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Chapter 11

Culture and Management Training: Closed Minds and Change in Managers Belonging to Organizational and Occupational Communities

Pasquale Gagliardi

11.1 An Introduction: The Impact of the Cultural Approach on a Management Centre

In recent years corporate culture has attracted the interest of a growing number of scholars. Moreover, it has become the latest fashion among managers: *Fortune* (October 17, 1983) devoted its cover to culture as if it was a business star and *Business Week* (January 20, 1986) listed culture among the things which are currently "in" in business corporations.

In 1977, some years before the topic was in fashion, a few of the faculty members of ISTUD — an Italian Management Institute specializing in in-service training courses for executives — started a number of seminars on the problems of cultural analysis and change. The messages which basically the teachers wanted to transmit to the trainees were the following:

- a) culture, understood as a coherent system of assumptions and basic values — mostly taken for granted by organization members — constitutes the framework and the root of organizational behaviour;
- b) the culture of each particular organization appears through expressive strategies which support and justify instrumental strategies in a success-reinforcing "virtuous circle": culture is then a resource for organizational integration;
- c) when the instrumental strategies needed for organization survival are not consistent with the existing culture, the virtuous circle becomes a vicious one, the chances for a cultural change are very few and basically depend on skillful leadership creating the conditions for the idealization of new successful experiences and promoting a mythical retrospective interpretation of success.

The reaction of our managers — at the same time fascinated and shocked by this proposal — revealed that the new approach was not simply a new topic of the curriculum: on the contrary, it challenged their self image as rational managers who use scientific rather than mythical knowledge and who reject the use of symbolic persuasion and ideological suggestion as

tools of management. We realized that the cultural approach challenged the "managerial culture" that we ourselves were proposing in other seminars or in other classes of the same course. This traditional culture, mainly derived from psychosociological literature on management, emphasizes logical reasoning, negotiation and development of interpersonal competence, without analyzing or really debating value orientations.

The anthropological perspective appeared to our trainees, and to ourselves, as a "subversive" intellectual instrument. In fact — as Postman and Weingartner pointed out (1969: 17) —

this perspective allows one to be part of his own culture and, at the same time, to be out of it. One views the activities of his own group as would an anthropologist, observing its tribal rituals, its fears, its conceits, its ethnocentrism. In this way, one is able to recognize when reality begins to drift too far away from the grasp of the tribe.

It is not an accident that this book by Postman and Weingartner became one of the main ideological points of reference for the faculty.

The cultural approach comes to be a sort of boomerang for those who use it: it compels scholars of culture to reflect on their own culture and ideology. That is what happened to our School. We were compelled to become aware that education is a particular kind of cultural engineering. In most cases this engineering is done without being aware of it: teachers usually know what information they want to transmit and which attitudes or behaviour they want to induce, but very rarely are they aware of the basic values and assumptions they actually refer to. The anthropological perspective "subverted" our Institute, originating reflections which involved the entire faculty and led us to review and define explicitly the kind of "culture" that ISTUD wanted to transfer to executives attending the most demanding of the courses offered by the Institute, the "Programma di sviluppo delle abilità direttive", referred to hereafter as PSAD.

The PSAD, an intercompany residential programme lasting 9 weeks and divided up into three-week blocks, is offered to executives with a professional background in one or more functional areas (marketing, production, personnel, finance, purchasing, etc.), who are preparing to take on more general management tasks. Some firms made systematic use of it as a way of developing the management skills of their own executives who were about to take on overall management responsibility in subsidiaries, divisions, profit centres or complex organizational units. The course was thoroughly overhauled by the entire teaching faculty in 1978 and those firms which had become the main users of the course took part in the lengthy debate and detailed analysis. When the work had been completed, the basic objective of the Programme was defined as follows: to endow its participants with greater freedom and critical scope towards both their own professional group — so as to be able to act as integrators of various professional cultures rather than as specialists — and the firm they belong to — so as to be able to help their own firm to adopt new strategies as and when needed.

