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MAXWEBER AND MODERN ORGANIZATION CULTURE **STIMULATING PRODUCTIVITY** **1920MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY FOR TODAY?**

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Abstract

Revisiting the works of Max Weber, German Sociologist of almost a century ago, highlight important business anchors. The world is changing at a steady pace and businesses need to understand their current situations, as well as plan towards new horizons. Whilst moving the business, it is important to understand action, as well as stimulate definite action in support of this move. *Verstehen* of action (motive and motion) and constructions of ideal types (scenario's) spur important questions to modern business. The present study indicated a very strong role culture in the studied business, whilst personnel yearn for a performance culture. The gap identified is also of such a nature that change is inevitable.

1. Introduction

Organizational culture is the pattern of beliefs and values, rituals and sentiments that is shared by the members of an organization. It influences the actions of all individuals and groups within the organization. Culture has an influence on most aspects of organizational life, for example how decisions are made, who makes the decisions, how does recognition take place, who is promoted, how people are handled, and how the organization reacts to its environment. Evidently it is important to have a thorough knowledge of the culture within the company. Despite these, relatively few surveys in this regard, have been conducted in South Africa.

There are different perceptions towards the culture in the specific organization used in this study. The organization and the industry experience a constant and fast changing environment, internal diversity, even spurred by new labor legislation, as well as different ideological undertones. Organizational culture forms the binding factor amongst employees and must therefore be utilized to steer employees with the prospect of ensuring a motivational climate, conducive to productivity in the midst of all the change.

2. MAX WEBER'S VERSTEHEN

2.1 UTILIZATION OF VERSTEHEN

In view of the above, this study had five major objectives. The first objective was to study the term action, descriptive of both behavior and patterns of thought from a theoretical perspective. The *Verstehen* theory of Max Weber provided the basis of the study in terms of:

- a true understanding of action;
- rationalizing action into different ideal types that may be used in research;
- using qualitative, empirical, scientific research methods and still be able to *verstehen* the subjective orientation of the individual actors performing actions, while also allowing the scientist with the opportunity to come to terms with his or her own values regarding the

specific study.

Weber's contribution to the establishment of sociology as a science is enormous. Sahay (1971:1) describes Weber as the most important and famous theorist in Sociology. Notwithstanding his influence, empirical studies on Weber's perspective are very scarce (Abrahamson, 1981:214).

Max Weber's *Verstehen* Theory focuses on building ideal types representative of specific study aspects. In this respect Whyte (1991:91) believes that Weber's studies could be seen as the origin of later studies on management and labour.

2.2 WEBER: THE MAN

Weber lived from 1864 to 1920 in which he, a German, experienced the unification of Germany under Bismarck and the development of the German nation state. Weber saw phenomenal growth in Germany with industrialization, as well as efforts in creating a German Empire culminating in World War I (Lee & Newby, 1983:169).

Max Weber was born to a middle class family where his parents influenced his life in a definite and different way. Weber's father was a bureaucrat who loved daily pleasures. His mother, instead, was a devout Calvinist who bypassed her day's activities to obtain eternal redemption. The difference in lifestyle created marital tension that left a definite influence on Weber, the importance and his values about life.

Weber was a student, originally in Law, but later also of Economy, History and Sociology. His life pendulumed between manic periods of outstanding productivity and fatal depression. Notwithstanding this, it seems as if Weber's works give large insights into the processes of transformation and rationalization (Farganis, 1996:109).

2.3 THE ROLE OF SOCIOLOGY AND OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES

Weber indicates that Sociology has the task to deliver an asked-for service to history. Sociology tries to create concepts and generalized uniformities and empirical processes with which the world could be understood in more than only an economical or nomothetical perspective.

Weber defines Sociology as the science that facilitates interpretative understanding of social action to arrive at the causal explanation of the cause and impact of the action (Stryker, 1980:43).

From the *Verstehen* theory of Max Weber, it is argued that the actions of people must be understood before situations are explained. From this view this perspective links to symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and other micro-sociological perspectives (Ritzer, 1996:227).

Making use of ideal types, Ritzer (1996:227) is of the opinion that Weber focuses on large-scale structures and not primarily on what individuals do or why they do it. These large-scale

structures are therefore not reduced to individual action. The opinion is rather that structures determine individual action and not individual motives per se. Structure therefore determines action.

