


The Cultural Analysis of Soft Systems Methodology and the Configuration Model of Organizational Culture

SAGE Open
April-June 2015: 1–10
© The Author(s) 2015
DOI: 10.1177/2158244015589787
sgo.sagepub.com


Jürgen Staadt¹

Abstract

Organizations that find themselves within a problematic situation connected with cultural issues such as politics and power require adaptable research and corresponding modeling approaches so as to grasp the arrangements of that situation and their impact on the organizational development. This article originates from an insider-ethnographic intervention into the problematic situation of the leading public housing provider in Luxembourg. Its aim is to describe how the more action-oriented cultural analysis of soft systems methodology and the theory-driven configuration model of organizational culture are mutually beneficial rather than contradictory. The data collected between 2007 and 2013 were analyzed manually as well as by means of ATLAS.ti. Results demonstrate that the cultural analysis enables an in-depth understanding of the power-laden environment within the organization bringing about the so-called “socio-political system” and that the configuration model makes it possible to depict the influence of that system on the whole organization. The overall research approach thus contributes toward a better understanding of the influence and the impact of oppressive social environments and evolving power relations on the development of an organization.

Keywords

organizational culture, power relations, soft systems methodology, public sector, organizational ethnography, European Union

Due to growing complexity, organizations find themselves increasingly in situations they do not know how to cope with. This can, for instance, be a situation where the organization needs to evolve or change but is not really able to adapt suitably to an organizational or societal problem. This requires a particular investigation into the organizational setting to understand what the problem is (Pidd, 2003). Issues such as strategy or operations and their subsequent performance are often the first to be considered, thus neglecting the influence of the organizational culture on these issues. However, people are no longer considered machine-like entities because they are now recognized as being the “elements” that build up and constantly shape the culture of an organization. Dauber, Fink, and Yolles (2012) provide a configuration model of organizational culture which explores the dynamics between organizational culture, strategy, structure, and operations (Dauber, 2011). The authors draw upon well acknowledged models from culture theory as well as management (e.g., Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; Schein, 1985). Theory is necessary to analyze the data collected. Nevertheless, and of equal importance is the type of data collected and the research approach used. Lowe (2010) describes the ambivalence of the “etic” (theory-driven) and the “emic” (how people think/act) approach and the prevailing adherence

of positivism to rationally explain cultural phenomena from the outside. In his examination of open access practices, Xia (2011) uses an anthropological view of emics and etics and concludes that the combination of insider–outsider approaches provides a much richer account and a better understanding of the system.

According to Stacey (2007), interaction between people constitutes an important factor in the way organizations change over time. “To research an organization understood as patterning and repatterning of people’s communicative interaction requires that the researcher uses methods which pay attention to exactly this local interplay” (Mowles, 2011, p. 65). This exploration of the day-to-day activities in detail corresponds with organizational ethnography (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009; Wastell, 2010). Being an organizational member and a researcher at the same time has in the ethnographic sense many advantages. However, this requires the researcher to be aware of his or her possible

¹Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding Author:

Jürgen Staadt, RSM, Erasmus University, Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, Rotterdam, 3062 PA, The Netherlands.
Email: juergen.staadt@t-online.de



influence on the research setting (Dale & Vinson, 2013; Pidd, 2003). When the researcher of this study started work for the leading public housing provider in Luxembourg in November 2006, he found that organization within a problematic situation. First observations and the analysis of organizational documents showed a decrease in productivity while the workforce was constantly augmented. In the first 10 years after its inauguration in 1979, 734 units were produced with an average staff of 8 people. In the further development between 1990 and 1999 another 1,290 units were produced with an average staff of 14 people. The following years between 2000 and 2010 show a somewhat different result because an average staff, now of 36 people, produced only 964 units. However, this was only a symptom of the true problems, which were predominantly located in power relations that had developed over more than a decade into an oppressive social environment (Stadt, 2014). This “thinking-from-within” is a main strength of organizational ethnography (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009), which requires the researcher to act reflexively as well as critically in the meaning-making processes (Ybema et al., 2009). Insider-ethnography is, according to Sykes and Treleaven (2009), particularly useful for investigating critical issues such as power and knowledge.

