British Society and the Culture of British Local Government: The Influence of Society on Organisational Culture

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This paper takes the view that a society's culture has a direct influence on the culture of organisations in that society. This theme is expanded by focusing on British Society and the culture of British Local Government. The author points to the values of post war Britain and how they influenced the culture and management of British local government. Charles Handy's typology of organisational culture is used to depict the cultural pattern of that period. The capacity for cultural change is demonstrated by looking at the influence of "The Thatcher Years" on British local government. Here one may observe the emergence of a new corporate culture, perceived to be more suitable for the management of local government in the 1990's.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

All of us are conscious of the fact that the world consists of a vast number of different cultures, sometimes we categorise them on the basis of nation states e.g. British, American, Finnish, Japanese, Chinese, Nigerian, Lebanese etc.. On occasion we group them together into broader categories western, eastern, middle eastern and asian. We also recognise that within one particular culture many sub cultures may exist, sub cultures often emphasis values and beliefs which are not stressed in the dominant culture. Another pattern has become common in nations where several groups with different historical traditions co-exist. Here we see groups participating in the national culture on the one hand, while maintaining and subscribing to their own particular tradition. This Is loosely termed a multi-cultural society.

A complex society may contain within it a range of overlapping cultural identities. It might be useful therefore to perceive culture not as monolithic phenomena, but rather as a series of cross cutting patterns. A matrix or network, where at certain points of reference different cultural identities interact or clash with one another. Culture in this sense becomes a multidimensional frame of reference for individuals or groups as they develop a unique culture, a set of presuppositions that evolve in a succession of collective adjustments to the situations in which they find themselves. Mumford (1951) expressed it thus:

"Every human group, every human being lives within a cultural matrix that is both immediate and remote, visible and invisible: and one of the most important statements one can make about Man's present is how much of the Past or Future it contains".

Thus we can see that culture Is a human product, and that even within the confines of tradition, culture is subject to the effects of change. In this sense culture refers to the social development of a society's system. This will be reflected in the society's values, beliefs, laws, institutions, ideologies, knowledge base, symbols and rituals. Culture in this way provides the individual with a way of viewing the world. It becomes social reality. Beliefs and values emerge as they key features or a particular knowledge base, they inform the laws, institutions, rules and procedures, norms of conduct, goals and objectives, and the rites and rituals of that group. All of these elements are used to socialize existing and new members in the tradition of the beliefs and values. Culture in this way provides people with a number of ready made answers for crucial life problems. It also dictates the routine relationships and so-

cial arrangements which help to handle survival needs, the protection and education of the young and many other necessary social functions. A significant part of a culture's influence resides in its pervasive psychological effects on perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIETY'S CULTURE AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

What is interesting to me is the relationship between a society's culture and the culture of organisations in that society. If we take the Roman Catholic Church as an example of a world wide organisation we can observe that the culture of the organisation differs depending on its location. For example The Republic of Ireland has a strong Roman Catholic tradition and so has Italy, France and Portugal. if we take the practice of religious observance in these four countries we see enormous differences. Ireland has a long tradition of high attendance at Sunday Observance (Mass). This is reinforced by the Society at large, religious practice being a core value of the culture. Italy, France and Portugal display a different tradition. Attendance is low and, of those who do attend, women predominate. These patterns of observance reflect the values of the wider society, since in theory the Roman Catholic Church deciares Sunday observance to be a rule of membership. The dichotomy between church and State is clear in Italy, France and Portugal. This core value influences how the Organisation of the Church functions in these countries. For example the laws of the country do not necessarily reinforce the Roman Catholic belief system. In Ireland the dichotomy is not so clear. This in turn influences how the Church operates as an organisation. Ireland's laws do reinforce the Roman Catholic belief system.

Current interest in the relationship between culture and organisational life can probably be attributed to the extraordinary achievements of the Japanese in the 1970s and the 1980s. Theorists speculated on how such a small country with virtually no natural resources could achieve the highest growth rate, the lowest unemployment rate and come to dominate in one selected industry after another. Most observers would probably agree that Japanese culture has influenced organisational life, but that a major direct influence has been the manner in which Japanese Management has structured the culture of individual organisations. As Pascale and Athos (1986) remind us, the "Art of Japanese Management" has been to achieve an excellent fit between Superordinate Goals, Strategy, Structure, Systems, Style, Skills and Staff. These have to be integrated together in a corporate culture that reinforces the beliefs and values of the organisation. In the remainder of this article I wish to look first at the relationship between British Society and the Public Sector, the particular focus being Local Government. The explore the corporate culture of local Government, and how sub cultures exist within it. This will lead us to discuss how patterns of culture are sustained, changed and created.