3. THE TERM *VERSTEHEN*

The German word for understanding is *verstehen*. Weber's thoughts on *verstehen* were general amongst German historians and came from hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, especially in Weber's time, was an effort in the understanding of the author's thoughts, as well as the basic structure of the text. The idea of interpretative understanding was first used by the historian Droysen and was intensely exploited by the follower Dilthey (Coser, 1971:220).

Joseph (1990:159) argues that the researcher can only truly explain social phenomena, if he clearly understands the meaning that people attach to their actions. Max Weber opens a total new way in his Sociology, measured against his predecessors. Weber focuses on individual human actors, whereas his predecessors viewed Sociology from socio-structural glasses (Coser, 1971:114).

Although Weber experienced critique that his research methodology of *verstehen* is irrational and subjective, he argued that true *verstehen* can only be realized by systematic, precise research, rather than just a feeling for a text or a social phenomenon.

Weber distinguishes his theory of that of other Sociologists based on the following four anchors:

- Weber's sociological theory rests fundamentally on action as the primary unit of research.
- The definitions that Weber developed for the diversity of social action indicate his systematic approach.
- The accentuation of the meaning of social action per se.
- The framework of empirical generalizations (ideal types) with which he explains the modern world, that are bureaucracies and capitalism (Sahay, 1971:10).

3.1 DIFFERENT STUDY APPLICATIONS

3.1.1 CULTURE STUDIES:

Weber utilizes culture studies in his effort to understand, although he does stay collected about his culture studies. An analysis comes from a specific life and world view ("weltanschauung") and could therefore not be generally accepted (Van der Walt, 1997:14).

3.1.2 SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:

Different types of social action exist not per se, but originate from interaction based on a relationship at the time of interaction. Weber applies this viewpoint to amongst other, bureaucracies, and indicates typical characteristics such as depersonalization, routine and mechanically predictable activities.

3.1.3 ACTION

Action, to Weber, is both motive and motion together in a means-ends relationship, because motion is meaningless or empty if it is without a motive, whilst a motive cannot be determined without motion. Social action therefore exposes or unlocks social motive and motion (Sahay, 1991:68). Weber's total sociology is based on his idea of social motion (Ritzer, 1996:228).

Weber explores his methodology of ideal types to explain action according to four basic types. These ideal types show forward to Weber's concerns about larger social structures and institutions, because for him, it is systems that inhibit or stimulate specific action. Weber applies ideal types to clans, status and power and discusses themes such as rationalization, the economy, religion, the community and the city.

The different classifications of social action serve a dual goal, namely:

- It allows Weber to make systematic typological divisions amongst orientations for action
- It creates a basis for his analysis of the development of Western society.

3.1.4 SCIENTIFIC STUDY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Understanding (or *Verstehen*) to Weber is not the subtle intuitive sympathy that philosophers believe in (Cloete, 1996:3), but intellectual, analytical and predictable explanations of action. This urge for scientific study may be translated to organization development and its methodology in studying organizations.

Weber has a comparative approach through out his work. Rex (Sahay, 1971:33) believes that it is possible to develop a sociological language and a limited number of categories that will explain all historical social systems.

Lee and Newby (1983:170) confirm that Weber under writes the radical division of the German philosopher, Kant that natural sciences analyzed with nomothetical methods and social sciences with ideographical glasses. To Weber a specific action implies a specific motive. A causal explanation may explain or show the cause (motive) and effect (motion) of a specific type of action (Parker, Brown, a.o., 1981:14). Because human actions do not comply with fixed rules as the physical sciences, Weber developed the concept of sufficient causality.

3.1.5 CONTROL AND CHANGE

Weber saw society as a system where participant individuals aspire to regain control of their own actions and institutions that they created. The problem of control and order embrace the viewpoint that social institutions that were originally created by people take control over the people that originated it.

Change is constant, especially in modern times with expanding technologies. Change implies action. Weber argues that values, underlying to motives, have to change to accept orderly change (Abrahamson, 1981:216). Anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown and Malanowski, argues again that change in one element, influence other elements, but not necessarily to the same order.

3.1.6 IDEAL TYPES

Social scientists build models or ideal types that explain the relationship amongst applicable key elements in the social world. Reality is then organized by creating analytical concepts (Farganis, 1996:110, 134).

