

In editing a collection of essays on corporate culture, Frost et al have introduced three distinct perspectives on culture: Integration, differentiation and fragmentation. Critically consider these distinctive approaches to culture considering the claim that ‘all forms of workplace behaviour, including management action, is complex, ambiguous and material, in other words it is cultural and impossible to completely know.’

Organisational culture is the values and beliefs of the people within an organisation; it is the ‘personality’ of the organisation. It includes the assumptions, values and normalities of behaviour within the cultures (McNamara, 1999). *“Just as tribal cultures have totems and taboos that dictate how each member will act towards fellow members and outside, so does the corporation’s culture influence employee’s actions towards customers, competitors, suppliers and one another.”* (Parker, 2002) Therefore human behaviour is the focal point of culture. Culture is mainly studied through anthropology, researchers providing empirical evidence to view culture, some describe it and some try to come up with solutions. This assignment sets out to critically look at culture and the framework put forward by Frost et al, with an understanding of organisational behaviour. Use of empirical examples from Frost et al’s ‘Reframing Organisational Culture’ will be used to support and explain the framework and the criticisms of it.

The core definition of organisational culture is relatively stable; however, ways in which to study and ‘measure’ it are not. There are many disagreements as to which methods should be used. Such disagreements come from the fact that researchers of organisational culture do not study the same manifestation, *“they do not study from the same theoretical, epistemological or methodological point of view.”* (Frost et al, 1991) This is where the study of organisational behaviour begins to become complex. We need to emphasise the researcher’s approach to understanding and interpreting culture and behaviour as this is *“inseparable from the picture he or she paints.”* (Frost et al, 1985) The profession, values, background, style and assumptions of the researcher all play a part in the understanding and interpreting. Frost et al have taken this into account in providing us with a three perspective framework which does not exclude the ambiguity within the research of organisational behaviour. These perspectives offer *“a theoretical framework that can capture the major similarities and differences among the various approaches to the study of culture.”* (Frost et al, 1991) They give different insights into organisational culture, insights which aim to provide a less bias view of culture.

The 3 perspectives are comprised of the integration, differentiation and fragmentation perspective. Integration is where culture is considered to be ‘as one’. Everyone agrees with what is to be done and how to do it. One main factor of the integration perspective is that it is consistent and ambiguity does not exist. Differentiation has sub-cultures, small pockets of groups within a larger culture i.e. the organisation. These sub-cultures have consensus within them and ambiguity occurs between these sub-cultures but so can an agreement, the culture is inconsistent. Disagreement is

virtually unavoidable in a fragmentation perspective. This is where culture is viewed as though each person had different opinions on why things are done, how to do them, when to do them etc. Sometimes there is consistency, sometimes there is inconsistency, but one thing is almost certain, there will always be a lack of consensus. The table below shows the main characteristics of the three perspectives to organisational culture:

Features	Perspective		
	Integration	Differentiation	Fragmentation
Orientation to Consensus	Orientation-wide consensus	Sub-cultural consensus	Lack of consensus
Relation among Manifestations	Consistency	Inconsistency	Not clearly either
Orientation to Ambiguity	Exclude it	Channel it outside sub -cultures	Acknowledge it

(Frost et al, 1991)

Frost et al's perspective is a descriptive way of looking at culture. Descriptive approaches to culture literally describe the culture of the organisation; it is involved in it, but does not offer a solution to the situation. This way, it allows managers to adapt the description to the organisation for them to come up with a solution. On the other hand, there is prescription. Prescription offers an answer to cultural problems within the organisation. One example of prescription is Taylor's Scientific Management, where he offers a system in the aim to eliminate soldiering. (Hitchin, lecture 5, 2004) It can be said that by offering a descriptive approach alone may easily eliminate ambiguity due to the fact it only describes a situation. There is likely to be even more disagreement in a prescriptive approach as there seems to be a larger scope for subjectivity due to there being two sides; the description of the culture or behavioural problem, e.g. employees are soldiering, and the solution offered, e.g. scientific management, whereas a descriptive approach has one that can be adapted by organisations and its managers in their specific context as it is, or certainly appears to be, an objective approach to culture. Frost et al have given organisations and its managers a descriptive way of looking at the behaviour of employees.