The revision of the course confirmed and strengthened a series of house-keeping and management rules concerned with the running of the course and designed to encourage the assumption of attitudes and values consistent with the basic aim of the course:

- a) there should be the greatest possible range of age, present functional area, firm and economic sector in the course group;
- b) extensive use would be made of active teaching methods, particularly the case method, as laid down by the orthodox Harvard Business School tradition (McNair 1954; Andrews 1956);
- c) participants would be rotated in different work sub-groups;
- d) a wide range of background and experience would be actively encouraged in the faculty itself and in its teaching style.

The intention was not only to encourage contact between different social, professional and corporate cultures and a reassessment of cognitive and operative paradigms whose assumptions and validity had been taken for granted, but also to affirm publicly the Institute's belief in the value of criticism and the tolerance of cultural and professional diversity. In this sense, the authority of the Institute (and its ability to influence course members) was deliberately used to reinforce these rather than other values. During the debate which took place during the revision of the course, several faculty members often quoted the slogan written by an unknown student on the walls of Nanterre University during the protests of 1968: "*La seule attitude dogmatique qu'il faut reapprendre et conserver c'est l'attitude critique*". Many faculty members were also by no means unaware that this anti-ideological statement constituted an ideology in itself, but this ideology was advanced in all seriousness as a distinctive feature of the sort of manager the firms using the course actually needed or would need in the future.

During the revision of the PSAD, an attempt was also made to tackle the problem of how to make a systematic and credible assessment of the effect the course had had on its participants and so also of the extent to which its aim — the cultural transformation of participants — had actually been achieved. After lengthy debate, it was decided to set up a longitudinal research project which involved administering three tests to all participants before the start of the course (Time 1) and then later on at the end of the course (Time 2). The tests included Rokeach's mental openness/closedness test¹ which had been specially revised and adapted to reflect the features of a managerial population in Italy.

¹ The other two tests were for, respectively, change in how the manager's role was defined and the acquisition of management concepts and methods. They were designed to measure the attainment of important teaching objectives which were secondary, however, to the basic aim of reducing dogmatism in course participants.

The test was taken by 184 executives who had completed the Programme during the three-year period from 1982 to 1984 and had attended 9 different sessions of the course.

In the following pages the research project will first be illustrated. Then two sets of findings will be presented and discussed:

- a) the difference between dogmatism levels at the beginning and at the end of the Programme, in connection with some traits of the learning experience;
- b) mind openness (and its tendency to change through the Programme) in managers belonging to different organizational or occupational communities.

11.2 The Research Project

Dogmatism was studied by Rokeach as a particular mental structure or form which distinguishes individuals along a mental "openness/closedness" continuum. Rokeach (1960) defines dogmatism as "a closed way of thinking which could be associated with any ideology regardless of content, an authoritarian outlook on life, an intolerance toward those with opposing beliefs, and a sufferance of those with similar beliefs" (1960: 4–5). According to Rokeach, dogmatism can be analyzed in relation to three dimensions: the "belief-disbelief" dimension, the "central-peripheral" dimension and the "time perspective" dimension.

As regards the "belief-disbelief" dimension,

a system is defined to be closed to the extent that there is a high magnitude of rejection of all disbelief systems, an isolation of beliefs, a high discrepancy in degree of differentiation between belief and disbelief systems, and little differentiation within the disbelief system (1960: 61).

Rokeach defines three regions within the "central-peripheral" dimensions: the central region, which is the seat of primitive beliefs (the nature of the physical world, the nature of the "self" and of the "generalized other"), the intermediate region which contains beliefs about the nature of authority, and the peripheral region which contains beliefs deriving from authority and completing the world-map of the individual. As regards this dimension,

we assume that the more closed the system, the more will the world be seen as threatening, the greater will be the belief in absolute authority, the more will other persons be evaluated according to the authorities they line up with, and the more will peripheral beliefs be related to each other by virtue of their common origin in authority, rather than by virtue of intrinsic connections (1960: 62).