An ideal type can be defined as a one-sided accentuation of one or more premises and the synthesis of various independent, different, largely representative or sometimes absent concrete individual phenomena, that is organized in accordance to a one-sided unified analytical construct. In its purest form, this cognitive construct cannot be found in reality (Ritzer, 1996:22). Weber recognizes that the definition of ideal types make it impossible in actual life. Notwithstanding the reality, Weber argues that ideal types capture different social phenomena in a theoretical framework that can indicate similarities and deviations amongst different social actions. The ideal types therefore facilitate understanding and action based on that comprehension.

Sahay (1971:72) list a few characteristics of ideal types as:

- Identifying the characteristics of a unique action or phenomena.
- Organizing the facts of an action so that the causal relationship amongst the different facts become clear
- The conceptualization of basic, general characteristics of social action in its purest form. There may be deviations of the pure form in practice.

The above does not imply timeless ideal types, because concepts in the social sciences cannot be timeless but need to be specific, in the thoughts of Weber. Flowing from the motive for action, ideal types enclose a structure or basis with specific values that may change mainly by changes to the structure or basis (Abrahamson, 1981:208).

3.1.7 VALUES IN RESEARCH

Weber had a dualistic point of view regarding values of the researcher. At the one end Weber's standpoint is that a researcher has to be value-free or value neutral, although at the other end he also indicates that an attitude of moral neutrality has no relation with scientific objectivity (Farganis, 1996:128).

3.2 CRITIQUE

All human knowledge is but manmade and relative to a specific time and to specific circumstances. It is also expected that not even Max Weber's *Verstehen* is without critique.

- Some critiques assume that Weber's ideas are not neatly integrated into a consistent theory.
- It is also meant that Weber's ideas are very loose and general.
- The Weber literature was originally in German and translations into English are not perfect.
- Some also indicate that Weber's thoughts stretched over such a broad spectrum, that one

cannot expect to see all of his ideas in one theory.

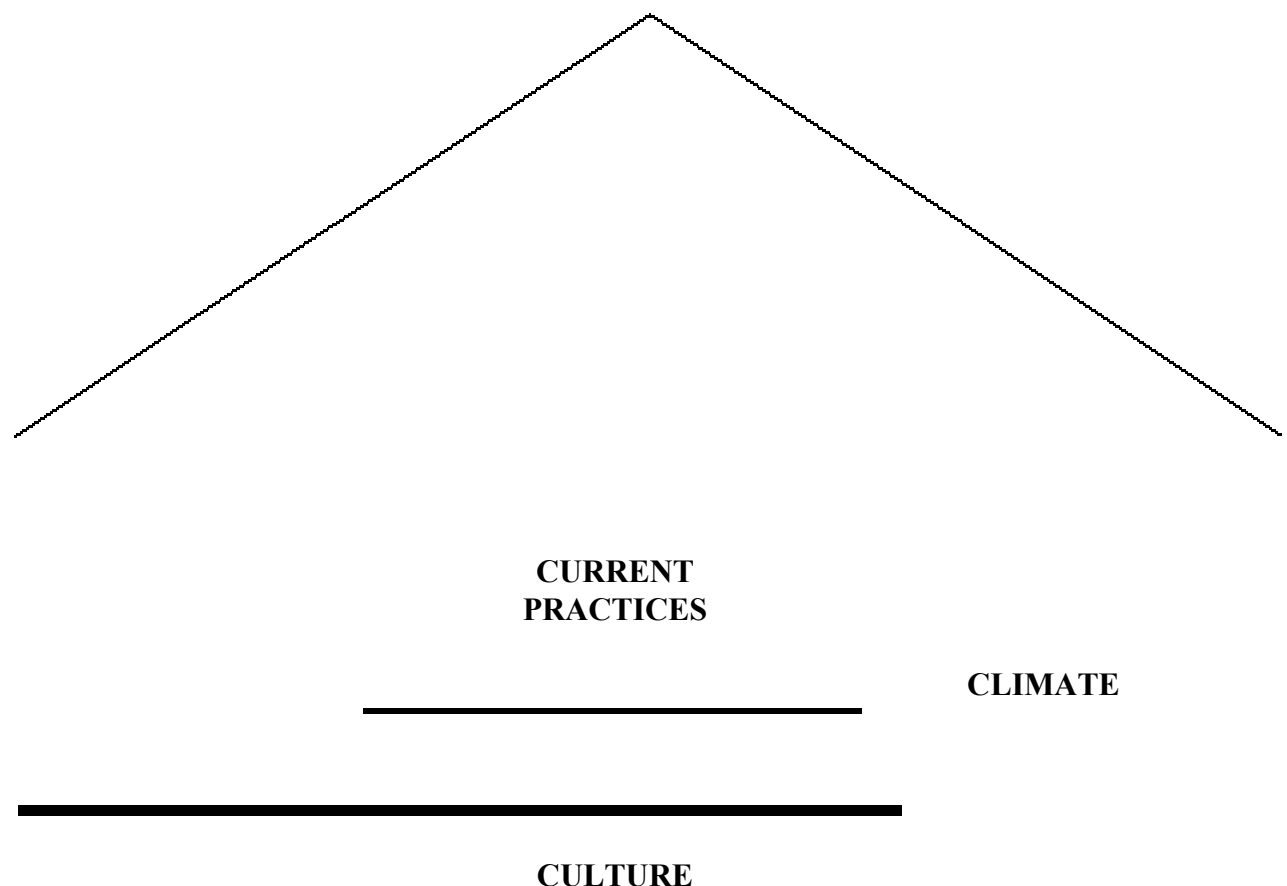
4. ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