To collaboratively investigate the problem situation, soft systems methodology (SSM) was used. SSM constitutes an organized learning system that is, according to Checkland and Poulter (2010), best carried out by the people within the problem situation (Herr & Anderson, 2005) and ideally is a never-ending process (Chapman, 2004). However, SSM has been criticized for its adherence to the interpretive paradigm (Flood, 2001; Jackson, 2010; Kotiadis & Mingers, 2006; Paucar-Caceres & Pagano, 2009) and the lack of a sufficient theoretical basis for the analysis of the organizational culture (Stadt, 2014). With regard to theories, Shotter (2010) argues that they

are of use in representing or picturing states of affairs, and we, as individuals, use them to *explain* events *after* they have happened, to determine their antecedent causes and to make *predictions* (on the assumption that the future will be like the past). Our use of descriptive concepts is quite different. Their use is pre-theoretical. (p. 154)

This article seeks to demonstrate, on one hand, how the cultural analysis of SSM, understood as pre-theoretical, can be supported by the configuration model of organizational culture and, on the other hand, how the configuration model can gain significantly from the cultural analysis of SSM. The following paragraphs describe first the cultural analysis of SSM, the configuration model of organizational culture, and the overall methodological approach. This is followed by the analysis of the data collected, which was undertaken manually as well as by means of ATLAS.ti. The findings are then discussed, followed by the conclusion.

Cultural Analysis of SSM: Analyses One, Two, and Three

Organizational development is concerned with cultural change within organizations (Yolles & Guo, 2003). As depicted in Figure 1, cultural aspects in an SSM intervention are analyzed by employing (I) Analysis One: analysis of the intervention itself, (II) Analysis Two: social system analysis, and (III) Analysis Three: political system analysis (Checkland, 2000). This cultural enquiry or “stream of cultural analysis” continues throughout the intervention right to its end (Checkland & Scholes, 1990) and thus concerns all of the four main activities of the methodology. The four main activities (1) to (4) of SSM, that is, the “logic-based stream of analysis” can be described as follows: The starting activity is concerned with the finding out about a problem situation, which incorporates cultural as well as political aspects (1). Informed by this first step, relevant purposeful activities are modeled (2), which are then used for a structured debate about desirable and feasible change (3). The objective of the debate is to find accommodations between conflicting interests, which enable action to be taken in the situation (4) so as to improve the situation (Checkland, 2000; Checkland & Poulter, 2010; Wastell, 2010; Yolles, 2006).

It is clear that the logic-driven stream and the cultural stream will interact, each informing the other. Which selected “relevant” human activity systems are actually found to be relevant to people in the problem situation will tell us something about the culture we are immersed in. (Checkland & Scholes, 1990, p. 30)

Analysis One considers the intervention into the problematic situation itself as being problematic. There are three roles that have to be considered. First, the client who is the person or group that caused the study, second, the would-be problem solver, that is, whoever wishes to do something about the situation in question, and third, the problem owner. The role of client is of particular interest because the study was initiated by the researcher and not directly by management. The researcher thus acts in the beginning as client, would-be problem solver, and problem owner, albeit with the approval from management to use the organization as the case study. The participating employees, as well as management, take on the roles of problem solver and problem owner. It is their perception, willingness, as well as knowledge that should be used for defining the intervention (Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Sykes & Treleaven, 2009; Yolles, 2006) and to collect emic data (Xia, 2011). Analysis Two is concerned with the constantly changing interaction between roles, norms, and values (Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Sankaran, Tay, & Orr, 2009). A role is meant to be understood as a social position, which is significant for the people in the problem situation such as the leader(s) of the organization. A norm is defined as expected behavior of the leader(s) and the performance in the role will be judged