Finally, about the time dimension:

the more open the system, the more the immediate future should be in the service of confirming or not confirming predictions about the present. It is the other way round

in closed systems. Things that happen in the present should be in the service of "confirming" the remote future. For this reason, a narrow, future-oriented time perspective, rather than a more balanced conception of past, present and immediate future in relation to each other, is also seen to be a defining characteristic of closed systems (1960: 64).

Although insisting on the "formal" nature of dogmatism i. e. on its independence from the actual content of beliefs, Rokeach himself maintains that intermediate and peripheral beliefs emerge from primitive beliefs which are formed early on in the life of an individual, "as walking and running emerge from crawling" (1960: 42). And yet, Rokeach offers no specific hypothesis regarding the relationship between dogmatism as the "mind-set" of an individual and the "nature" (the quality of beliefs and values) or "strength" (stability, homogeneity, distinctiveness) of the social cultures the individual was reared in or now belongs to.

The study of these relationships was not one of the main objectives of those involved in the research project, who were concerned above all to measure the effectiveness of the Programme in "opening the minds" of course members. Moreover, to have made an accurate survey of their "home" cultures (organizational and occupational) would have been both difficult and impracticable given the large range of firms to which they belonged and the difficulty of identifying and delineating possible reference groups. Nonetheless, the research group decided not to let slip entirely the possibility of investigating these aspects, both because of the theoretical interest of the subject and because the results would be of some practical use in establishing criteria for selecting participants and putting together classes and sub-groups in the future. It was decided, then, to correlate degree of individual dogmatism (and its propensity to change after the course had been taken) with a number of known and so classifiable features of the past experience of course members which could be used as indicators of cultural typologies. This would then throw some light on the relationship between dogmatism and culture – or, at least, would allow rather more accurate hypotheses to be formulated.

The known and classifiable features of the past experience of course members were:

- a) the professional/functional area they belonged to at the time;
- b) the economic sector of the firm they belonged to at the time;
- c) whether they had always worked in one single firm or in a number of different firms;
- d) whether they had always worked in the same professional area or in a number of different professional areas;
- e) whether the firm they belonged to was publicly or privately owned.

The research design assumed that those who had spent the whole of their working lives in the same firm (working in different functional areas) would have the firm itself as their primary reference community, while those who had worked in the same professional area in a number of different firms would have their professional group as their primary reference community. Finally, the research team felt that the possibility of assessing dogmatism in individuals who could be regarded equally as members of both an organizational and an occupational community (having always worked either for the same firm and in the same professional area, or else in many firms in many professional areas) would assist in the interpretation of any possible relations between dogmatism and culture.

Thus, the research programme made it possible, on the one hand, to measure absolutely the variation in individual dogmatism upon completion of the course, and on the other, to answer the following sorts of questions:

- a) Which occupational cultures tend to produce a higher degree of dogmatism in their members?
- b) In which economic sectors do organizational or occupational cultures encourage a higher degree of dogmatism in their members?
- c) Does the level of individual dogmatism tend to be higher in individuals who adopt the firm as their primary reference community, or in individuals who adopt their professional group as their primary reference community?

The findings also make it possible to explore whether these variables, apart from the influence they have on the absolute level of dogmatism, also have an effect on the tendency of dogmatism to increase or decrease in individuals exposed to an executive training programme whose explicit purpose is to reduce the level of dogmatism in those attending it.

The answers to these questions may throw some rather more factual light on a controversy that is at present creating a rift between scholars of culture. Some authors maintain that organizations tend to construct a relatively unified base culture i.e. a system of shared basic beliefs and values which functions as a means of integrating the organization as a whole (Gagliardi 1982). If we exclude counter-cultures — which openly challenge the values of the dominant culture — sub-cultures could only be reinforcing in relation to organizational culture (Martin and Siehl 1983), or else represent minor variations of the dominant culture (Turner 1986). Other authors (Alvesson 1984; Louis 1983) maintain that organizations are simply containers of sub-cultures, and of professional and class-based cultures in particular. If this is the case and we exclude clans (Wilkins and Ouchi 1983) and total institutions, it is unlikely that organizations can ever be said to have a unified culture.