POST-WAR BRITAIN

In the post war years Britain established itself as a welfare state. This was expressed as a core value of the State having a duty to provide certain services from national resources. The Coalition government of 1940—5 accepted the general principles of The Beveridge Report that social insurance should be placed within the context of an overall social policy. In addition the Coalition Government in 1944 accepted government responsibility for full employment after the war. Greaves (1947) gave the following summation of the impact of these decisions:

"The regulatory state has given place to the social service state. Public responsibility is now admitted for the securing to every citizen of an important body of fundamental needs. Free and enforced education provision is made for him, with much assistance for further training in technical institutes and universities. His care is organised through the national health service. There is central and local responsibility for housing him. An elaborate insurance system has been constructed to meet the contingencies of sickness, accident, and old age. When he is unemployed the community recognises a responsibility for maintenance and for assisting him to obtain and train for work."

Thus within the welfare state a citizen could expect to be cared for, from the cradle to the grave. The assumptions underlying this were that the state would provide from economic growth particular services to its citizens. The question arises how would the State ensure economic growth to fund these services so

desired by the public at large. Apart from fiscal policy I would like to just mention three ways in which the government hoped to stimulate economic growth. Firstly the government sought to encourage farmers in the home market to produce more, this was done by guaranteeing a market and a price for some of their main products. Through this policy government became involved in negotiations about the structure of industry. The second source of influence was government's own economic activity. Central government expanded as did local government. The policy of nationalization of certain key industries meant that the public sector had a major position in the labour market. Brown and Steel (1979) note that:

"In 1938 less than 10 per cent of the working population had been employed in the public sector most of it in local government. By 1950 the public sector, including the armed forces, employed over five and a half million people or nearly a quarter of all employed workers. The nationalised industries and services alone accounted for over a tenth of the total working population." p35.

The third important factor was Government Education Policy. It was argued that the rapid expansion of educational services was essential to the efficient and competitive operation of industrial nations. Education was highly valued both for its own sake and because of its ability to provide social mobility across the class barriers through employment and economic growth. With increased access to education came an increased number of students In higher education increasing from around 200,000 in 1962 to nearly 475,000 by 1972. With this trend came a concomitant growth in the professions. The growth in professions encouraged a blief in expert knowledge, this was exemplified in the UK by the growth of sociology and sociologists in the 60s. Individuals in society looked to this relatively new discipline and its experts, to provide explanations of a wide set of social phenomena, ranging from the decline of the extended family to Beetle mania. The growth in the professions generally meant that society looked to them for solutions. The fifties and sixties saw a trend of professionally inspired solutions to social issues, these included planning of motorways, new towns and housing to name but a few. If we take an overview of post war Britain we may observe strong values within the society In relation to state and public provision of essential services.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

When we reflect on the 50s and 60s we consider it to have been a period of consensus politics for local government. Local authorities were seen as providers of services, while also being political institutions with powers for local government. The services provided by local Government were mostly prescribed in statute, there was a high degree of consensus in the society about the services local government should provide. While the society wished for public provision it was not involved in any active way in seeking to influence the politics of local government. There was a good degree of consensus among elected councilors from all parties that local government should provide professional services to the public. This meant that the administration, as represented by officers, could expect a high degree of acceptance for their suggested implementation strategies.

Central government encouraged the growth of local government by grant and loans sanctions. From 1952 to 1975 local government expenditure grew in real terms. Growth was to be expected and seen as a solution to any problems that might face local government. Thus local authorities were charged with the provision of education, social services and housing to name the most prominent. Local authorities were seen as providers of services, while also being political institutions with powers for local government. The services provided by local Government were mostly prescribed in statute. John Stewart (1986) in discussing Local Government as a provider of services and a political institution makes the following points:

"Local government in this country is not distinguished by the particular services provided. They have varied over time and will doubtless continue to vary. Local government is distinguished by being carried out by directly elected local authorities, with responsibility for a local area and by a general organisation carrying out many functions, rather than a functional organisation limited to a single primary responsibility. The combination of direct election, responsibility for a particular local area and the range of function justifies the phrase local government".