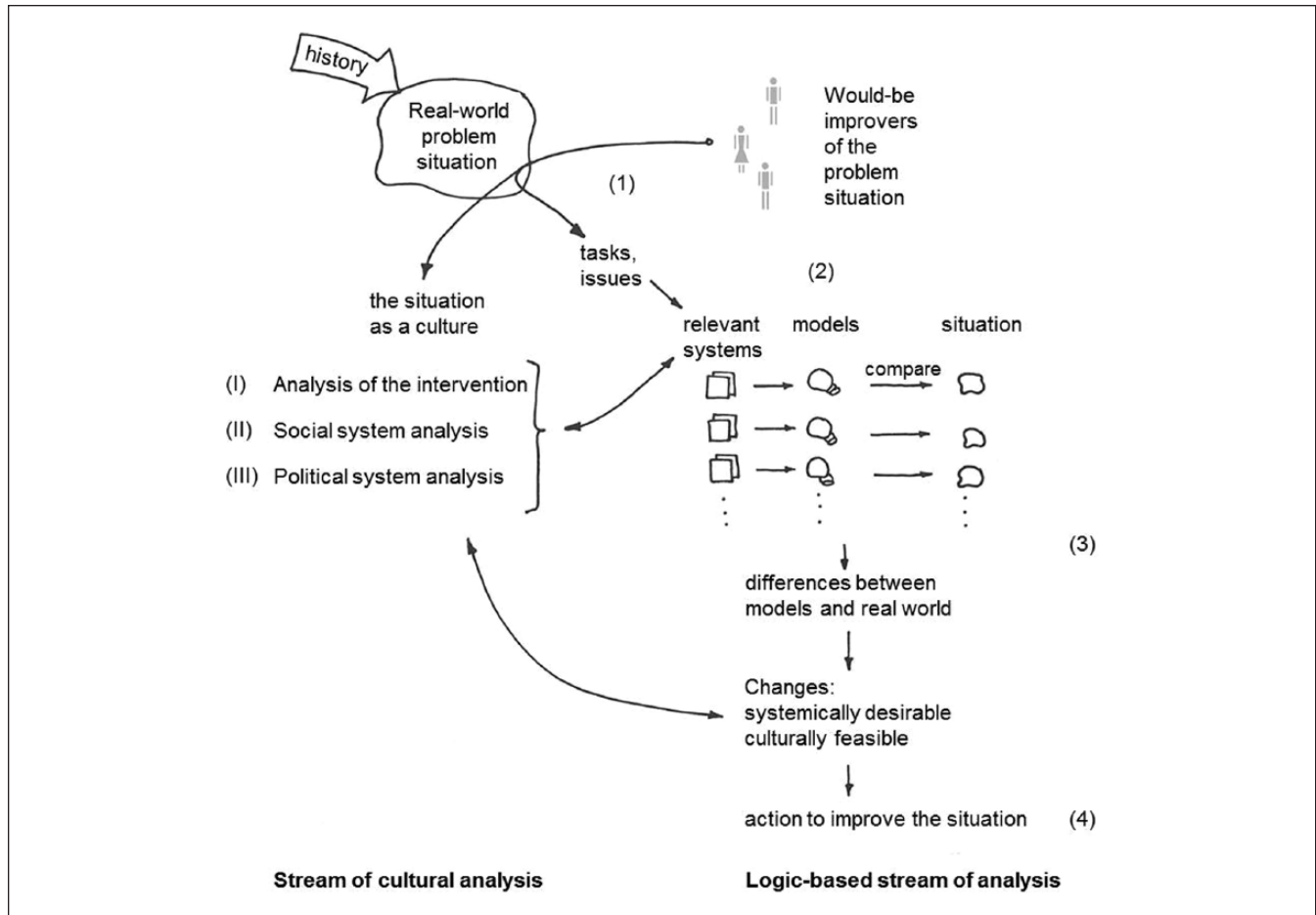


Figure 1. Cultural and logic-based analysis of soft systems methodology.

Source. Adapted from Checkland and Scholes (1990, p. 29).

according to the values, that is, the local standards. This constitutes beliefs about what is humanly good or bad performance by the leader(s) for instance. "If you want to understand human values and identities, you should study their failures, . . . [since they] deliver more useful knowledge and even more useful pragmatic warnings than success stories" (Magala, 2010, p. 245). Analysis Three deals with issues such as politics and power, which incorporate its expression, allocation, or distribution (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). According to Magala (2009), issues of power, their genesis, evolution, and sense-making in organizational settings are more often discussed and interpreted in informal communication such as gossip than in formal research reports.

