Cultural Intensity Study in an Educational Institution

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Management education can contribute to transforming the economy and developing society by producing globally competent and competitive managers. Management education in India, however, presents a patchy system where disparity is vivid among management education providers as well as takers. Goel et. al. (1997) attribute this patchy system to lack of vision among management institutions. Irrespective of type of ownership these management institutions are responsible for developing students who can create wealth for organizations, society, and nation, and strengthen the economy. The disparity in institutions in terms of rigour, quality, and in general acceptability of courses has arisen because of the kind of educational environment envisioned, developed, and sustained within the institution. In this sense, the work practices and systems adopted by a management institution may differentiate it from excellent to not-so-excellent ones. These practices may lead to a culture which is unique, sustainable, and breeds overall effectiveness amongst students, staff, and faculty members.

Culture is the software and collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes members of one group or category of people from another (Bourdieu, 1980; Hofsetede, 1991). More importantly, the values and beliefs held by members of cultures influence the degree to which the behaviours of individuals, groups, and institutions

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within cultures are enacted and the degree to which they are viewed as legitimate, acceptable, and effective, and represent organizational identity (Hofsetede, 1980; Albert and Whetton 1985; Triandis,1995). This paper examines whether the vision, values, and beliefs held by founder members are shared by all the constituents of the institution, especially students, by evaluating their perception about the practices.

Broadly speaking, every organization, whether educational or business, has its culture representing shared beliefs, values, and assumptions reinforced through practices. Culture, therefore, is the property of groups, not of individuals. Based on Durkheim (1938, 1953), culture (collective representation) may be best represented by the central tendency of the group mind and can be derived from society's social conventions external to individual minds. Hence, the perception of various practices by group members may indicate the shared values and assumptions about the organization. Another interesting treatise is to study culture as related to founders and leaders. The assumption that founders have a strong influence on organizational culture is explained by Martin and Siehl (1983) in terms of two social cognition biases: salience, which "causes leaders to figure prominently in people's memories of events"; and attribution, which "suggests that people may have only minimal awareness of the situational determinants of a leader's behavior". Societal culture, values, and practices affect what leaders do. Substantial empirical evidence supports this assertion (House, Wright, and Adirya, 1997).

Leadership affects organizational form, culture, and practices. Founders of organizations establish the initial culture of their organizations (Schein, 1992). Founders and subsequent leaders continue to influence the organizational culture (Bass, 1985; Miller and Droge, 1986; Yukl, 1994). However, these cultures affect members through shared practices. Founders/leaders' values become members' practices. Founders influence the behaviour of subordinate leaders and subsequent leaders through management selection criteria, role modelling, and socialization.

Some authors acknowledge that large organizations often have many cultures, which form over time as a result of segmentation, importation, technological innovation, ideological differentiations, and career filters (Van Maanen and Barley, 1985). As opposed to subcultures, a dominant culture expresses the core values that are shared by a majority of organization members. It is this macro view of culture that gives an organization its distinct personality (Timmerman, 1996). Subcultures tend to develop in large organizations to reflect common problems, situations, or experiences that members face. The subcultures include the core values of the dominant culture plus additional values unique to members of a particular department. It is then difficult to have uniform interpretation of what represents appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Once a culture is in place, there are practices within the organization that act to maintain it by giving members a set of similar experiences.

The process of socialization has direct relevance to the development of culture within an organization. It is likely that new members of the organization disturb the beliefs and customs that are in place. Therefore old members may want to help new members adapt to the prevalent culture and this adaptation process is called socialization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The most critical socialization

stage is at the time of entry into the organization. Socialization can be conceptualized as a process made up of three stages: prearrival, encounter, and metamorphosis (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). The first stage encompasses all the learning that occurs before a new member joins the organization. In the second stage, the new member sees what the organization is really like and confronts the possibility that expectations and reality may diverge. In the third stage, relatively long-lasting changes take place.

The new member performs his or her new roles, and makes adjustments to his or her work group's values and norms (Feldman, 1981). This three-stage process impacts on the new member's commitment to the organization's objectives and eventual decision to continue the relationship with the organization. Metamorphosis and the entry socialization process are complete when the new member has become comfortable with the organization. He has internalized the norms of the organization and his work group, and understands and accepts these norms. The new member feels accepted by his peers as a trusted and valued individual, is self-confident, and understands the system—his own role, but also the rules, procedures, and informally accepted practices as well.

It is evident that the culture of an organization has a powerful influence on the member's behaviour. Founder/leaders are looked upon as causal agents who can develop a 'desired' culture through designing and implementing practices. The extent to which leaders are effective largely depends on how well they are able to correctly assess and manage the culture of an organization.

