commercially published instrument for assessing organization culture (Harrison and Stokes, 1992). In fact, this paper attracted virtually no attention at the time. It was to be nearly a decade before organization cultures began to shift radically enough that managers and consultants found a need to deal with culture as a differentiating quality of organizations. Until then, I believe that most inhabitants of organizations were not much more aware of their organization's distinctive culture than fish are of the properties of water. I did not pursue my interests in organization culture, but turned to other things. I only returned to this work in the eighties, at which time the topic was hot, and I was able to attract more interest in my work on it.

Understanding Your Organization's Character

Recognizing Ideological Issues

The failure to recognize the ideological issues that underlie organizational conflict is common among managers and administrators. Usually the issues are recognized only when they are blatant and the lines of struggle are drawn, as in labor-management relationships. But by then the conflict may well have developed to the point where a constructive resolution is virtually impossible.

While the term "organization ideologies" is perhaps unfortunately ambiguous, it is the best name I can apply to the systems of thought that are central determinants of the character of organizations. An organization's ideology affects the behavior of its people, its ability to effectively meet their needs and demands, and the way it copes

with the external environment. Furthermore, much of the conflict that surrounds organization change is really ideological struggle (an idea that is certainly not new to political science but one about which behavioral scientists have, until recently, been curiously quiet).

For example, during the commissioning and start-up stages of a U.S. chemical plant in Europe, it became apparent that the Americans and local nationals involved had rather different ideas about decision making and commitment to decisions.

Consider the approach of each group:

The Americans tended to operate within what I shall later describe as a task-oriented ideology. In problem-solving meetings they believed that everyone who had relevant ideas or information should contribute to the debates, and that in reaching a decision the greatest weight should be given to the best-informed and most knowledgeable people. They strove, moreover, for a clear-cut decision; and once the decision was made, they usually were committed to it even if they did not completely agree with it.

Some of the nationals, however, came to the project from very authoritarian organizations and tended to operate from a power-oriented ideological base (this will also be described later). Each individual seemed to be trying to exert as much control as possible and to accept as little influence from others as he could. If he was in a position of authority, he seemed to ignore the ideas of juniors and the advice of staff experts. If he was not in a position of authority, he kept rather

quiet in meetings and seemed almost happy when there was an unclear decision or no decision at all. He would then proceed the way he had wanted to all along.

The task-oriented people regarded the foregoing behavior as uncooperative and, sometimes, as devious or dishonest. The power-oriented people, however, interpreted the task-oriented individuals' emphasis on communication and cooperation as evidence of softness and fear of taking responsibility.

Each group was engaging in what it regarded as normal and appropriate practice and tended to regard the other as difficult to work with or just plain wrong. The fact that the differences were ideological was dimly realized only by the more thoughtful participants. The remainder tended to react to each other as wrongheaded individuals, rather than as adherents of a self-consistent and internally logical way of thinking and explaining their organizational world.

A Theory of Organization Ideologies

In this article I shall present a theory that identifies four distinct, competing organization ideologies and their meaning for the businessman. But, first, let me attempt to further clarify the concept. Here are the most obvious functions that an organization ideology performs:

- Specifies the goals and values toward which the organization should be directed and by which its success and worth should be measured.

- Prescribes the appropriate relationships between individuals and the organization (i.e., the “social contract” that legislates what the organization should be able to expect from its people, and vice versa).
- Indicates how behavior should be controlled in the organization and what kinds of control are legitimate and illegitimate.
- Depicts which qualities and characteristics of organization members should be valued or vilified, as well as how these should be rewarded or punished.
- Shows members how they should treat one another – competitively or collaboratively, honestly or dishonestly, closely or distantly.
- Establishes appropriate methods of dealing with the external environment – aggressive exploitation, responsible negotiation, proactive exploration.

Values and Ideologies

An organization ideology, however, is more than a set of prescriptions and prohibitions. It also establishes a rationale for these “do”s and “don't”s. This rationale explains the behavior of an organization's members as well as the working of the external environment (in the latter case, by telling members how to expect other people and organization systems to behave).