The second objective was to indicate, from literature, the essence of a motivational climate conducive to productivity in relation to organizational culture. Organizational climate is seen as the perceptions of employees about the actions of management, perceptions about communication patterns, dominant motivational styles, policies, procedures and practices which motivate or demotivate individuals on either an informal or formal level towards action from their positions in ensuring organizational success.

Climate in general, stems from a certain organizational culture and culminates into certain practices. Managers / leaders commit themselves to practices where they accept individual differences, place people into meaningful positions, set challenging targets, ensure that targets are reachable, reward results applicable to individual needs and continuous control of organizational systems for fairness and equity and applicable reward systems. Management leaders create a climate through continuous articulation of their vision with emphasis on core values, commitment and assistance to employees through coaching, mentorship, feedback, role-modelling and enthusiasm, linked to honest recognition and rewards of success.

The position of organizational climate, may best be indicated by the following figure:

FIGURE 1 : THE POSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE



(Schneider, 1990:416)

The above figure supposes that a climate, consisting of perceptions of employees within an organization, reflects on culture as well as on practices. The perception that employees have is sculpted according to the culture that they experience in the organization. The practices again, are products of the specific climate - it flows forward from the climate and reflects and strengthens the climate.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

The third aim of the study was to discuss culture as an element in the workplace. Organizational culture may be described as an ideal that serves as a filter for the actions of individuals to create internal integration and external adaptation over a long period. Individuals are socialized into a specific culture based on definite values, postulations and norms.

Organizational culture develops from diverse inputs, where the focus is mainly on the role of management in the formation, establishment and adaptation of organizational culture, as well as the acceptance of the culture by individuals. The history and size of the organization together with workgroups play a significant part in organizational culture. It is also stressed that the typical managerial functions of planning, organizing, leading and control even if only indirectly, are affected by culture. The Harrison/Handy Cultural Typology was identified as possibly the best tool to study and measure organizational culture with.

6. AN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS

The fourth objective of the study was to measure the perceptions of a specifically contracted managerial group in a large organization.

Based on the theory, the culture analysis of Harrison and Handy were utilized so as to analyze individual perceptions on organizational culture and construct ideal types on culture which may form a mindmap for management.

Harrison and Handy identified different phenomena with which they created ideal types. To them, there are mainly four organizational cultures, namely:

- Power culture, consisting
- Role culture consisting
- Task or performance culture and
- Individual culture consisting.

With a tested and proven questionnaire, exploring organizational culture based on the model of Harrison and Handy, the culture within a large national company was evaluated. The results were differentiated according to relevant discriminating factors. According to these factors, certain conclusions were made. The questionnaire of Harrison and Handy is

attached as an addendum.

6.1.1 THE TARGET POPULATION

Along a stratified random test sample 265 questionnaires were distributed in the organization forming a representative percentage of group in total. Responses received back counted to 258 giving a percentage of 97%. All questionnaires received back could not be processed for being spoiled or arriving after the return day. Only 207 of the 265 responses are accounted for in the final results. This response accounts for 78% of the test sample. Only 7 questionnaires that were sent out originally did not return, whilst a further 51 could not be used for reasons stated above.

The biographical picture, compiled from the different responses, illustrates that the dominant grouping is that of white males in the age groupings ranging from 36 to 55, and dominating the years service grouping of 8 to 15 years at the center of middle management.