As in the case of business organizations culture in educational institutions plays an important role in shaping the minds of young generations. In business organizations the focus is on profits and customers matter the most. In the case of educational institutions reputation, attitude of alumni, and the general perception of industry and society put pressure on continuous monitoring of the education system and practices. The role of the head of the institution, thus, becomes critical as well as challenging in the onslaught of the changing business scenario. Privatization of higher education is another reason, which has created an imbalance in demand-supply position. Students have a wider choice in selecting an institution and selection involves perception about quality of education provided, value for money, and perceived pay-off. Probably the difference an educational institution can make is developing and nurturing a challenging atmosphere grounded on values and reinforced through practices.

Majority of educational institutions, therefore, carefully select the teaching pedagogy, evaluation criteria, and activities which are unique or even if copied from renowned institutes must represent the values and culture the institution possesses. It would be interesting to know what students of an institution feel about the values, beliefs, and assumptions: the role the head of the institution (leader) plays in spreading the culture across different constituents of the institution and whether different departments of the institution develop different subcultures.

Methodology

The paper presents an evaluation of practices by students of an educational institution representing the impact of culture in the departments. The institution in which the study was conducted primarily offered professional courses approved by AICTE, New Delhi. It had a strength of 2400 students. The courses were run in different buildings located in one campus and constituted independent departments. These departments were headed by independent directors/principals/heads of departments. The founders of the institution were involved in development functions and the heads of departments (hereafter called leaders) were given freedom to design and develop systems and practices as per the requirements of courses and within the framework of government regulations. The departments had exclusive manpower such as faculty and support staff as well facilities such as seminar halls, computer labs, and libraries. The head of the institution often met the founders to take policy decisions and decide capital expenditure. However, interaction between faculties as well as students of different departments was restricted to functions, seminars, and conferences.

The objective of the study is to find out the difference in cultural intensity: the extent to which members of the department – students in this case – agree with the philosophy, objectives, practices, values, and beliefs as identified and laid down by the heads of departments among different departments of the institution. The next objective is to find out the impact of leaders' practices on cultures in different departments. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase the leaders were interviewed in order to understand their vision, values, and beliefs as well practices in individual departments. In the second phase students of these departments were administered a questionnaire.

Sample

Three leaders and 300 students constituted the sample. The leaders were heading departments having almost equal student and faculty strength. Department A had around 400 students, department B had 380 students, and department C had 350 students. The number of faculty members was 21, 23, and 19 respectively. All these departments had undergraduate as well as postgraduate students. Other departments of the institution were not included in the study on account of either being too large or too small in terms of faculty and student strength. Some of them also offered traditional courses. Twenty students from every class were selected at random.

Data Collection

Data were collected in two phases; in the first phase from leaders and in the second phase from students.

Phase 1: The leader is the person who sets the mission, vision, and goal for his/her department; these are in turn aligned to the overall mission of the organization. To understand the leader's views and thoughts, in-depth interviews were conducted of three departmental heads. The experience survey helped define the problem more succinctly and helped the researchers in framing the questionnaire for

students. The interview guide included questions regarding the values, mission, goals, and objectives of the department. Questions related to unacceptable and acceptable behaviour of students and teaching faculty were put to the leaders as were qualities in appointing faculty, ethical practices in the education institution, motivating environment, futuristic and idealistic department, etc.

Phase 2: Based on the interviews with leaders a questionnaire was administered to students. It appeared that all the leaders shared the basic values and vision of the institution. There were some differences in the practices and implementation; therefore, one questionnaire was prepared for students irrespective of the department.

Interviews with leaders revealed that the practices as adapted by the institution relating to fulfillment of vision, mission, and objectives revolved around the institution itself, faculty, and students. The questionnaire was administered to students in classrooms. The questionnaire had fourteen items and a six-point scale was used in the questionnaires: strongly agree (scoring: 6), agree (5), moderately agree (4), moderately disagree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The respondent was asked to tick against every item on the six-point scale. The questions were framed to represent collective perception in the opinion of the individual student. The questionnaire was high on face validity as well reliability (Cronbach alfa: 0.8452, SPSS 8.0).

To further establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire data were put to factor analysis. Three factors emerged as important: The first factor was related to the institution, the second factor was related to the faculty, and the third factor was related to students themselves. Items no. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 were related to the institution. Items 9 and 14 related to the faculty. Items 1, 7, 11, 12 and 13 related to students.

However, item 10 (admissions are given on merit) did not logically fit into the factor structure. It represented the third factor (students). However it seemed that as admission to various courses studied in the present study were given by the state government, the institution practices may not have had a direct influence on admissions.