The rationale of an organization ideology is similar to what behavioral scientists call “organization theory.” The difference is that behavioral scientists try with varying degrees of success to keep their values from influencing their organization theories; people, for the most part, do not try to keep their values from influencing their organization ideologies. (This is one reason why education about organization behavior

is likely to be so emotionally loaded; if you change a man's organization theory, he usually ends up questioning his values as well.)

Among people in organizations, ideas of “what is” and “what ought to be” merge into one another and are – or are made to appear – consistent. Here is an example:

The ideology of a large U.S. manufacturer of consumer products prescribed that work should be organized in the way that produced the most profit. If this meant that some organization members had boring jobs which offered little opportunity for satisfaction and pride in their work, then it was unfortunate but ideologically irrelevant. According to the rationale of this ideology, a majority of people did not have much aptitude or desire for responsibility and decision making, anyhow, and those who did would rise by natural selection to more responsible, satisfying jobs.

Some young managers, however, had rather more egalitarian personal values. They uneasily suspected that there were more boring jobs than there were apathetic people to fill them. They were very excited about a group of research studies which attempted to show that giving employees more responsibility and involvement in decision making actually led to improved performance. But in my discussions with the managers, I found that the studies' instrumental value in improving organization effectiveness was not the cause of their popularity; rather, they were welcomed because they helped the managers reconcile their personal values with the dictum of the prevailing ideology that work should, above all, be organized to produce the best economic result. (I have, in fact, found that behavioral research findings are usually

accepted or rejected on such ideological grounds instead of on the probability of their being true.)

A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Organization Culture

In the remainder of this article I shall present a conceptual framework for understanding organization culture. It postulates four organization ideologies: (1) power orientation; (2) role orientation; (3) task orientation; and (4) person orientation. These ideologies are seldom found in organizations as pure types, but most organizations tend to center on one or another of them. I shall describe and contrast them in their pure form to emphasize their differences, and then indicate what I believe to be the strengths and weaknesses of each. After this I shall apply the conceptual model to some common conflicts in modern organization life.

Power Orientation

An organization that is power-oriented attempts to dominate its environment and vanquish all opposition. It is unwilling to be subject to any external law or power. And within the organization those who are powerful strive to maintain absolute control over subordinates.

The power-oriented organization is competitive and jealous of its territory (whether this be markets, land area, product lines, or access to resources). It seeks to expand its control at the expense of others, often exploiting weaker organizations. Even a weak power-oriented organization takes satisfaction in being able to dominate others that are still weaker. Such organizations always attempt to bargain to their own

advantage and readily find justification for abrogating agreements which are no longer self-serving.

Some modern conglomerates project images of power ideology. They buy and sell organizations and people as commodities, in apparent disregard of human values and the general welfare. They seem to have voracious appetites for growth, which is valued for its own sake. Competition to acquire other companies and properties is ruthless and sometimes outside the law. Within the organization, the law of the jungle often seems to prevail among executives as they struggle for personal advantage against their peers.

There is, however, a softer form of the power orientation that is often found among old established firms, particularly those with a background of family ownership. Here the employees may be cared for rather than exploited, especially those that are old and loyal. Externally, the proprietors may hold to a code of honor, especially when dealing with others like themselves. This is the power orientation with a velvet glove. But when the benevolent authority is crossed or challenged, from either within or without, the iron fist is very likely to appear again. In such cases, the test of power orientation is how hard a person or organization will fight for power and position when these are at issue.

Role Orientation

An organization that is role-oriented aspires to be as rational and orderly as possible. In contrast to the willful autocracy of the power-oriented organization, there is a preoccupation with legality, legitimacy, and responsibility.

It is useful to see role orientation as having developed partly in reaction to power orientation. Competition and conflict, for example, are regulated or replaced by agreements, rules, and procedures. Rights and privileges are carefully defined and adhered to. While there is a strong emphasis on hierarchy and status, it is moderated by the commitment to legitimacy and legality.