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY ON TRADITIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Traditionally local government in the United Kingdom has broken itself into functional departments with discrete areas of professional activity. Typical departments would be Social Services, Education, Planning and Transportation, Environmental Health, Recreation and Leisure and Housing. At the same time the Centre has developed to perform those functions that are not directly part of service provision. Classically this has meant Legal, Finance and Personnel. The committee structure largely follows this pattern with elected members gaining their identity from roles on particular committees. This functional structure was a reflection of the growth of professionalism in the society at large and we see the political structure mirroring the same values.

This system of local government is based on certain organisational and managerial assumptions. Firstly the idea of self sufficiency it was assumed that local government itself should provide the services. This was closely linked to the value society placed on public services, it was deemed appropriate for local government to be a sole provider, in reality having almost a monopoly on public provision. Here we can see the value in the society for public provision effecting local governments perception of itself. The appropriate structure was interpreted to be hierarchical with central control, the classic bureaucracy. This of course was in perfect keeping with the goals and objectives that society had for a welfare state. A bureaucracy with its characteristics of a well defined hierarchy of authority, clear lines of responsibilities, a system of rules and procedures, impersonality of relations and written records, could be expected to administer an impartial service to its citizens.

This view was compounded by the professionalism of the service. Professionals defined the service that was good for their clients. This generally meant a uniform standardised service delivery approach. Britain in the 50s and 60s had not begun to come to grips with the reality of the cultural diversity within society. The professional was perceived as knowing best what people needed. The public were seen as being uniform so for example the provision by Social Services of "meals on wheels" made the assumption that everyone ate meat.

As local government departments expanded they became more differentiated in operational services. One of the concerns of The Maud Committee on the Management of Local Government (1967) was the internal organisation of local authorities. The Committee recognized the wide differentiation that had occurred in local government and linked it to the tradition of associating particular committees with particular services, coupled with the requirements of statutes for certain services to have specific committees. In discussing this view Greenwood et al. (1980) stated:

"the Committee diagnosed an imbalance between the processes of differentiation and integration. The Committee recommended that local authorities should adopt a more co-ordinated (that is integrated) approach to the management of local services and put forward proposals for structural reorganisation."

Here it is useful to consider distinctions made by Greenwood and Stewart (1973) with regard to three ways in which local authorities appeared to manage:

Separatist authorities: these assume that the local authority consists of a series of services which may be planned and provided independently of each other, thus requiring minimum coordination.

Federal authorities: these assume also that services may be provided separately but recognise that there are such things as economies of scale to be derived from a common framework. So for example you would find central purchasing, typing pools etc.

Integral authorities: assume that services are interlinked in there impact on the community and that they ought to be planned together as a programme.

These distinctions emphasis that those authorities that adopt a federal approach are primarily to be recognised by administrative co-ordination, while those that adopt an integral approach seek the co-ordination of both administration and policy. So when we look at traditional local government of the 50s and 60s we can associate it with the following characteristics. Local government had a federal approach. It grew in a stable environment of economic growth. It assumed the sole provider role. It adopted a bureaucratic structure based on functional professionalism. Services were delivered in a uniform manner to clients. It operated in an environment of consensus politics, with the committee system mirroring that of the administrative structure. All these features

were built on a shared value system, of a professional impartial service to clients, this in turn reflected the values of the wider social welfare state.

THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF TRADITIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Charles Handy (1985) has produced a very useful typology describing four different types of organisational culture. In describing four distinct types of culture, Handy is careful to point out that these are pure types which will not really exist in their entirety in one particular organisation. However an organisation may display more of one particular culture than another. Equally common is a combination of one, two, three or all four existing in different parts of the one organisation. So what are these four types of culture called?. We have Role Culture, Power Culture, Task Culture and Person Culture.