Data collected from the interviews were content analysed and that collected from students were subjected to cluster analysis to explore the presence of subcultures if any. Mean scores were calculated to understand the response pattern within and across clusters.

Results and Discussion

The cluster analysis revealed presence of four clusters and included students of various departments. Each cluster was examined on two parameters: identification of elements of the cluster and mean score of responses to the questionnaire. These clusters are denoted by A, B, C, and D.

Table 1

Distribution of sample element across clusters

Particulars	A	B	C	D
Number and percentage of students in respective clusters	8% (17)	84% (176)	5% (11)	3% (6)
Number and percentage of students of department A in respective clusters	16 % (11)	84 % (59)	--	--
Number and percentage of students of department B in respective clusters	--	75% (53)	16% (11)	9% (06)
Number and percentage of students of department C in respective clusters	9% (06)	91% (64)	--	--
Mean Scores	5.4	4.35	2.36	1.4

Cluster A had 17 elements and included students from department A and department C. Not one student of department B appeared in this cluster. The mean score (5.4) of the responses by students indicate that they agreed with what the leaders expressed during the interview.

Cluster B included the largest number of students from all departments. The largest representation came from department C. The mean score (4.35) was closer to 4 which means that the students moderately agreed with the practices being implemented. However, they may not be sharing common beliefs. While studying the profile of students and their scoring pattern it appeared that a sizable number of students were undergraduates (64 per cent) and the scoring pattern of these students varied among departments. For example in department A, high scores appeared for items related to factor 1 (perception of institution) as well as for items related to factor 2 (students) while in the case of department B high scores appeared for factors 2 and 3 (faculty) and relatively low scores for factor 1. However, the responses of students of department C showed consistency on all three factors.

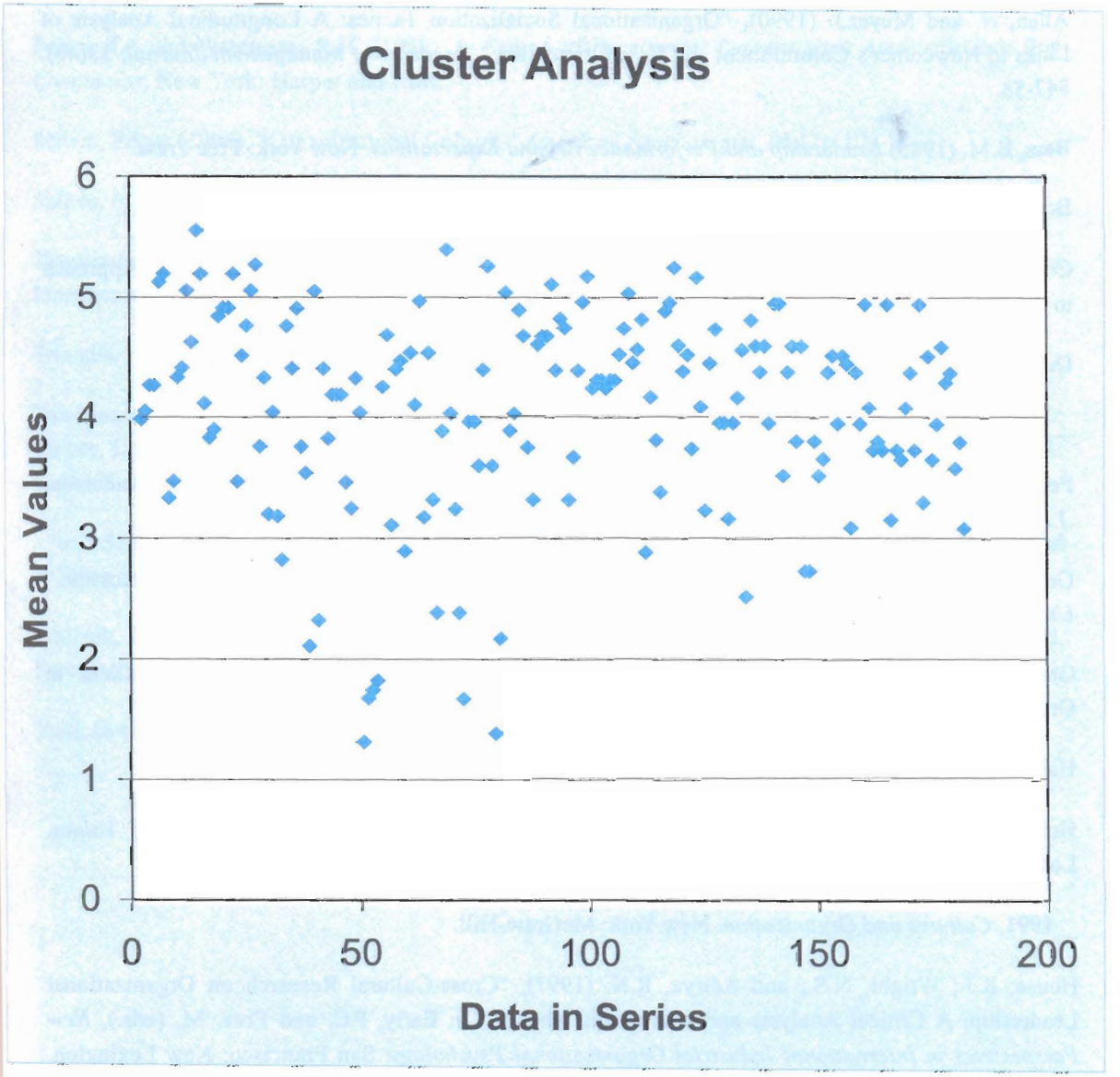
Clusters C and D had relatively fewer number of students. Interestingly the two clusters consisted of students from department B only and had mean scores of 2.36 and 1.4 respectively ranging from agree to disagree. On further scrutiny, we found that all these students were in the first year of the postgraduate course. It seems that these students did not agree that the practices or behaviours included in the questionnaire were being followed in the department. These students represented 25 per cent of the sample drawn from department B.