The different attitudes of the power and role orientations toward authority might be likened to the differences between a dictatorship and a constitutional monarchy.

Predictability of behavior is high in the role-oriented organization, and stability and respectability are often valued as much as competence. The correct response tends to be more highly valued than the effective one. Procedures for change tend to be cumbersome; therefore the system is slow to adapt to change.

Most commercial organizations are too constricted by market demands to afford the extreme rigidity of a pure role orientation or the worst excesses of its tendency to place procedural correctness before task effectiveness. Some businesses, however, which either control their markets or operate in areas that are highly regulated by law, exhibit a considerable degree of role orientation. The rationality, impersonality, and adherence to procedure of many banks, insurance companies, public utilities, and social work organizations are cases in point. Their role orientation leaves the customer, the public, or the client with little alternate choice in dealing with them.

Task Orientation

In the organization that is task-oriented, achievement of a super ordinate goal is the highest value. The goal need not be economic; it could be winning a war,

converting the heathen, reforming a government, or helping the poor. The important thing is that the organization's structure, functions, and activities are all evaluated in terms of their contribution to the super ordinate goal.

Nothing is permitted to get in the way of accomplishing the task. If established authority impedes achievement, it is swept away. If outmoded roles, rules, and regulations hinder problem solving, they are changed. If individuals do not have the skills or technical knowledge to perform a task, they are retrained or replaced. And if personal needs and social considerations threaten to upset effective problem solving, they are suppressed in the interests of "getting on with the job."

There is no ideological commitment to authority, respectability, and order as such. Authority is considered legitimate only if it is based on appropriate knowledge and competence; it is not legitimate if it is based solely on power or position. And there is little hesitation to break rules and regulations if task accomplishment is furthered by doing so.

There is nothing inherently competitive about task orientation. The organization structure is shaped and changed to meet the requirements of the task or function to be performed. Emphasis is placed on rapid, flexible organization response to changed conditions. Collaboration is sought if it will advance the goal; allies are chosen on the basis of mutual goals and values; and there is little "advantage seeking" in relationships with other organizations.

The task orientation is most readily found in those small organizations whose members have come together because of some shared value, task, or goal. Examples are

social service organizations, research teams, and high-risk businesses. Often, however, internal conflict and external stress drive these organizations toward power and role orientations.

Large organizations that operate in highly complex, shifting environments offer more durable examples. Companies involved with dynamic markets or fast-changing, complex technology frequently establish project teams or “task forces.” These groups of specialists are selected to solve a particular problem and often operate in a very flexible and egalitarian manner until the problem is solved. The units are then disbanded, and the members join other teams to work on new problems. Although the larger organization in which it operates may be basically role- or power-oriented, the project team or task force often exhibits a relatively pure task orientation. Moreover, these groups have been so successful that some organizations are trying to install a task-oriented ideology throughout their operations.

Some of the aerospace industries have probably gone the furthest in this direction, TRW Systems being a notable example. Although I do not know of any large organization that could be classed as “pure” in its task orientation, the success of such task-oriented programs as MBO is a sign of the growing interest among managers. Parenthetically, the most frequent reason for the failure of MBO is probably that task-oriented managers try to install it in power- or role-oriented organizations.

Person Orientation

Unlike the other three types, the person-oriented organization exists primarily to serve the needs of its members. The organization itself is a device through which the

members can meet needs that they could not otherwise satisfy by themselves. Just as some organizations continually evaluate the worth of individual members as tools and accept or reject them accordingly, so the person-oriented organizations are evaluated as tools by their members. For this reason, some of these organizations may have a very short life; they are disposable when they cease to provide a system for members to “do their own thing.”

Authority in the role- or power-oriented sense is discouraged. When it is absolutely necessary, authority may be assigned on the basis of task competence, but this practice is kept to the bare minimum. Instead, individuals are expected to influence each other through example, helpfulness, and caring.

Consensus methods of decision making are preferred; people are generally not expected to do things that are incongruent with their own goals and values. Thus rules are assigned on the basis of personal preference and the need for Teaming and growth. Moreover, the burden of unrewarding and unpleasant tasks is shared equally.

