

CULTURAL THEORY AND THE SECURITY FRATERNITY

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Abstract

There is an ongoing debate on the importance and meaning of organisational culture. Comprehending the prevailing organisational culture is crucial for organisations that need to change and/or launch new projects. This especially applies to the security industry which is constantly faced with new challenges in a national and international realm. This paper uses an anthropological approach to propose an organisational structure best suited for the private security industry. A major South African security company is analyzed in terms of the grid group (GG) or cultural theory. This framework originated in the study of anthropology, originally developed by the British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1970, 1978).

Keywords: Organisational culture, cultural theory, anthropology, the South African security industry

1. INTRODUCTION

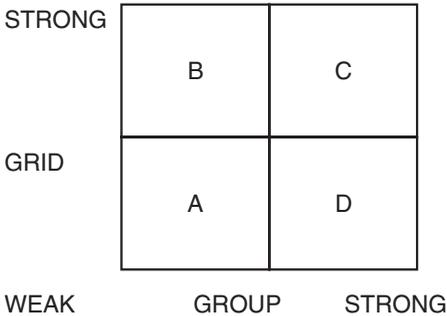
The roots of organisational culture lie in the study of anthropology. By the late 1990's the term organisational culture became a 'household name' mostly due to the influence of the Japanese writers like Ouchi & Jeager (1987). The approach used in this paper corresponds with numerous authors that have acknowledged and applied the use of an anthropological approach in studying the management of organisations [See Deal & Kennedy (1988); Ronen & Shenkar (1985); Hofstede (1991); Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (1993); Altman & Baruch (1998) and Frostdick (1995)].

2. AN OUTLINE OF THE GROUP/GRID MODEL

Cultural theory also known as the group/grid analysis is a typological paradigm developed by the social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1970; 1978) with the aim of comparing cultures and the forms of social organisation that support them. She is by no means the only anthropologist to propose a cultural typology, which supports the notion that the term 'culture' is essential to the study of anthropology.

The Douglas model proposes that individual behaviour, perception, attitudes, beliefs and values are shaped and controlled by constraints that can be grouped into two terms, group commitment and grid control. Combined, these project four prototypes presented in fig 1 and 2. The under-mentioned figure (1) depicts the group/grid axes and its four quadrants.

Fig 1: The group/grid model



Source: Altman & Baruch (1998: 771)

GROUP

The group is represented by the horizontal quadrant and depicts the extent to which people are driven or restricted in thought and action by their commitment to the social unit. High group strength implies that people devote considerable time and attach high importance to be a member of the unit, which could grow the more time the group members spend together. Group strength could be enhanced by the following: 1) frequency of interaction, 2) degree of mutuality, 3) scope of interpersonal relationships and 4) boundary tightness. Low group strength implies that people negotiate their own way through life on an individual basis (Altman & Baruch, 1998: 771; Howard, 1998: 235).

GRID

The grid is represented by the vertical quadrant and represents the constraints on social interaction and the subsequent behaviour of individuals due to this role differentiation. High strength on the grid occurs whenever roles are distributed based on social classification like for example sex, colour and position. Low strength on the grid occurs when the classification does not limit the range of choices open to individuals (Altman & Baruch, 1998: 771). Each quadrant is a combination of group and grid factors and will be explained in the next section (Altman & Baruch, 1998: 772).

Weak grid/Weak group

Quadrant A (weak grid/weak group) represents a social context dominated by strong competitive forces, volatile circumstances and prescribed rules for individual autonomy. Heritage doesn't count and individuals can negotiate their way up and down the prestige ladder.

Strong grid/Weak group

Quadrant B (strong grid/weak group) represents a social context dominated by insulation. This means that there is little room for individual autonomy and a lot of formalities exist. This system could be very hierarchical and ancestry or even age could be a means of classification.

Strong grid/Strong group

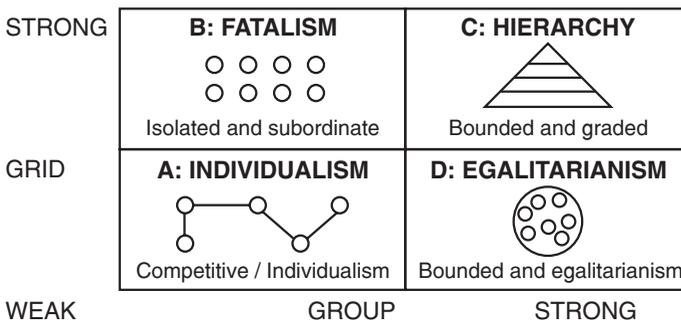
Quadrant C (strong grid/strong group) represents a social context with two strong controls namely a) individual behaviour and b) group boundary. In this system everybody knows their place which could vary from time to time and personal security is obtained through the expense of competition and social mobility. Examples of this quadrant are bureaucracies.

Weak grid/Strong group

Quadrant D (weak grid/strong group) represents a social context where the external group bounty is the main concern and social interaction is shaped by the 'we' versus 'them' ethos. All the other aspects of interpersonal relationships are open to negotiation. Leadership is usually charismatic and not bound by rules of succession. Betrayal of group members and infiltration by outsiders are a common occurrence in this type of system (Altman & Baruch, 1998: 771).