The results and the exploration of various clusters pose interesting questions. In spite of the leaders agreeing on the vision, mission, objectives, and practices of various departments, why do not the students feel so? Differences in the scoring pattern on various factors also indicate that, although the leaders have worked out policies and practices related to facilities, faculty, and students, differences are apparent in terms of perception of students regarding execution and perhaps effectiveness of these policies and practices within the departments. The results definitely indicate the presence of subculture. Although a large number of students constitute cluster B and represent 84 per cent of the sample, the difference in the scoring pattern causes concern. Thus, the institution, in spite of its efforts to develop shared vision, might be suffering in developing a dominant culture. The researchers also collected qualitative data adopting 'here and now' approach and it appeared that the students had variety of opinions regarding the practices of the institution. Students of department B expressed serious concern about the way new students were inducted. The postgraduate students were from different backgrounds and regions, and had different expectations, and any mismatch between the actual and desired practices may lead to doubts. There is a possibility that the institution may not be devoting attention to creating symbols and reinforcing incidences which clearly spell out the desired behaviours. Perhaps the institution may not be consistent in doing so since one of the students angrily said that every year the rules changed. Schein (1990) suggests that cultures are created through the way organizations react to important incidents in the past and have thus evolved certain norms as well as through identification of organizational members with their leaders. As such, organizational cultures are perpetuated through the process of socialization of new members into the organization. It is important that the organization socialize the outsider into members. Those who fail to learn the essential behaviours are generally labelled as nonconformists or rebels. The role of the head of department is crucial in carving the socialization process and as well as in keeping a close watch on the way practices are being practised. The leader's vision must be created, communicated, translated, implemented, evaluated, then re-created (Hall, 1991). It is extremely important that new organizational members are given sufficient time, orientation, and guidance to understand what is desired from them, what is the rationale of certain practices, and what are the commonly shared beliefs. Leaders (heads of departments) must constantly work out ways to reach students, understand what is going on their minds, and create mechanisms for doubt clarification. Students will be contributing to their respective organizations, take up higher studies or create their own business empires. They as alumni will come to the institution and contribute to its growth. Hence, it is imperative that during the students' short stay the institution leaves cultural imprints that are long lasting.

This research is an attempt to understand the culture of an educational institution by focusing on the collective *perception of* students about the practices related to three pillars: infrastructure, faculty, and students. However, the researchers could not involve faculty members in the study because of their reluctance to participate. Further research may focus on the role of faculty members. There is a possibility to explore the nature of clusters further by conducting focus groups, personal interviews, and observation, supplemented by statistical analysis.

Rotated Factor Matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
VAR00002	.03868	.60354	.51176
VAR00003	.54006	.38223	−.11531
VAR00004	.70901	−.03762	.04025
VAR00005	.38191	.29454	.35824
VAR00006	.82025	.07696	.23400
VAR00007	.63988	.08033	.03424
VAR00008	.41566	.42916	.21600
VAR00009	.65149	.19474	.37287
VAR00010	.42262	.12180	.45458
VAR00011	−.01799	−.03528	.77400
VAR00012	−.04278	.77099	−.05961
VAR00013	.17461	.63990	.48046
VAR00014	.51839	.63164	.08506
VAR00015	.42120	.27842	.43848


Cluster Analysis
Mean Values
Data in Series
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
0
50
100
150
200

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