Why is it impossible to have complete knowledge of organisational behaviour? Employee behaviour cannot be monitored every minute of the day; it would not be cost effective. Therefore management often have a misperception or do not know of the patterns of behaviour within the workforce. Behaviour, or misbehaviour, can only be known when it is seen, unless there are employees who are very loyal towards their managers and willing to report misbehaviour. In the library, it is forbidden to eat or drink, yet how many times do you see people doing so without librarians noticing, how many of you have gotten away with taking five minutes extra on your tea break or dumped an item just anywhere in the store room because you cannot find it? From previous experience and knowledge, misbehaviour occurs all the time in quite possibly all organisations, no matter how integrated the organisation thinks it is. You have to ask yourself, have you heard of any large successful organisation where there is no misbehaviour? Where there is an organisation-wide consensus of views, assumptions and beliefs? One would assume not because it is an immeasurable task. Behaviour becomes more complicated when misbehaviour is overlooked by management. This could be due to a number of reasons: apart from lack of care, it

may seem that the cost of eliminating the misbehaviour may be more than the cost of eliminating it, therefore, it is dismissed. Also, the tolerance of misbehaviour may be seen as a good thing. A good thing!? The correction of misbehaviour can be seen as a *“powerful and effective control device.”* (Ackroyd et al, 1999) Managers can use misbehaviour to their advantage in allowing it to occur and then reinforcing what behaviour should be, this way, employees are constantly reminded about hierarchies within the organisation and is also a learning process for the employee. However, tolerance of behaviour can lead to uncertainty in what is acceptable and unacceptable, therefore ambiguities can occur. This goes to show that management behaviour and the way managers define misbehaviour can cause complexities in itself as it is a very subjective issue. Managers need to find consistency in the way they define and deal with misbehaviour in order for there to be a clear understanding amongst the workforce of the behaviour expected of them. To do this, there should be no ambiguity amongst managers; you could say that there needs to be consensus within the culture of the organisation's managers for there to be consistency amongst the workforce. However, we will never know when ambiguity and misbehaviour amongst the workforce has been eradicated. Because of such unknowingness, how can we view culture from any of the 3 perspectives? We do not know how fragmented or how integrated an organisation's culture because we do not fully know how employees behave, or misbehave. We cannot watch each employer all the time and therefore, we do not entirely know whether the employee shares the organisations view, values and assumptions or not.

We must apprehend that management behaviour is similar to that of 'normal' employees, more than we realise. This may be a surprise to some, but why? It is probably due to the way managers are disciplined, *“if a manager is not to be found, it is assumed there is good reason for it. If a shop worker is absent, it is assumed there is no good reason for it.”* (Ackroyd et al, 1999) Manager's can escape punishment easier due to their position of responsibility. However, one thing we need to understand is that management behaviour and their regimes affect employee behaviour. One reason why managers have problems with misbehaviour is because they misbehave themselves. (Ackroyd et al, 1999) If an employee sees their manager soldiering or pilfering, then they are likely to think that it is acceptable for them to do so. More ambiguity comes into play here if a manager attempts to discipline an employee for a behaviour in which a manager has partaken in. In this situation, which from previous experience is not rare, it shows that there is not an integrated culture that an organisation would like. It suggests that there is differentiation, different sub-cultures, where management is one of them. One aspect that often complicates organisational behaviour is that managers have a tendency to believe that they can change organisational behaviour more than they actually can; they mistake small, temporary changes in behaviour for long term changes. (Ackroyd et al, 1999) They believe that they can conform to organisational aims of integrating the culture, yet they can only affect behaviour to a certain extent and even then, it is only temporary.