Frostdick (1995: 45) adds to this explanation in the following way: If both dimensions are weak one finds an individualistic/entrepreneurial way of life. When both dimensions are strong we find a hierarchical way of life. These two lay at either end of a continuum emphasizing the duality between the free market system and regulated bureaucracy. Cultural theory also proposes two further ways of life namely the egalitarianism (weak grid/strong group) and the even more passive fatalism (strong grid/weak group). This is visually demonstrated in figure 2.

Fig2: Cultural theory the four ways



Source: Frostdick (1995: 46)

These four ways of life depend on each other for their continued existence and presents an analytical framework at a micro and macro level (Frostdick, 1995: 47). It is clear form the above discussion that the cultural components of an organisation are made up of various aspects making it a dynamic force to be reckoned with.

3. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The method of applying the group/grid model to the company under investigation corresponds with the view of Altman & Baruch (1998), which notes that culture researchers are more likely

to use qualitative techniques allowing meaning to emerge from the subject under investigation. Qualitative methods provide the greatest depth in comprehending individual cultures and the origin of those cultures (Sriramesh, Grunig & Dozier, 1996: 242). Data was collected by means of structured interviews, conducted with various members of top management over a five year period.

4. APPLYING THE GROUP GRID MODEL TO A MAJOR SOUTH AFRICAN SECURITY COMPANY

Private security aids public policing and the national defense force in curbing the high levels of crime in South Africa. The difference between private security and the other two role players is that private security has a profit-related aim. Private security intrudes on the domain of public policing by rendering a security service to paying customers. The company under investigation is one of the major security companies in South Africa and is the service provider to top blue chip companies. Niche markets include financial institutions, the motor industry, the petro-chemical industry, retail and warehousing, gaming and leisure, aviation and mining.

5. DISCUSSION

The group/grid model applies to the company with regard to the following:
HIERARCHY (quadrant C)

The company is dominated by a high-grid, high-group ethos, characterized by quadrant C. Legislation and a clearly defined company structure govern the company as a whole. The next section explains the legislation that applies to the security industry and relates the operational structure of the company under investigation.

Legislation: Towards the late 1980's government became aware of the growth and expansion of private security. At this stage the industry was largely un-regulated. As private security increasingly performed duties previously associated with public policing the Security Officer's Act 92 of 1987 was passed. This emphasized that government deemed it important to review and change the then stipulations governing the industry. The act also made provision for the establishment of the Security Officers Board (SOB). The SOB had to maintain, promote and protect the status of the private security profession. The act required that companies had to register themselves and the individual's members working for them. A contribution levy had to be paid monthly (Minnaar & Ngoveni, 2004: 51).

The Security Officer's Board (SOB) also had to advise the Minister on various issues pertaining to the industry. Although the SOB was created in terms of legislation it received no government funding. Funds were primarily generated by through the contribution levies and administrative fines paid by companies and security officers (Minnaar & Ngoveni, 2004: 51). The SOB did promote the professionalisation of the industry which included the adherence to principles of democracy, transparency, equality and accessibility (Pillay, 2002: 122).

The SOB succeeded in regulating the industry by using industry expertise in creating training courses. These training courses could be seen as a means of setting standards and for the grading of security personnel. A major contribution of the SOB was to initiate a Code of

Conduct applicable to all security officers (Pillay, 2002: 122). But in practice the Code of Conduct operated without any powers of sanction or the ability to enforce disciplinary measures (Minnaar & Ngoveni, 2004: 51).

In 1997 the Security Officers Amendment Act 104 was passed. This provided for the establishment of an Interim Security Officers Board, replacing the SOB. This amendment to the legislation required any individual providing a security service to register to the Interim Board. Because of a lack of compliance to the Code of Conduct the Interim Board had legal rights to sanction and to impose fines. In 2001 the Private Security Industry Regulation Act 65 established the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA, www.sira-sa.co.za, 2005). This obliged all security providers, as well as in-house security operations to register as “security service providers”. The act defines a security services provider as “a person who renders a security service to another for remuneration, reward, fee or benefit” (Minnaar & Ngoveni, 2004: 53). This includes locksmiths, car-watch services, security trainers and consultants. The act created an inspectorate, with powers of persecution and reporting of instances of misconduct.

A five member government-appointed council heads PSIRA. They implemented registration, renewal and inspection fees that amounted to thousands of rands. This led to dissatisfaction among smaller security companies and an outcry from Security Association of South Africa (Sasa) (Honey, 2003: 74). Companies also complain of lengthy delays and bureaucratic snarl-up in registrations and inspections. The regulation that company directors should undergo training to qualify for 'grade B' security officers training has also caused vehement objections from the industry. Draft legislation further prevented security guards from issuing their own guns and compelled them to use specified colours and guard uniforms.