The Paterson grading levels according to the original contract with management included D1 to D5. Changes, such as promotions, took place and therefore the bands were stretched to include E and F, as well as the upper C-levels. The larger number of respondents, fall into the Paterson D2 band that are typically of the nature of middle management.

It must be said that not all respondents knew their Paterson grading and had to find out before the completion of the questionnaire. The vagueness around Paterson grading also reflects a specific culture where secrecy plays a strong part. The secrecy of grading has a ripple effect to the extent that employees do not really trust their gradings.

Service years may have an influence on culture, considering that employees are socialized in a company and also learn to operate and feel comfortable within a specific culture. The organization is known for long service of its employees, whilst practices such as long service bonuses and pension payment scales enforce long years of service. The long years of service support the reliability of results, because the respondents can reflect with enough experience on the current and expected cultures.

Responses returned represent an almost equal distribution of respondents from different business units. The test sample represents a well-educated grouping with 88,5% having higher qualifications than a senior school certificate. These qualifications range from certificates, degrees, and diplomas to post degree qualifications. The scientist is of the opinion that, in the light of the level of qualifications, questions could be interpreted by the respondents and that the results are therefore, in this instance, valid.

The sample is stratified along the Paterson grading system and not primary along business unit lines. Different business units focus on different activities and may develop different sub cultures. Respondents are equally represented from different units (See figure below). There are therefore comparable numbers of responses from different units. The category OTHER, which represents the largest percentage in the above, encloses mainly the functional head offices and does therefore not really form a business unit per se, although it represents views of middle managers and specialists in these disciplines.

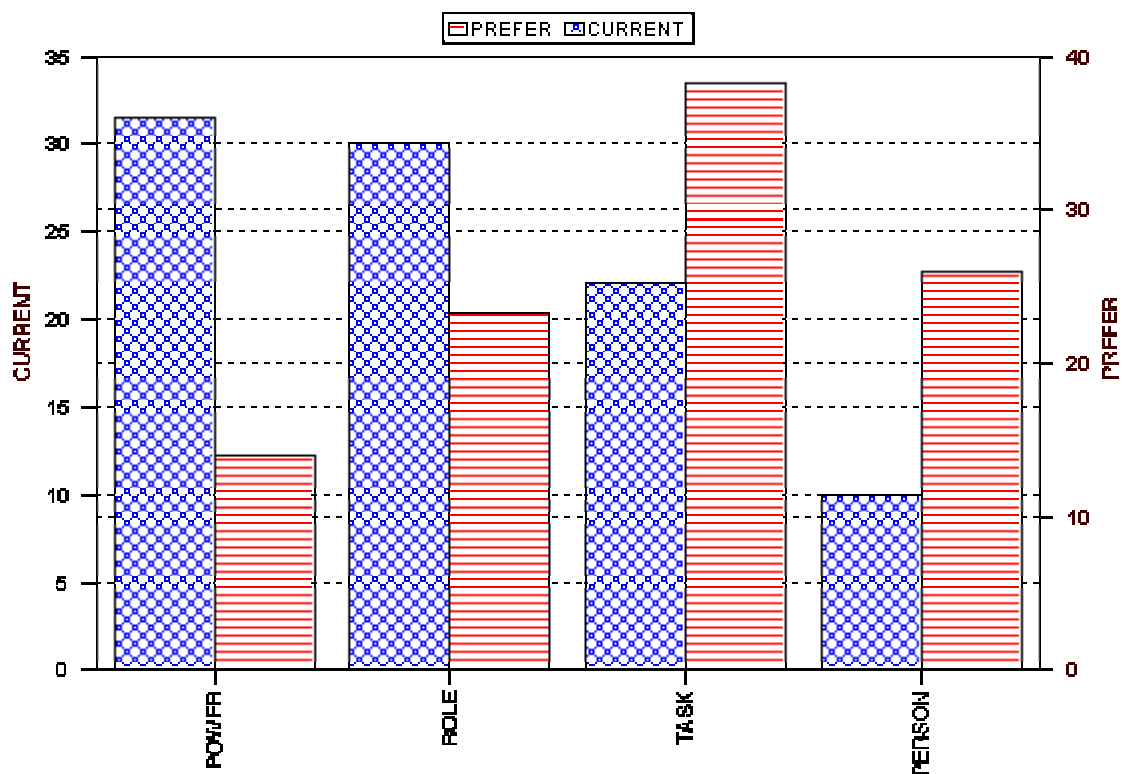
FIGURE 2: BUSINESS UNITS OF RESPONDENTS

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
MEMBER SERVICES/TRANSPORT	40	19
PRODUCTION	46	22
DISTRIBUTION	37	18
COMMERCIAL	26	13
OTHER	58	28
TOTAL	207	100%

6.1.2 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

With reference to the questionnaire and the processing of the questionnaire, it is clear that all the “a”-responses next to questions, as well as all the “b”, “c” en “d”-responses separately total in separate sums to give a representation of a specific culture typology. Below follow some graphs that reflect the information in the different typologies.