Illustrations of person orientation are small groups of professionals who have joined together for research and development. Some consulting companies, too, seem to be designed primarily as vehicles for members. It is typical of such organizations that growth, expansion, and maximization of income and profit are not primary considerations. Rather, the organizations, hopefully, are conducted to make enough money to survive and provide their members with a reasonable living as well as an opportunity to do meaningful and enjoyable work with congenial people.

There seem to be increasing pressures from the members of modern industrial organizations to move toward person orientation. Young professionals are pushing their companies for opportunities to work on interesting, worthwhile (congruent with their own values) projects. Engineers and scientists, for example, have refused to work on projects for the military and have been successful in getting transfers to nondefense-related activities. Job recruiters find that college graduates are often more interested in opportunities to learn and grow than they are in their chances for organization advancement. Such signs of social change illustrate why the person orientation must be considered an ideological force to be reckoned with, even though there are few contemporary organizations that operate in total congruence with its principles.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Ideology

An organization ideology obviously has a profound effect on organization effectiveness. It determines how (a) decisions are made, (b) human resources are used, and (c) the external environment is approached. An organization ideology tends to be internally viable when the people within the system want and need the prescribed incentives and satisfactions that reward good performance. It tends to be externally viable when the organization it embodies is a microcosm of the external environment and rewards the same skills, values, and motivations.

Information Processing

Usually, as an organization increases in size, its operational environment becomes more complex. More arenas in which large companies operate change rapidly and/or have many features that require an integrated response. Worldwide markets

and rapidly changing technology, for example, make heavy demands on the information processing and decision-making capabilities of organizations.

The power-oriented organization is not well adapted to flexible response and effective information processing in such environments. Since decisions are made at the top, the information has to pass through many people who screen out the “irrelevant” data. Moreover, some may distort the message to their own advantage (aggressive competition is part of the ideology). And when conditions change rapidly, the time lag introduced by the filtering process may unduly delay organization response.

The role-oriented organization is also insufficiently flexible to easily adapt to rapid external changes. In order to achieve the security that is one of its highest values, it must perpetuate rather rigid roles and reporting relationships. This gives stability but means that even the most powerful individuals may be unable to produce needed changes quickly.

In times of change, established procedures often do not apply, and the information channels become overloaded with problems that require higher-level decisions. Consider what happened in the commissioning and start-up example referred to at the beginning of this article:

Because equipment was not working properly, many actions which ordinarily would have been dealt with by standard operating procedures required top-management decisions. But the ordinary channels would not carry the necessary volume of information, and the quality of decision making and problem solving suffered accordingly. However, when control was shifted to teams of experts

clustered around each plant (a task-oriented system) the problems were handled much more smoothly.

Coping with Change

The task-oriented organization's greatest strength is dealing with complex and changing environments. Decentralized control shortens communication channels and reduces time lags, distortion, and attenuation of messages.

Both the power- and role-oriented organizations associate control with a *position* in the organization; neither provides for rapid and rational reassignment of appropriate persons to positions of influence. In contrast, the task oriented ideology clears the way for a very flexible system of control—one that can shift rapidly over time as differing resources are required by external problems.

Probably the best example of this system in operation is the project team or task force that is formed to identify, diagnose, and solve a particular problem. Even some rather bureaucratic organizations make use of these temporary systems for emergency problem solving. The task force leader is selected for his combination of technical expertise and ability to manage a small group in an egalitarian manner.

The temporary work system is a particularly characteristic response of the task-oriented organization to environmental change. These temporary systems can be activated quickly, provided with the necessary mix of skills and abilities, and disbanded again when the need is past. Their use provides what is, in effect, a continuously variable organization structure.

The person-oriented organization, too, is well adapted to dealing with complexity and change. It also features a fluid structure and short lines of communication and control.

Coping with Threat

In a highly competitive environment where organizations are frequently confronted with overt threats and hostility, the strengths and weaknesses of ideological types form a different pattern.