PSIRA however insists that private security officers should be distinguished from public police and that strict gun legislation is essential in an industry awash with firearms. Industry representatives viewed these regulations as 'dictatorial' and were dissatisfied that industry was not consulted on these issues. This has caused division between the various parties (Honey, 2003: 75). These measures has according to King (Online, 2005) made PSIRA loose credibility with the private security industry. As an act of self preservation the industry formed the Security Industry Alliance (SIA). As PSIRA is run by money extracted by the industry, King (Online, 2005) refers to it as a classic case of “taxation without representation”. In the light of a huge staff turnover and astronomical legal costs incurred mostly through the CCMA and labour court King (Online: 2005) calls for a clean-out of PSIRA. He suggests going back to the drawing board to find workable solutions to suit the various parties.

Organisational Structure: Operational work teams present the core of the organisation's operational success. The size and composition of work teams are decided upon by the client requiring the security service, and will thus vary from one site to the next. There is a clear hierarchy that governs security teams on site.

Patrolmen/women function on the lowest operational level and reports to a team supervisor, which is usually present on site, overseeing duties. The team supervisor could be a senior patrolman/woman, a section leader, inspector or senior inspector, depending on the structure required by the client. A contract manager could also be appointed to manage major contracts. Activities of team leaders are overseen by an operations manager, who also needs to incorporate the needs and requests of the clients. The regional operations manager

oversees the operations manager, and reports directly to the general manager of the region.

Team members thus operate on the site of the client and not their employer, meaning they form part of the client's workforce. Site instructions for both retail and industrial site serve as the job description for individual team members and provide guidelines for handling emergencies.

INDIVIDUALISM (quadrant A)

Contrary to a prescribed hierarchy, individualism also applies to the company under investigation (quadrant A). The weak-grid, weak-group cultural orientation opposes the hierarchical one. Individualism relates to the individual behaviour of patrolmen/women when confronted with dangerous situations.

Patrolmen/women operate mostly in work teams, especially if a site is large, but single patrolmen/women could also be allocated to a specific site. Flexibility, in terms of the composition and allocation of teams according to the needs of clients, serve as a guideline to security managers (team leaders). Teamwork involves the alignment of team members and team leaders to the needs of the client, which means that the interpersonal relationships between team members and between team members and security managers need to be open in order to discuss possible problems. In his regard security managers visit sites on a daily basis, to handle complaints and queries.

The duties of security personnel (patrolmen/women) are not exact and often quick decisions needs to be made by individual team members, based on the situation they are confronted with. Integrity is a main characteristic of individual security personnel, as they could be bribed to aid criminals. The individual behaviour of security personnel adds to the success the work team as a whole. Performance driven work teams lead to better crime prevention, which adds to the reputation of the security company ensuring enhanced market share and profits.

It is clear that hierarchy and individualism, are opposing forces, both applies to the company under investigation. These opposing forces form a 'stable axis', which allows for individual discretion within a hierarchical organisation, thus lending them the flexibility they need to operate successfully.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presented a cultural typology of a major South African security company. The group/grid model, with its origins in anthropology, depicts organisational culture as exclusive and differentiating. As the security industry deals with safety and security matters, traditionally the domain of private policing, it has to be regulated by legislation. The company has a clear hierarchical structure, placing in the C quadrant of the GG model. This is opposed by quadrant A (individualism), which also accentuates the importance of individual behaviour in crime prevention and loss control. Organisations falling into the quadrants A and C represent what is known as a 'stable' axis, which shows the duality between the free market system and regulated bureaucracy.

Classical hierarchical organisations (quadrant C) mainly include the armed forces and state bureaucracies, which are usually highly structured (high grid) with group/peer-bound (high group) control. At the opposite pole we find that institutions such as estate agents, investment banks and advertising firms which are more flexible in both their operational procedure and

client interface - quadrant A (Altman & Baruch, 1998: 782). This applies to those who thrive on ambiguity and entrepreneurial thought. The company under investigation displays qualities that fit into both quadrants A and C, presenting a stable axis. This organisational structure is conducive to the security fraternity, as it allows for a hierarchical structure within which individual behaviour is also permitted. This means that within a clear organisational structure there is flexibility to not only meet the needs of clients, but also to prevent of crime and organisational losses.

This stability is contrasted by the somewhat volatile nature of organisations falling into the other two quadrants. Egalitarian bound groups (quadrant D), such as voluntary organisations, professional societies and egalitarian communities (such as Hippy communities and some religious orders) often move from periods of relative stability to sudden abrupt changes. It thus represents democratic organisations where solidarity is put to the test and decisions taken are subjected to fluctuation and uncertainty. At the other extreme lie the so-called 'fatalistic' institutions (quadrant B). They include individuals such as: rail signalmen, petrol-station attendants, supermarket cashiers and production-line workers. Instability is built into these jobs and members attempt to escape their fate (high turnover) (Altman & Baruch, 1998: 782).

As culture is a multi-faceted concept it is not possible to capture all its dimensions. This not only applies to the group/grid model, but also to any other model that aims to capture culture, imposing limits on the explanatory power. The group/grid analysis could however provide management with the insight regarding the existing culture in their organisations.

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