FIGURE 3: CURRENT VERSUS PREFERRED CULTURE



In the above figure the points of view regarding the current culture(primary y axle) is contrasted with the views on the preferred culture(secondary y axle). The x-axle represents the different culture categories as they are indicated in the Harrison and Handy model. Responses in the above are reflected as percentages of the total.

From the research it shows that the most dominant current culture, is the power culture followed by the role culture typology, then the task or performance culture and lastly the individual culture.

The research also illustrates that the most preferred culture is that of the task or performance culture, followed by the individual culture, then the role culture and lastly the power culture. The preferred, performance culture, is the direct opposite of the current dominant power and role cultures. The scientist came to the conclusion that the large gap between the current and preferred culture, creates and spur a lot of stress and frustration. The gap indicates the specific readiness level for change in the company and may also point to a leadership crisis whereas people has certain aspirations, but do not experience any guidance to that extent.

If the above 2 most representative current cultures are contrasted with the two most preferred cultures, it results to the following condensation:

<u>ASPECT</u>	<u>TASK-/INDIVIDUAL CULTURE</u>	<u>POWER/ROLE CULTURE</u>
STRUCTURE	Network structure Strong team focus Change according to needs Small head office	Fixed hierarchies in Silo structure Strong individuals within the hierarchy Fixed and rigid Strong and large head offices
COMMUNICATION	Open in and between networks	Up and downwards communication through the hierarchy and silo's
REMUNERATION	In teams, according to performance Primary according to contribution	Fixed system Remuneration primary according to position in hierarchy
CONTRIBUTION	According to knowledge	According to position in hierarchy, age and years service
LEADERSHIP	Process facilitator	Bureaucratic

DECISIONS	Delegated, within teams / networks	One person or a senior management group (silo facade)
AUTHORITY	Decentralized	Strongly centralized
FOCUS	Service focused on customer needs	Service primarily the needs of the silo's
ORGANIZATION	Typical within a professional or team environment	Typical within a stable production environment or a bureaucracy
ENVIRONMENT	Dynamic	Stable
REACTION TO CHANGE	Creative and reconnoiter	Reactive and sometimes anticipative

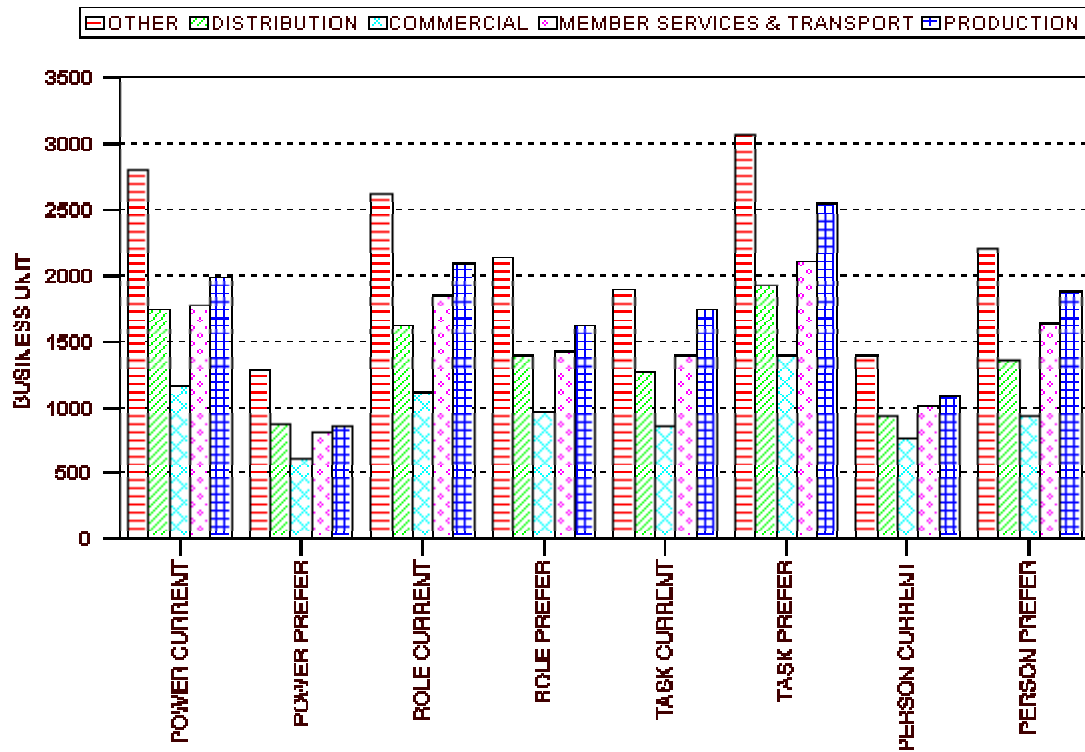
There are large gaps between the current and preferred cultures. The different cultures represent ideal types in the words of Weber that is based on personal points of view of the different respondents. These differences are not reconcilable because it is in conflict with the aim of culture creation, namely pattern forming and integration (Schein, 1992:11). The gap between the current and preferred cultures needs to be addressed because these differences stimulate or inhibit specific actions. In the study it was indicated that a motivational climate is grounded with a specific culture and manifest in specific practices or actions. The actions of Weber in his Theory of Verstehen need to fit into the preferred culture to enhance a motivational climate.