For example, while the power-oriented organization is not well suited to handle complexity and change, its structure and decision-making processes are admirably suited for swift decision making and rapid-action follow-through under high-risk conditions. It tends to promote tough, aggressive people who can lead the organization in a dangerous, competitive environment.

The task-oriented organization usually takes longer to respond, but the response is more likely to be based on adequate data and planning. In contrast to the power-oriented structure, which is aggressively directed from the top, it tends to enlist the full commitment of organization members at all levels.

The role-oriented organization does not deal successfully with sudden increases in threat because it relies heavily on established operational procedures. Consequently, its structure is too cumbersome to react quickly in cases of overt threat.

And the person-oriented organization has difficulty directing its members' activities in unison until the danger is so clear and present that it may be too late. The

person-oriented structure, however, does offer some advantages – its members are committed and have a high concern for one another's welfare.

Probably the most viable organization in a hostile, threatening environment would have a combination of the power and task orientations. This is a difficult marriage, however, because the desire for personal power is often incompatible with the required willingness to relinquish control to those with the most knowledge and ability for the task at hand.

Internal Viability of Each Ideology

Internal Cohesion

The power-oriented organization is an excellent structure for attaching many eyes, ears, hands, and feet to one brain. It exercises tight internal control and integration. As mentioned earlier, the system works well when problems take the form of overt challenges that can be comprehended and solved by one or a few intelligent, courageous people at the top.

But when the power-oriented organization becomes large and complex, this control tends to break down. Under these conditions the role-oriented ideology is more effective. It provides rules and procedures that allow a high degree of internal integration with little active intervention from the top.

It is obviously more difficult to achieve internal cohesion under a task- or person-oriented ideology. For example, if the work is done by temporary project teams, how are their efforts to be coordinated to a common goal? When a problem-solving team comes up with a solution and then disbands, how is its work to be given impact and

continuity in the rest of the organization? Some stable and central structure is needed to provide coordination, long-range planning, and continuity of effort. If it is too stable, however, it may become role-oriented (rigid and hard to change) or power-oriented (recentralizing control). The personal power and security needs of individual members may foster such developments.

New Forms of Coordination

These dilemmas of internal structure have led to various compromise solutions such as the “matrix organization”. The term “matrix” is used because the actual working groups *cut horizontally across* the normal functional-pyramidal organization, bringing together selected individuals from different functions and different levels to work in a relatively autonomous, egalitarian group. Structural stability is provided by a fixed role-oriented framework organized on functional lines. Personnel are readily detachable from the functions for varying periods of time during which they join a *task-oriented* work unit or project team. They are directed by the work unit; but their pay, career prospects, and promotions emanate from the role-oriented part of the system.

Matrix forms of organization have been used with success in highly technical businesses operating in a fast-changing environment. Again, TRW Systems is perhaps the oldest and most comprehensive example. Considerable experimentation with matrix forms has also taken place in the chemical industry, both in the United States and abroad.

Although the matrix system can be effective, it often suffers from attempts of the role-oriented functions to over control the task-oriented functions. The resulting

conflict is usually won by the former, which has greater permanence and more resources. One reason for this difficulty is that organizations try to operate partially task-oriented structures without commitment to the ideology. Role-oriented people cannot be plugged into a task-oriented system without conflict.

Effective Motivation:

While the power-oriented organization provides a chance for a few aggressive people to fight their way to the top, it offers little security to the ordinary person. It is most viable in situations where people are deprived and powerless and have to accept a bad bargain as better than none. For example, the power-oriented organization thrives in underdeveloped countries.

The power-oriented organization also has the problem of using too much of its energy to police people. Reliance on rewards and punishments tends to produce surface compliance and covert rebellion. Where the quantity and quality of work can be observed (as on an assembly line), inspection and discipline may keep the system working. But if the power does not command loyalty as well, the system usually breaks down. A simple example is the sabotage of hard-to-test aspects of car assembly by disgruntled workers.