The second group of authors sees the very concept of organizational culture as in itself highly debatable, and the analytical approach they envisage is the one which Van Maanen and Barley used to brilliant effect in their essay on occupational communities (1984). In all fairness, it should be said that they themselves are rather more cautious than some of their more enthusiastic supporters. In a footnote to their essay (1984: 353–354) they clearly state:

Occupational cultures may, of course, reside more or less peacefully within (and as part of) organizational cultures, may exist alongside and in opposition to them, may be buried by them, or may even contain them. Within organizations, occupational cultures are subcultures harboring segments of relative diversity within a generally approved organization plan; alongside organizations, occupational cultures compete with the plan, offering to its membership alternative goals; when buried by organizations, occupational cultures cease to exist; and, when containing organizations, the occupational and organizational cultures are one and the same. This crude taxonomy ... only begins to suggest the kinds of interactions possible. The main point is, however, the need to explain each rather than assume the priority of one over the other.

This argument can, on the whole, be accepted. It is pointless to try to define in the abstract which type of culture has priority over another, but it can be assumed that if the priority of one system of beliefs and values over another is not clearly recognized and defined, the organizational and psychological cost will be extremely high. The degree of coupling between conflicting systems can sometimes be reduced (Van Maanen and Barley 1984) to the point where distinct and sufficiently separate cultural unities may be created. If this is not possible, it becomes important to know which mechanisms and variables result in one culture prevailing over another in specific situations. We shall return to this notion in the light of the research findings.

11.3 The Main Findings of the Research Project

Dogmatism was measured using a scale of 28 items located along the three dimensions of dogmatism and their specifications, the overall structure of the scale being more or less similar to Rokeach's own dogmatism scale. Values were calculated by awarding points for the answers to each item, ranging from +6 (maximum agreement) to +1 (maximum disagreement) and then adding up the points. Since the statements in each item were "typical" of closed mental attitudes, the score shows the level of dogmatism in the subject taking the test (the higher the score, the more closed the mind).

In the 184 subjects who took the test, the average individual dogmatism index fell from 75.03 at the beginning of the course to 70.98 at the end of

the course, a decrease of 4.05 points. Since it was impossible to compare these indices either with general averages and standards or with control readings in other groups of executives, we are unable to decide whether the average initial dogmatism of our subjects was relatively high or low, or whether the variation recorded at the end of the course was relatively moderate or high. However, internal analysis of the results does provide assessment parameters and allows a number of interesting comparisons to be made. The three tables given below summarize the main results of the research project. They show, in order:

a) the average dogmatism index of the group at Time 1 and Time 2 in the nine sessions of the Programme (Fig. 11.1);

Session*)	Time 1	Time 2	T 2 - T 1
1	75.47	71.60	- 3.87
2	77.07	71.84	- 5.23
3	74.43	68.91	- 5.52
4	74.21	69.94	- 4.27
5	73.55	72.73	- 0.82
6	71.86	69.96	- 1.90
7	77.13	73.05	- 4.08
8	80.63	70.26	- 10.37
9	71.78	70.31	- 1.47

*) The courses during which tests were performed are given here in temporal order. Course 1 was the 35th held since the founding of the Institute, and Course 9 was the 43rd.

Figure 11.1 The Average Dogmatism Index of the Group at Time 1 and Time 2 in the Nine Sessions of the Program

b) initial dogmatism levels cross-referenced with age, the economic sector of the firm to which subjects belonged, the type of ownership of the firm (public or private), the functional/professional area subjects belonged to at the time, and whether they had always worked for one single firm or for a number of different firms (Fig. 11.2);

c) the degree of change after the course (the difference between the dogmatism index at Time 1 and Time 2), cross-referenced with the variables given above (Fig. 11.3).

The results can be used both to examine to what extent the individual dogmatism of a subject was affected by having attended the course, and to examine the relationship between individual dogmatism (and its tendency to be modified over the course) and the previous experience and assumed culture of course members. The results of these two analyses are discussed separately below.