Based on the demographics of the test sample, there were no significant differences amongst discriminating factors regarding perceptions of culture according to:

- Sex
- Racial grouping
- Age
- Years service
- Qualification level
- Business unit.

The test sample in the given company was by and large of a homogenous nature. The homogeneity of the group support congruence of findings.

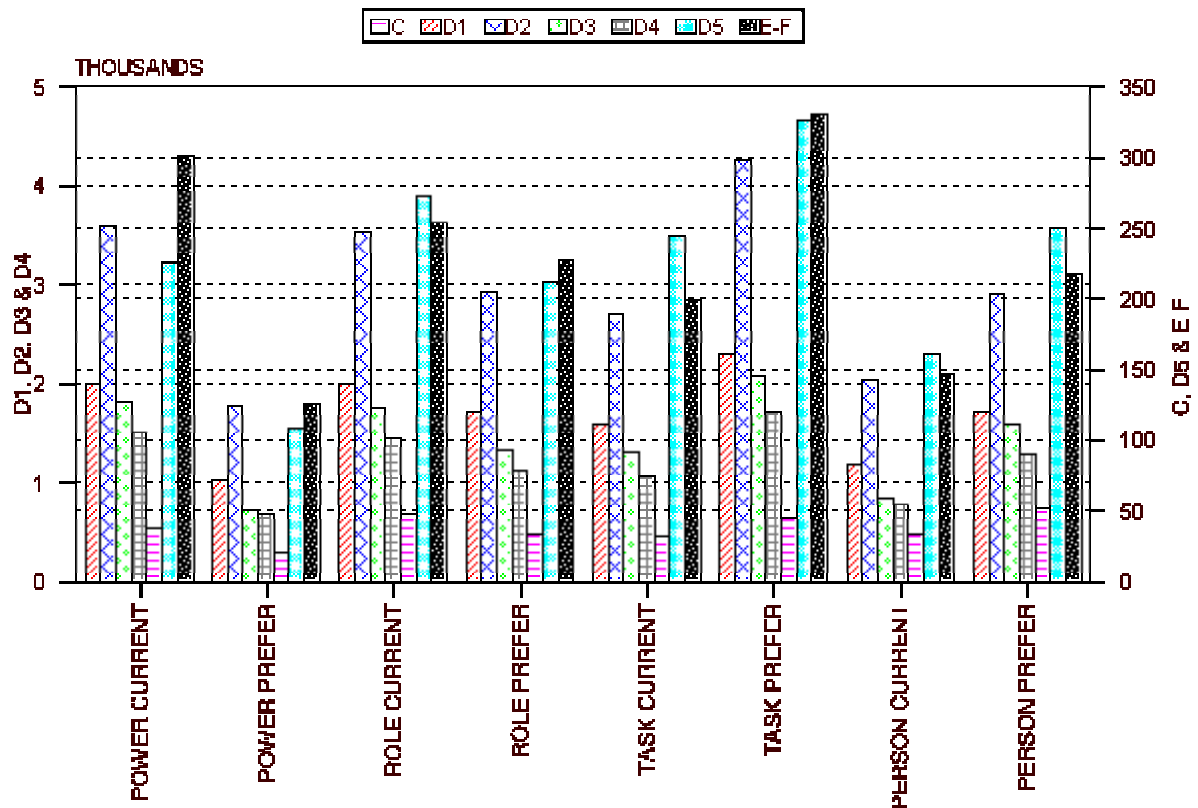
FIGURE 4: CULTURE VIEW ACCORDING TO BUSINESS UNIT



The above graph was generated from the sum total of individual responses to culture categories. The y-axis reflects the results per business unit against the current and preferred cultures on the x-axis.

From the above there is support for the viewpoint that work group may influence work culture. The category OTHER, mostly representative of functional head offices, strongly prefers a task culture. It is also interesting to view that Production and Member Services and Transport experience a role culture rather than a power culture as the dominant current culture. This difference to the overall picture may be ascribed to specific leadership styles within the mentioned business units. Leaders are of the primary determinators of organizational culture. It also supports the overall view that there is a change potential amongst all the business units from current culture to preferred culture.

FIGURE 5: CULTURE VIEW ACCORDING TO PATERSON LEVEL



The above figure indicate on the primary y-axle the responses of thegrades D1, D2, D3 and D4, whilst the secondary y-axle reflects the responses ofthe C, D5 and E to F-groupings.

The above figure also correlates with the overall picture regardingthe perception of the current and preferred cultures. It seems that the higher the grading, the more therespondents prefer the task culture. See especially the groupings D5 and E to F. Based on their seniority these mentioned groupings must fromthemselves be initiators of culture, although they experience the largest gapbetween current and preferred culture. It may be possible that especially the senior groupings experience alack of leadership or empowerment. This frustration (based on lack of empowerment) of especially the seniorgroups may also highlight practices with which they do not want to associatethem with.

7. CONCLUSION

The studied organization operates in an environment that iscurrently undergoing rapid change. The organization per se, is divers in amongst others number ofmanagerial levels, culture groupings and divisions or business units. International competition is becomingfiercer which in turn put a stronger emphasis on productivity. The typical nature of the industry isthat production-flow is cyclical of nature and that change is slow against thebackground of agriculture orientated industry. The market environment is however pushing for fasteradaptation, although the nature of the industry is to be more stable.