The role-oriented ideology tries to deal with the difficulty of supervising complex decision-making and problem-solving tasks by rationalization and simplification. Each job is broken into smaller elements, rules are established, and performance is observed. When conditions change, however, the members are likely to continue carrying out the same (now ineffective) procedures.

The power- and role-oriented organizations simply do not provide for the development and utilization of internal commitment, initiative, and independent judgment on the part of members at other than the highest levels. Nevertheless, in societies where most people's aspirations are just to get by, or at most to achieve a measure of economic security, the power- and role-oriented organizations are able to function adequately.

In affluent societies, however, where security is more widely assured, people begin to look for deeper satisfactions in their work. They attempt to change tightly controlled work assignments and rigid internal structures. When trends toward task orientation ("useful", "meaningful" work) and person orientation (interesting work, self expression, and "doing one's own thing") begin to develop in the wider society, internal pressures for change develop within power- and role-oriented organizations.

Unfortunately, not all people can function productively in a flexible and egalitarian structure. Some people are dependent, apathetic, or insecure. They do need external incentives to work and directives or rules to guide their activities.

Furthermore, the task-oriented ideology has its own ways of exploiting the individual. When his knowledge and skills become obsolete for the task at hand, an individual is expected to step gracefully aside to make room for someone who is better qualified. Status and recognition depend almost entirely on task contribution; if the problems facing the organization change suddenly, this can produce cruel reversals of an individual's personal fortune and work satisfaction.

The person-oriented organization seems to be specially created to fit the work situation to the motives and needs of the independent, self-directed individual. It is flexible to his demands, whereas the power-oriented organization is controlling; it gives scope for his individual expression, whereas the role-oriented organization programs every move; it is concerned about his personal needs, whereas the task-oriented organization uses people as instruments for "higher" ends. Unfortunately, as discussed above, the person-oriented organization is less likely to be effective in the external environment than organizations based on the other ideologies.

Resolving Ideological Conflicts in Organizations

One basic tension runs throughout the ideologies and organization types discussed thus far. It is the conflict between (a) the values and structural qualities which advance the interests of people and (b) the values and structural qualities which advance the interests of organizations.

I can identify six interests, all mentioned previously, which are currently the subject of ideological tension and struggle. Three of these are primarily interests of people, and three are primarily interests of organizations. The three interests of people are:

1. Security against economic, political, or psychological deprivation.
2. Opportunities to voluntarily commit one's efforts to goals that are personally meaningful.
3. The pursuit of one's own growth and development, even where this may conflict with the immediate needs of the organization.

The three interests of organizations are:

1. Effective response to threatening and dangerous complex environments.
2. Dealing rapidly and effectively with change and complex environments.
3. Internal integration and coordination of effort toward organization needs

and goals, including the subordination of individual needs to the needs of the organization.

These are obviously not all the interests at issue, but in my opinion they are among the most salient.

Table 10.1. shows the interests of people, and how well they are met under each orientation. Table 10.2. shows the organization's interests, and how well they are met by each orientation. The four ideologies have quite dissimilar profiles. Each ideology thus “fits” the needs of an organization and its members differently.

Table 10.1. Interests of People Under Four Orientations

	Security against economic, political, and psychological deprivation	Opportunities for voluntary commitment to worthwhile goals	Opportunities to pursue one’s own growth and development independent of organization goals
Power orientation	Low: At the pleasure of the	Low: Unless one is in a	Low: Unless one is in a

	autocrat	sufficiently high position to determine organization goals	sufficiently high position to determine organization goals
Role orientation	High: Secured by law, custom, and procedure	Low: Even if, at times, one is in a high position	Low: Organization goals are relatively rigid and activities are closely prescribed
Task orientation	Moderate: Psychological deprivation can occur when an individual's contributions are redundant	High: A major basis of the individual's relationship to the organization	Low: The individual should not be in the organization if he does not subscribe to some of its goals
Person orientation	High: The individual's welfare is the major concern	High: But only if the individual is capable of generating his own goals	High: Organization goals are determined by individual needs