ROLE CULTURE

The role culture is represented in classic greek architecture by tall columns upon which rests a pediment. This organisational culture perceives its strength to rest in its pillars, in Local government we would immediately think of the separate professional departments each with a chief officer who has risen up through the columns. The pediment is where co-ordination takes place with a narrow band of senior management, in our case the chief officers of the professional departments lead by the Chief Executive, who traditionally has been a legal professional. The work and interaction of the pillars/departments is controlled by systems of rules and procedures with clearly defined responsibilities and authority. This culture works on logic and rationality which reinforces the idea of impersonality of relations with clients and promotion based on professional/technical qualification. This pattern can be clearly ifentified within traditional local government, where one observed chief officers who had risen on professional expertise to be barons of their domain, defending their departments professional interests. Obviously Handy identifies role culture as being associated with the classic bureaucracy. Traditional local government is indeed in this mould, with very powerful individual departments seeking to expand their are of operation. An interesting observation about bureaucracies is that they function best in stable environments where they are asked to handle large uniform, routine, and known tasks. This is precisely what was generally required of iocal government in the UK in the 50s and 60s. Generally we can say that both the hierarchical structure and associated role culture was correct for the climate of certainty and consensus that was prevalent in local government.

POWER CULTURE

It would be remiss not to emphasis that while the role culture was undoubtedly dominant, the other three cultures were also present in different parts of local government. Power Culture is depicted by a spider's web, with a central figure at the core from which spread rays of power and influence. This central figure is connected by functional or specialist strings but the power rings are the centres of activity and influence. This culture works on precedent. Individuals who aspire to promotion, seek to anticipate the wishes and decisions of the central figure. There are few rules and procedures, control being exercised by the centre. It is in essence a political organisation where decisions are largely taken on the balance of influence. It does not necessarily have to be associated with Politics, but it described very well the politics of traditional local government. Here it was quite common for the Leader of the ruling party to bestow the Chairman/Chairwoman role of powerful committees to favoured party members who had anticipated the political direction of Leader and party. This of course was also to ensure future anticipation of direction through patronage. It clearly reflects the reality of political life where loyalty to, and promotion of, political belief is a core value. It is interesting that, while officers were promoted on professional expertise, elected councilors were promoted within the political system on the basis of political expertise. However both officers and councilors valued and promoted professional knowledge within the service provider role. This consensus permitted officers to anticipate the wishes of councillors policy, in the form of a strong advisory professional implementation role. There appeared to be a general belief in the concept of a separation between policy and implementation.

The power culture is generally successful while the central figure is reading and understanding both the internal and external environment of the organisation. The individual needs to have good antennae for change and future trends, together with a clear understanding of current situations. Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party is a fascinating example of the power culture in operation. Here was a leader who correctly read the mood of the Country for change in the 1980s. As a leader she promoted party members on the basis of their agreement with her particular brand of Conservatism. Cabinet Ministers remained while they anticipated her wishes, wavers were out. We became familiar with a new meaning for the word "Wet" used to describe party members who expressed serious doubts about Thatcherism. We can partially attribute her demise to a lack of touch with her electorate in the late 80s, which led her to fail to anticipate the extent of the negative impact of the Community Charge/Poll Tax on huge sections of the electorate.

TASK CULTURE

This culture is represented by a net where each unit is connected to others while being self contained at the same time. Power lies at the itercises of the net and not necessarily at the top as in role and power culture. The quickest way to appreciate this type of organisation is to imagine a matrix organisation, where everyone is involved in project work. This requires an ability to form and reform project teams according to the requirements of the different tasks within the organisation. A strong value in this culture is expert power rather than position power or personal power. When successful it is essentially a team culture where people strive together to solve problems/tasks. Control can be difficult in the sense that each project team will seek a high level of resourcing to facilitate the best solution, therefore it does best in a resource rich climate. The culture performs well in a competitive market where speed of reaction, creativity and integration are important factors.

This culture may be found in traditional local government within sections of particular departments, but it is not the dominant culture. The engineer's department will house project teams who will operate in this way. Policy analysis units located within the chief executive's department will display a task culture. In traditional local government task culture encounters difficulties when it knocks against the dominant role culture.