The fourth objective of the study was to measure the perceptions ofa specifically contracted managerial group in a large organization. Some of the major findings were:

- that the reigning dominant cultures are firstly the power culture, followed by the role culture;
- that the most preferred culture, on the other hand, is the task culture or performance culture;
- that all groups had the same perspective towards the current and preferred cultures;
- That the gaps between the current and preferred cultures are large.

The researcher came to the conclusion that, based on the results of the empirical study:

- the organization shows a remarkable high level of readiness to change and
- The organization experiences a leadership crisis.

The following proposals to management as a fifth and final objective of the study, were formulated:

- Management needs to take note of the outcome of this survey. The questionnaire in itself, is already a reliable intervention that could heighten expectations. These expectations need to be addressed.
- The results of the study need to be communicated throughout the organization.
- A stronger awareness of change needs to be created.
- Management ought to play an active role in addressing the findings of this survey.
- Management needs to appoint a project team empowered to initiate and drive the change process.
- A reliable external consultant ought to facilitate this process.
- The process of structuring, identifying focus areas, projects, manpower utilization, performance management, remuneration, diversity and career planning, need to be addressed and aligned with the preferred culture and the challenges of post-modernism.

Organizational culture holds the key to productive and highly successful organizations. Managers/ leaders have the responsibility to unleash the dynamics of organizational culture in order to create a motivational climate. Only a highly motivated workforce secures growth, stability and profitability.

Revisiting Weber's *Verstehen* also re-opened a world useful for modern-day business. Max Weber lived almost a century ago, at the time of the industrialization of Germany and the modernistic ideology culminating in bureaucracies.

The world is ever changing, even ideologically. The change currently is to a post-modernistic ideology with a new emphasis on understanding different people. Businesses spread their wings and become global players, whilst they are also unbundling to focus on core business aspects. In this turbulent management arena, Weber's value still stands namely that:

- Action (motive and motion) must be *verstehen*, and
- To really plan and understand action, construct ideal types.

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