Table 10.2. Interests of Organization Under Four Orientations

	Effective response to dangerous, threatening environments	Dealing rapidly and effectively with environmental complexity and change	Internal integration and coordination of effort – if necessary, at the expense of individual needs
Power orientation	High: The organization tends to be perpetually ready for a fight	Moderate to low: Depends on size; pyramidal communication channels are easily overloaded	High: Effective control emanates from the top
Role orientation	Moderate to low: The organization is slow to mobilize to meet increases in threat	Low: Slow to change programmed procedures; communication channels are easily overloaded	High: Features a carefully planned rational system of work
Task orientation	Moderate to high: The organization may be slow to make decisions but	High: Flexible assignment of resources and short communication	Moderate: Integrated by common goal; but flexible, shifting structure may

	produces highly competent responses	channels facilitate adaptation	make coordination difficult
Person orientation	Low: The organization is slow to become aware of threat and slow to mobilize effort against	High: But response is erratic; assignment of resources to problems depends greatly on individual needs and interests	Low: A common goal is difficult to achieve and activities may shift with individual interests

A couple of examples show how organizations with differing internal and external situations are best served by different cultural orientations. A small organization operating in a rapidly changing technical field and employing people who desire personal growth and autonomy might find its best fit with either the task or person orientation depending, on how competitive its markets are and how strong its finances are. A very large organization operating a slowly changing technology in a restricted market and employing people who desire stability and security might find that a role orientation would provide the best balance.

For most organizations, there is no perfect fit with any one of the four ideologies. The “ideal” ideology would possess some power orientation to deal smartly with the competition, a bit of role orientation for stability and internal integration, a charge of task orientation for good problem solving and rapid adaptation to change, and enough

person orientation to meet the questions of the new recruit who wants to know why he should be involved at all unless his needs are met.

Unfortunately, this mixture of ideologies *and their consequences* for people and organizations will inevitably result in conflict, and consequent wear and tear on organizations and their members. Trying to mix ideologies may also prevent each type from producing the advantages that are unique to it.

On the other hand, I do not think that the most viable organizations and the maximum satisfaction of human needs will result from monolithic structures which are ideologically homogeneous. It seems to me that we must learn to create and maintain organizations that contain within them the same diversity of ideologies and structures as are found in the complex environments in which the organizations must live and grow. This means that organizations may have to be composed of separate *parts* that are ideologically homogeneous within themselves yet still quite different from each other.

Such organizations will be very effective in dealing with complex environments and maximizing satisfactions for different types of people, but they will be subject to more internal conflict and ideological struggle than most current organizations could tolerate. For example, instead of a “company spirit” there will be several “company spirits,” all different and very likely antagonistic. In this environment of conflicting but mutually interdependent parts, the management – not the resolution – of conflict will be a task of the greatest importance. One can imagine, in fact, that as Lawrence and Lorsch have suggested, the most important job of top managers will not be directing the

business, but, instead, managing the integration of its parts (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967b).

The Future of Organization Ideologies

Whether people confront or avoid them, ideological issues will continue to sharpen of their own accord, both inside and outside the organization. As long as we continue to raise and educate our children permissively, the pressure from younger members of the organization for greater person orientation will increase. As operational environments become more turbulent and more technical, the attractions of task orientation will make themselves felt. Yet every change in organizations means some degree of power redistribution and with it some shift in rewards—such shifts will always be resisted by those with the most to lose, usually the older members of the organization who have a higher status. Thus I believe that ideological conflict will increase within organizations, whether that conflict is dealt with openly or not.

By dealing with such conflict openly, however, businessmen may find ways to manage it in the service of both the organization and its members and also to use tension creatively as well as competitively. Hidden conflict on the other hand, tends to eat away at the strength of an organization and then to erupt when it is most dangerous to organization health.

In writing this article, I have attempted to render these inevitable, ideological differences more conceptually clear. What is now needed is to develop a common language and set of norms that support both the open confrontation of such issues and the strategies for dealing with them in our organizations.