Organisations tend to attempt to obtain an integrated culture as they believe that agreed ideas and methods are a basis for success. However, is it as simple as this? Can an organisation build an integrated culture, or can they change the culture from fragmented or differentiated to integrated? A major problem in organisational behaviour is that you cannot permanently change individuals' behaviour as this is based upon *their* own values, assumptions and beliefs. Behaviour is therefore

cultural, but cultural to the extent that individual behaviour cannot be changed on such a large scale and it is almost impossible to alter the values, assumptions and beliefs of a great number of people. Take for example 'the Jones food company': Jones set up a company and wanted to implement his beliefs and visions onto his employees to create a culture that reflected him i.e. an integrated culture. In the beginning this worked, employees behaved in a way that Jones wanted mainly due to the fact that he employed those who he believed would conform to his way of thinking, but as the company grew, employees began to realise that some of his assumptions and methods of management were in fact controversial. What happened here was that employees got together to form a culture of their own, a sub-culture. Loyalty was significantly damaged and ambiguity occurred when sub-cultural values conflicted with the founder's. "*Cultures do not start from scratch*" (Schein, cited in Frost et al, 1991), individual employees come from different backgrounds with different beliefs and assumptions.

Human behaviour is already inscribed into an individual before they are employed into an organisation due to their culture and to change this is extremely difficult, to change a whole workforces' behaviour is almost impossible. Or is it? McDonald's example of The Los Angeles Olympic Organising Committee (LAOOC) is portrayed as integrated, "*inspiring individuals to strive for a common goal.*" (McDonald, cited in Frost et al, 1991) Employees were made to feel a part of the organisation and a part of history. They were worked hard, but they all shared this common goal. However, there seems to be a couple of problems with this example: Firstly it is only for a short period of time and does not represent an ordinary organisation in that organisations are permanent (one would like to think). You would have to ask yourself whether this culture would continue. Secondly, although an integrated perspective is portrayed and individuals are striving for the same goal, there are conflicts: "*conflicts are inevitable.*" (McDonald, cited in Frost et al, 1991) Frost et al's integration perspective states that there is to be an organisation-wide consensus, which means no conflicts or ambiguity, if there are conflicts in the LAOOC, then it cannot be said to have an integrated culture, therefore, the organisational behaviour will be different between the employees, it will be ambiguous.

Although these empirical studies are viewed from the integration perspective, there are elements of differentiation and ambiguity amongst employee behaviour and it is clear to see where criticisms can occur. In the introductory paragraph to this essay, Parker states that corporate culture influences the behaviour of employees, but it seems here, particularly referring to the Jones food company, that behaviour and the consequent actions of employees is already embedded in them and therefore implies the opposite; employee culture influences corporate culture, especially during the first stages of an organisation's life. For an employee's behaviour to conform to the organisation's culture, the employee's culture must have the same or similar values, assumptions, beliefs etc to that of the organisation. Before we move on, consider the fact that every year, shoppers have to pay so much more than they should, running into 3 figure sums, due to shoplifting. Around one third of shoplifting is carried out by staff. (Ackroyd et al, 1999) Figures like these are in opposition to an integrated perspective to culture.

Traditional studies of culture tend to look at culture from too much of an integrated point of view and have the assumption that the members have the same (or very

similar) views and understandings, which make people's opinion of workplace behaviour more confusing than it should be. However, Frost et al offer two more perspectives. The empirical example of Disneyland is viewed as a differentiated culture, very different to that of Jones and the LAOOC. *"The culture of interest is the Disneyland culture but it is not necessarily the same one invented, authorised, codified, or otherwise approved by park management."* (Maanen, cited in Frost et al, 1991) Unlike Jones, Disneyland has allowed a culture to develop without the strongly imposing its culture on employees. Disneyland realises that employees come to them, already with a culture inscribed in them, but *"Nestled closely alongside these imported status badges are organisational ones that are also of concern and value to employees."* (Maanen, cited in Frost et al, 1991) A potential employee will go to Disney because he or she wants to and believes that their culture and behaviour will fit in well with what will be expected from Disney, this will go for any organisation, if you apply for a job, it is because you want to work there, therefore, organisational values are also of value to the employee.