The classic example is when project teams are formed on the basis of expert knowledge and not seniority. Members of the project teams find they have two bosses, the project team leader and their traditional line manager. This interface calls for delicate negotiation of time allocation, reporting procedures and accountabilities. Project teams tend to believe in the importance of their task, which creates feelings of being influential this can create problems within a role culture where influence is associated with position power.

PERSON CULTURE

Handy describes this culture as unusual because the person is the central point in this culture. One may think of a group of individual stars coming together to share business facilities, an example would be a group of solicitors or doctors each with their own specialty and clients. In professional practices of this kind the organisation is subordinate to the individual. The individual joins the organisation to pursue their own career path. This Person Culture while not present in local government in the sense of formal professional practices, can be observed in the way individual professionals manage their career paths within Local government. Local government is not a unified service in the same way that the Central Civil Service works in the United Kingdom. The British Civil Service recruit centrally and promotion is controlled by a central establishment approach. In local government each local authority recruits and promotes independently. This permits considerable voluntary movement between authorities by individual officers seeking new challenges and promotion. Some officers who are known by the title of "Fast Trackers" bestow their talents on particular authorities usually for a short space of time while seeking an increased reputation in a high profile area of operation. The negative view of this approach is that these officers do not necessarily seek to contribute in a holistic way to their authorities but only contribute where their exists clear advantage for themselves. It needs to be acknowledged that often authorities do benefit from the presence of these "Fast Trackers". The

issue is that such behaviour is not in keeping with the dominant role culture where promotion comes more slowly and individuals are appreciated for adopting the values of the role culture. Individual stars often wish to challenge the status quo by pursuing their objectives in new ways that they believe will achieve the desired results.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE 1980s AND LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

So traditional local government entered the 1980s with a predominant role culture but also present in its environment were power culture, task culture and person culture. Remember that one of the features of a role culture is that it performs best in a stable environment. The 80s brought numerous challenges to local government, not all being internally inspired. A major challenge to Local government came from the Conservative Government's post 1987 package of legislation. The focus included local government finance, the political organisation of local governments and compulsory competitive tendering. The introduction of the poll tax in the election manifesto of 1987 signalled a wish by central government to change the manner in which local government was financed. The idea of a community charge or tax on each adult person was to make local governments more directly accountable to their local electorates. The Community Charge Legislation was passed in 1988. The Housing Act first introduced in 1988 and finalised in "The Local Government Housing Act" 1989 encouraged local government tenants to move out of local authority housing by seeking to make local authorities compete for tenants with other social landlords. The Education Reform Act 1988, sought to give parents more involvement in schools, devolve management from the Local Education Authority to local management of schools by head teachers and governors and central government to control the new national curriculum. Social Services had a review of community care in the form of "The Griffiths Report" 1989. The report recognised the key role social services must play in community care. But emphasised that social services should not see themselves as sole providers of these services but rather arrangers and purchasers.

The Widdicombe Committee was set up to enquire into the "politicisation of local government" which was percelved by the Conservative Government as a problem in left wing controlled councils. The committee issued it's Report in 1986 and it was two years later in 1988 that a white paper outlining the governments response was published. It was argued that the reforms proposed were designed to ensure local democracy and local accountability would be strengthened. Leach (1989) sets out five basic principles which provide a rationale for the report.

"These are: first that local authorities should be clearly accountable to their electors; second, that those who take decisions on behalf of the council must reflect the decisions of the electorate; third, that every councillor should be able to play a proper part in the council's work; fourth, that those concerned in local authority decisions should be free from any taint of suspicion that they are favouring personal interests; fifth, that councils should be served by an efficient, expert, politically impartial service, responsible to the council as a whole; and sixth that there should be effective arrangements to ensuro proper standards, and effective means of redress for members of the public against "unfair" council decisions". p104

Several major themes arose as a result of these changes, local government recognised ———

- there was a need for diversity in service delivery
- the need for economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Value for Money)
- the need to question the sole provider role
- the move towards differentiation in local government
- the need to develop further consumer choice and the Enabling Council Role.

INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE 80s

A more informed public in the 80s had led to more active politics with forms of delivery being questioned. A typical example would be the aforementioned "meals on wheels". Why should the food be exclusively based on the concept of a British diet when the society was now multi-cultural. Or, in housing provision, people questioned the idea of high rise living. Fundamentally the view of the Professional was being questioned. The public had a view and

were demanding to be taken account of. In this climate, service departments were the first to adapt and consider new ways of service delivery. These ranged from structural changes in the form of decentralization to neighbourhood offices for particular departments to complete decentralization, as in the case of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Service departments also became more aware of their public and of the need to know more clearly what individuals wanted from particular services. This led to more consultation with the public and a redesign of methods of service delivery with attention given to such criteria as accessibility, appropriateness and accountability. For this approach to be successful it was realised that departmental staff needed training in new skills of what was broadly defined as "public service orientation".

The introduction of Compulsive Competitive Tendering, meant that Local Authorities wishing to carry out certain defined activities could only to do so fater a process of competitive tendering. This resulted in local authorities looking at their internal structure and re-organising around a range of considerations from the separation of Client-Contractor Roles, to business units, cost centres, profit centres, to management buy-outs. When these changes were implemented they had knock on effects for the organisational design of particular local governments. Tall hierarchies with many layers of decision making were seen as unresponsive. Central control when exercised in a rigid manner was seen as unsupportive of direct service needs. These structural changes were an outward sign of a concern with performance at departmental level and the need to be competitive and cost effective. So external forces were a factor in local authorities beginning to question internally their roles and relationship, together with a deep questioning of their relationship with the electorate.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE 1990s

Thus we return to the what is the culture of the Local government to be for the 1990s. This may only be answered if we have a picture of what Local Government or the New Local Governments will be like. The first point to make is that there is likely to be less uniformity in Local Authority "Structures- Strategies and Systems". This is to be welcomed if it reflects a recognition of the diversity of local community needs and of responses to those needs. It follows that there may be a clearer definition of individual local authority markets and strategies, hence perhaps a mapping out of definite programme areas around which officers and members will work together to achieve a quality service. Programme areas could be Environmental Services; Leisure Services; Development of Employment and Economy. Without going into details of particular functions within each programme area the idea would be to group related functions, taking account of how the public receives and might perceive the service. Leisure might therefore include all recreational activities from Museums to Crematoriums. The emergence of definite programme areas could mean a reformulation of the committee structure and cycle.

Committees based on programme areas would be major committees on the basis of strategic importance, and larger to permit more members being active participants. It might also encourage greater integration between policy and implementation, evolving from a strategic perspective. One could envisage the emergence of strategic direction from the Centre in the shape of, definition and prioritization of particular programme areas closely tied into budgetary allocation on an output basis. Implicit in this would be the involvement of leading members in setting the strategic policy direction. Following on from this a wider group of members would come together on particular programme areas to focus and refine policies. In addition members would have a key role in performance review with regard to impact of particular programme areas on their client/electoral base. Programme Areas which are defined in output terms of service delivery have two immediate effects. One they facilitate the budgetary allocation process because it is much clearer what resources are required. Second it is easier for members to assess whether targets have been achieved, not just in expenditure but also in the qualitative terms of the impact of the service on the client. Officers would have parallel but different involvement in these processes, their role being one of advice and management of the implementation. The programme focus could also assist in coordination between different functional departments because of the need for cross departmental contributions. Here one is building up a role for the Centre of the Authority that is

chiefly focusing on local area needs which will be influenced by socio-economic demographic factors. Examples would be, Skills Shortages, Employment Generation, Environmental Issue, which are not easily met by departments. This is The Enabling Council, Michael Clarke and John Stewart (1988). In the view Clarke and Stewart the enabling council:

> "accepts that direct provision of services is but one means among many of providing for the community. Its role as an 'enabling council' is to use all the means at its disposal to meet the needs of those who live within its area. It will produce some service itself. It will work with and through other organisations- in the public, private and voluntary sectors- aiding, stimulating and guiding their contributions."

CULTURE CHANGE

The combination of Central Government legislation and a more informed society in the 1980s resulted in local government examining it's core values, mode of operations and it's aims and objectives. John Stewart (1986) rightly points out that the new values that will emerge to be nourished In local government, will vary from authority to authority. This fact recognises the diversity of local government and the importance of each authority grounding itself in the reality of its own unique local community. Nevertheless one can certainly build a picture of the corporate culture values of the new management. Stewart has expressed the organisational values of the new management as:

* The new management stresses the role of local authorities as local government rather than merely the provision of services.
* The new management supports rather than limits the political process.
* The new management is based on the authority's concern for the local community, and not limited to the services provided.
* The new management aims at service for the public, rather than service to the public.
* The new management focuses on staff as the means of learning, and of change, and cannot neglect their development.
* The new management creates and seizes opportunities to achieve political purpose and is not limited by the routines of past practices.