	High ←	Average	→ Low
Age	Over 45 (82.45)		36/45 (72.13) Up to 35 (73.01)
Economic Sector	Public Services (83.39) Banking/Insurance (83.23)	Textiles/Clothing (75.06) Foodstuffs (75.1) Commerce (76.01)	Engin./Metall. (66.88) Electronics/Elec. Eng. (72.02) Chemicals/Rubber (73.40)
Ownership	State-Owned Firms (81.85)		Private Firms (73.13)
Functional/ Professional Area	Admin. Finance (78.25) Personnel/Ind. Relations (76.74) Planning (76.06)	Inform. Systems (74.94)	Engineering/R & D (69.72) Marketing & Sales (70.68) Production (72.46)
Experience	Only One Firm (77.91)		Several Firms (70.70)

Figure 11.2 Level of Dogmatism at Time 1

	Low ←	Medium	→ High
Age	Over 45 (- 2.22) Up to 35 (- 2.69)		36/45 (- 5.33)
Economic Sector	Foodstuffs (- 0.59) Chemicals/Rubber (- 2.38) Public Services (- 2)	Textiles/Clothing (- 3.74) Banking/Insurance (- 3.51) Engin./Metall. (- 3.42) Electronics/Elec. Eng. (- 4.52)	Commerce (- 10.96)
Ownership	State-Owned Firms (- 1.34)		Private Firms (- 4.71)
Functional/ Professional Area	Marketing & Sales (- 1.27)	Personnel/Ind. Relations (- 4.49) Admin. Finance (- 3.69) Planning (- 3.70) Production (- 3.29)	Engin./R & D (- 6.22) Inform. Sys. (- 5.39)
Experience	Only One Firm (- 3.03)		Several Firms (- 4.84)

Figure 11.3 Difference between Dogmatism at Time 1 and Time 2

11.3.1 The Effect of the Programme on Individual Dogmatism

There can be no doubt that attending the course did reduce the mental closedness of participants (Fig. 1), presumably due to the tendency of individual participants to change. And we have seen that this is correlated with a series of personal, company and professional attributes of the individuals themselves (Fig. 3). But we should note that while the average dogmatism index at Time 1 in the nine groups who attended the nine course sessions fluctuates over a range of around 9 points, the average dogmatism indices at Time 2 fluctuates over a range of little more than 4 points. It would seem that groups (and individuals) tend to align themselves with the standard of mental openness explicitly or implicitly expected of them by the Institute itself, no matter what their specific personal or group characteristics may be.

It will be obvious that the various results obtained in each course could have been influenced by the particular way in which new values were transmitted and received by course members, and that the way in which this occurred differed, perforce, from course to course. Each group constructed — through the dynamic interaction between participants and with teachers — its own particular culture, i. e. its own particular way of perceiving, structuring and living the social and learning experience it was confronted with. This means that we would have to analyze the particular features of each course in order to identify which conditions hinder or promote change.

Such a qualitative analysis was in fact carried out by the faculty research team for internal purposes. Some of the more important conclusions the faculty arrived at were that the courses which furnished the best results (in terms of decrease in dogmatism in participants) were also those in which members 1) demonstrated greater emotional *commitment* to and *participation* in the course; 2) emphasized the *social* nature of the learning experience and attained high levels of interpersonal cohesion; 3) and finally, *idealized* the social and learning experience, seeing it as a unique and unrepeatable event in their professional lives. This seems to confirm that the idealization of a collective successful experience is a basic condition for incremental cultural change (Gagliardi 1986). It is also interesting that the conditions did not include meek acceptance of the Institute as such (indeed, course members were often highly critical of it) or the establishing of good relations between participants and faculty (they were often stormy in the extreme).