Whereas the integrated perspectives of the Jones food company and the LAOOC did not allow for ambiguity, the differentiated perspective of Disneyland does allow for some ambiguity amongst employee behaviour. Not only does Disney allow for differentiation by letting a culture develop, but they actively encourage it. They mainly do this by the rank order that is placed in the organisation. Pay differentiations are small, but the appearance of each rank is clear and the lower ranks are generally frowned upon. Each rank has different values and beliefs of many aspects of their work which conflict across to other ranks; therefore you can say that each rank is a sub-culture. One significant conflictual aspect across the sub-cultures is breaks: Due to management allowing the culture to develop, regulations are different; some believe that you can get away with a 45 minute break every hour at certain times, but others have far less. The maximum numbers of breaks are allocated, providing it does not have a negative affect on the sub-culture and its department.

Human behaviour, in general, is very competitive and in Disneyland, *"Employees lust for (the) higher status positions."* (Maanen, cited in Frost et al, 1991) They want to be looked up to, seen as more prestigious than a road sweeper dressed in all white, the way up to a move higher is to work to the best of their ability. The want to succeed is a behavioural aspect in almost any culture. (Hofstede, 1997) If management allow such a differentiated culture to take form the way it does, how do they know that misbehaviour will not occur to such an extent that it will damage the organisation's reputation and ultimately, its profits. *"Not all of Disneyland is covered by the culture put forth by management."* (Maanen, cited in Frost et al, 1991) It is seen that management action will not be the primary source of order; it is the feeling of being watched. As with many organisations, employees are constantly surrounded by customers. Customers see more of employee behaviour more than management does and they judge the employee, often this judgement can be seen through facial expressions. Therefore, customer behaviour can be said to affect employee behaviour. According to Adam Smith, a capitalist society has something called the impartial spectator; this is how we think others perceive us. (Smith, 1976) Social acceptance is a major part of any culture, so to be accepted by the customers, employees must act in a way that they will be accepted by customers. Going back to the breaks scenario, customers will frown upon a ride that is understaffed, which is why employees will not allow such a thing to happen due to them taking too long and

too many breaks. Viewing organisational culture from a differentiated perspective allows for some of the ambiguity and complex situations that behaviour raises and it understands that culture cannot be dictated. However, it still views culture in groups and does not view individuals' culture and behaviour.

Integrated and, to a certain extent, differentiated perspectives of looking at culture and behaviour often ignore the possibilities that *all "cultural members routinely live with ambiguity."* (Meyerson, cited in Frost et al, 1991) They both still "*assume that cultural members share common-and clear-understandings and identities."* (Meyerson, cited in Frost et al, 1991) Take hospital social workers: They all work for more or less the same reason, to help others. This is a differentiated view; however, a fragmented view looks at how they help and the meanings behind helping. It looks at each individual's behaviour and acknowledges that it is complex and ambiguous in doing so. The social workers, just like any other employee, face ambiguity when there are multiple interpretations and beliefs amongst them cannot be resolved. The fragmentation perspective also looks at ambiguity within the person when the individual holds multiple beliefs about the same issue. This way, culture is seen in a way that completely understands inscription and everyone's culture is different, no matter how marginal.

It would appear that a fragmentation perspective gives a fuller, more detailed picture of culture and seemingly a truer one, given the claim in the title. In culture, grouping individuals is very difficult to do seeing as human behaviour is so complex and ambiguous. Although cultures are formed, ambiguity occurs within cultures yet members still insist they belong to a culture; it is more fragmented than people give credit. However, such a view of culture cannot be good for the organisation; it assumes that there is little to no consensus which will not support or meet any organisational aim.

From the beginning, we can see that behaviour is cultural and is specific to the individual. As with any theory, there are flaws in Frost et al's three perspective framework. Integration is seen as an ideal cultural target, as consistency and an organisation-wide consensus can be seen to lead to success, but an integrated culture is extremely difficult to achieve due to such individualism in behaviour. On the other hand, fragmentation ultimately suggests that employees will not conform to organisational cultures and may lead to failure. The fragmentation perspective goes through culture with too much of a fine toothcomb. In my opinion, it is alright to ignore some ambiguity, like the differentiation perspective does as this seems to have a truer picture of the mix of individualistic behaviour and organisational culture. We will never know the ins and outs of employee behaviour; however, what frost et al have given us is a theoretical framework that will view the employee from all angles of culture.

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