This very accurately describes the overall corporate culture of local government in the UK as it is developing in the 1990s. What has been fascinating to observe and record is the creation of this cultural change both in the broad sense and in particular local authorities. The process of culture change is not easy, not least because it will challenge existing strategies, structures and systems or "the way things are done around here".

THE PROCESS OF CREATING A NEW CULTURE IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Here I wish to give a description of what I have observed the process to be in many local authorities in the United Kingdom. The focus will be on how the organisation goes about changing the culture. This example is from one local authority but the pattern is general. The first step in the process has been for an authority represented by the chief officers to develop an overall strategy, many but by no means all of these, have been around the strategy of a **Public Service Orientation.** Being customer orientated means ensuring that the services provided are those customers want. It means putting the customer first. It means understanding that the only reason the authority exists is to provide services to the public. We might like to compare this the to Japanese tradition of superordinate goals. This overall statement of purpose has then been translated into Authority wide core values. These core values are intended to inform the policies and practices of the whole organisation. In keeping with the **Public Service Orientation** strategy, here is an example of core values from a district council:

OUR CORE VALUES ARE:

We are Customer Orientated
We believe in the Abilities of the Individual
We must be Responsive and Responsible
We believe in Quality
We are Action Orientated.

The setting of the overall strategic goal and core values for the authority has typically taken place at the corporate level of the authority, usually by chief officers taking a few days away from the Authority to work out the strategy. The strategy and core values are then passed down

to each department by their respective chief officers and each department then formulates a departmental approach to service delivery on the basis of the strategic goal and core values. This process is repeated within sub sections of all departments so that all staff may begin to behave the culture. If we continue with the public service example the intention is that each individuals job is specified in terms of the **Core Values.**

See boxed example for how it finally impacts on the Main Switchboard Telephonists role under each of the Core Values.

Customer Orientated

Over 70 % of initial contacts with the Council begin on the telephone and your role in creating an initial impression is absolutely crucial. In fact, the importance of the telephonist's role in ensuring that we are customer orientated from the beginning cannot be over stressed.

The basic ground rules in dealing with incoming calls are agreed as follows:

i. We must give a clear and friendly greeting, i.e. Good morning/afternoon (name of council).
ii. Reassure waiting callers where appropriate that they are not forgotten.
iii. Be helpful and friendly at all times because the caller Is relying on you.

Responsive and responsible

It means answering incoming calls as quickly as possible, and making sure that we know **exactly** what the caller wants and putting them through to the right extension. Listen carefully to what the caller has to say, be responsive and show respect to the customer. Your voice is the human factor of the organisation and the way you treat individual callers will affect the way in which the council is seen. You are the council as far as the caller is concerned. Remember that each of us is responsible for portraying the image of the council as that of efficient, friendly and helpful.

Belief in the abilities of the individual

This means that the council has confidence in you to do your job by providing the necessary support, encouragement, facilities and training to help you. Performance Appraisal is part of this process.

Action Orientated· getting jobs done

It means:

i Ensuring the telephone procedure on the main switchboard is a credit to the organisation.
ii Establishing consistency in the way the telephone is answered.
iii Keeping the telephonist's directory up to date with new starters and leavers.
iv When taking telephone messages for someone, making sure that the message is dealt with.
v Being aware of all departments and their functions so that help can be offered immediately to a vague enquirer and they can be put through to the right person.

Belief in Quality and Quality Control

This means that we to impress and demonstrate to dustomers the quality of our telephone practices and techniques. We will not opt for second best.

In assessing whether the organisation has a good telephone practice and technique, the customer will ask the following questions.

1. Was my call answered promptly?
2. Was I answered in a friendly and courteous manner?
3. Did I have to wait long before I was connected?
4. Was I connected to the right person/department?
5. Was I passed from pillar to post?
6. Did I feel it was frustrating to deal with the Council by telephone or did I find it a pleasure?