11.3.2 Individual Dogmatism and Reference Cultures

In the population we studied, the highest level of dogmatism at Time 1 (Fig. 2) was found in executives 1) belonging to firms in the transport industry and other public services, banking and insurance or to state-owned firms, 2)

who worked in administration/finance, personnel/industrial relations and planning, 3) who had always worked for the same firm, in the same functional area or in different functional areas. The lowest level of dogmatism was found in executives 1) belonging to firms in the engineering/metallurgical and electronics/electrical engineering industries, or to private firms, 2) who worked in engineering/R & D, marketing or production, 3) who had worked in a number of different firms, whether in the same profession or in different functional areas.

If we assume that the primary reference community of those who have always worked for the same firm is the firm itself, and that, correspondingly, the primary reference community of those who have worked for several different firms (while still usually performing the same tasks) is the professional group to which they belong, we might conclude that corporate cultures are more likely to encourage dogmatism than professional cultures.² Could this be due to the greater importance of mythical and pre-scientific beliefs, beyond the influence of critical appraisal based on reason and experience, in corporate cultures than beliefs of scientific or technical origin?

However, corporate cultures do tend to produce in their members attitudes which are more or less dogmatic according to two basic factors: 1) the exposure of the firm to competition; 2) the importance of technical and scientific knowledge in defining the distinctive competence of the firm.

This interpretative framework suggests that there is a high level of dogmatism in members of firms which are protected from competition in a way which allows organizational behaviour to be based on a rather uncritical view of the situation of the firm. State-owned firms, public service corporations, and banking and insurance organizations are examples of this phenomenon in Italy. Correspondingly, in firms which have to have fully updated and so constantly monitored technological resources at their command in order to survive and be competitive, we find that scientific knowledge holds pride of place in the culture and competence of the firm. Such is the case in engineering and electronics firms and, more generally, in all firms dependent on the transformation of inputs into outputs by means of processes whose efficiency and effectiveness can be empirically measured.

This could also explain why certain occupational cultures produce higher dogmatism levels than others. Even if technical and scientific knowledge is more important in most occupational cultures than in most corporate cultures, the fact remains that the cultures of certain occupations are based on “conventions” rather than on empirically confutable knowledge (administrative jobs in comparison with R & D and production jobs), or on ideologically

² This would not be the case if we accept Rokeach's thesis that the primitive beliefs which strongly influence the level of dogmatism in an individual are established in the earliest years of life. Even if we do accept this, the present argument remains basically unaltered if firms select or co-opt people who match the dominant attitudes of the organization.

conditioned knowledge (personnel management) rather than on ideas and views that are constantly exposed to the scrutiny of market forces (marketing).

Thus, the results of our research project suggest not only that corporate cultures do in fact exist, but also that they tend, more than professional cultures, to discourage critical awareness in their members by offering more simplified and dogmatic versions of the real state of affairs. These "sketch maps" promoting stability and consistency in shared systems of meanings are a way of integrating organizational structures, but they may also prove a hindrance to organizations when they need to formulate new strategies and revise their visions of reality.

Do these results allow us to say anything definite about the relationship between professional and corporate culture? More specifically, which of the two cultures would concede pride of place and allow itself to be framed by the other?

Our findings show that people who have always worked for the same firm have high levels of dogmatism compared with those who have worked for a number of firms, regardless of whether they have always worked in the same or in different functional areas. In our population at least, a person who has two equally stable and consolidated reference cultures at his disposal (his organization and his occupation) will tend to identify with the organization rather than with his occupation.

It has been observed that an organization wins the loyalty of its employees by promotion opportunities which serve to break up occupational communities (Van Maanen and Barley 1984). From this point of view, the fact that our course members were career executives with further promotion prospects ahead of them was probably not without influence. In more general terms, however, our findings would seem to suggest that an analysis of professional and organizational cultures and their inter-relations would benefit from more explicit recognition and consideration of mythical knowledge on the one hand, and technical and scientific knowledge on the other. When incompatible cultural systems cannot be managed by weakening the coupling between them, the need for internal consistency within the symbolic field (Berger and Luckmann 1966) will probably result in the cultures in question assuming a hierarchy. It is theoretically plausible that technical/rational expertise will be put at the service of ideology and not *vice versa*, and that such expertise will be applied within the range of options the "available" myths allow (Gagliardi 1986).

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