The aim is to ensure that the customer finds It a pleasure to deal eith the council every time he has occasion to telephone. Your role in this is vital.

This boxed example demonstrates how the organisation seeks to inclucate the culture into the job behaviour of the individual. The aim is to achieve through a series of meetings, between decreasing numbers of staff, a translation of the culture from broad strategic goals into departmental, group and individual aims and objectives. Having clearly stated how the strategy and core values will effect organisational and individual delivery of services, the question remains, what structural and systemic changes need to be considered to support the cultural change?

CULTURE, STRUCTURE, SYSTEM AND STYLE

We have noted that the predominant culture of Local government is one of role culture, with the other cultures also present in the environment. Handy would suggest that the organisation should differentiate their cultures and structures according to the dominant activity in that department, division or section. The new management of local government recognises the diversity within the environment and seeks

innovative ways of providing services. We can appreciate that known routine steady state tasks can be handled in a culture where rules, procedures, controls and regulations facilitate the fast processing. The handling of rent and rebate payments in a housing department for example. Economic development on the other hand, with its need to enter into partnerships with other agencies often on a project by project basis, is better suited to a task culture, where the emphasis is on finding speedy and flexible solutions. Policy decisions involve the setting of overall direction and guidance. In local government policy is the domain of the elected councillors. Handy believes that policy decisions operate best in a power culture, this is exactly how the politics of local government is. Crisis is also dealt with well in a power culture, where a central power source can respond on behalf of the organisation. The person culture can contribute through individual stars being recruited to bestow their talents to particular local governments. Third trend is apparent in the recruitment of private sector expertise for the new specialist Direct Service Organisations brought about as a result of Compulsive Competitive Tendering. It is also seen in the recruitment of chief executive on short term contracts at a high salary to undertake a specific task for an authority.

The skill therefore is to recognise the diversity of tasks that logal government is engaged in and to structure oneself accordingly. This has in fact begun to occur in response to the challenges of the 1990s. Some authorities in their pursuit of cultural change have broken up there large central departments and replaced them with a small strategic core, with professional support services being created to supply services to the service departments on a commercial basis. Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire display this approach. This in turn leads to cost centres and smaller units responsible for discrete elements of service. Projectisation is growing in local government with a parallel growth in a team approach.

At the same time those authorities engaged in cultural change have realised the need to adapt their systems to support the Core values espoused in their Culture. This often means a significant increase in the Training budget so that staff may be given the skills to perform in the new manner. Performance appraisal also has to operate to support the goals of the organisation, therefore targets must reflect the new focus. This means targets are output oriented and measured in terms of quantity and quality. Priorities are reflected in the budget allocation with bids being made on an output basis. Management information systems have to change to provide the service delivery departments, with information in a form that is useful for them and not what is best suited for central requirements.

Local authorities have understood very clearly that Culture can assist the organisation in external adaptation and internal integration. They obviously agree with Schein (1985) that culture contributes the following functions to an organisations external survival and adaptation:

* securing a shared understanding of the core mission, primary task, manifest and latent functions of the organisation
* developing consensus on goals, as derived from the core mission
* developing consensus on the means to be used to attain goals, such as organisation structure, division of labour, and the reward and authority systems
* developing consensus on the criteria to be used in measuring how well a group is doing
* developing consensus on remedial strategies to adopt when things go wrong.

Schein further indicates what the culture can contribute to internal integration in the organisation. He emphasises the benefit of an organisation having a common language with which to communicate across different operational areas. This can be achieved through the mission statement and core values. The culture makes clear where the power lies and how individuals may be rewarded or punished. People in the organisation understand how heroes and heroines are created. This is achieved through myths and stories, rites and rituals, reinforcement of what are desired goals. So we see that organisational culture is a mirror image of societal culture in its core elements and that it provides organisational members with a belief system with which to interpret their organisational world, it supplies organisational reality.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to demonstrate the links that exist between the culture of the wider society and the culture of organisations within that society. The particular focus is British

local government and how its culture has been influenced in the first place by the values of post-war Britain and then by "The Thatcher Years". The paper reveals how particular local authorities have used the elements of corporate culture to adapt and change with their environment.

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