[Many authors repeatedly observed] a significant scarcity of research projects [in organizational science] devoted to the problem of power, power struggles, individual passion and interest devoted to the attempts to acquire or maintain power at the expense of the other members of formal organizations. (Magala, 2009, p. 26)

Configuration Model of Organizational Culture

Although the public housing organization is project oriented, it is argued that its configuration corresponds, apart from issues such as project portfolio management or teambuilding, largely to that of a typical functional organization. This equally incorporates its connection to the external environment which inherently includes the citizens as well as the government. The configuration model is equally concerned with the interaction between the internal as well as the external environment, that is, the task and legitimization environment as depicted in Figure 2. The model offers the possibility to "explain how and why organizational culture and other domains of an organization (e.g., strategy, structure) might change" (Dauber et al., 2012, p. 2). The model suggests an equal appreciation of domains and processes (e.g., guidance, single-loop learning) so as to understand cultural dynamics. This enables a better understanding of the efficiency of a change process within an organization (Dauber et al., 2012). With regard to the project-based organization, strategy, that

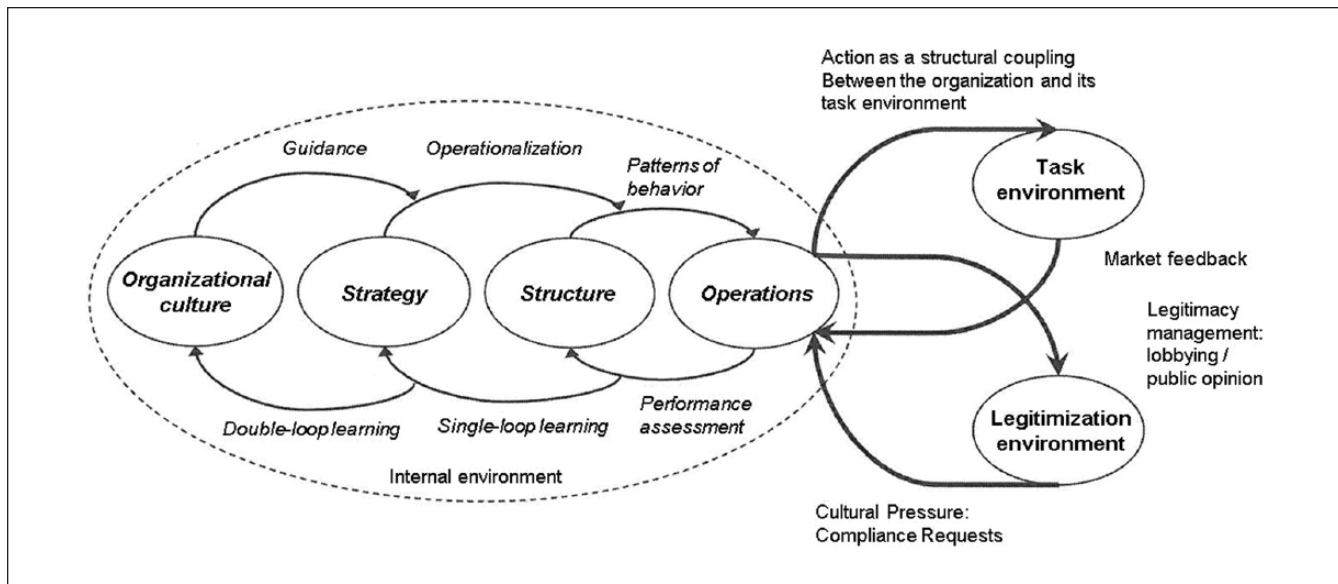


Figure 2. Configuration model of organizational culture.

Source. Adapted from Dauber, Fink, and Yolles (2012, p. 11).

is, what should be done, is affiliated with project portfolio management. Structure and operations, that is, how things should be done, are, for example, connected with project management methodology. The configuration model thus enables, as described by Xia (2011), a cross-cultural or etic analysis by comparing organizational cultures based on equivalent objects and standards.

According to Gharajedaghi (2007), social systems have to go through a collective process of unlearning with the intention of replacing the deformed shared image, thus supporting change in behavioral patterns. This process is influenced by the history of the system, that is, what happened before. Dauber et al. (2012) do not explicitly depict the history of an organization in their model, though the model from Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) describes the external environment as being composed of society, history, and contingency. However, this automatically happens once an intervener engages with the different domains and processes. The legitimization environment incorporates all stakeholders such as the government, which, for example, passes a law to create a new public housing organization. Compliance with the goals set could be assessed by analyzing its performance, even going back to its inauguration. However, how the internal environment can prohibit such an assessment, though societal criticism of its tasks (market feedback) constantly augments, can only be discovered through immersion into the organizational setting, thus collecting emic data. This incorporates “sacred” cultural codes, societal as well as organizational, because their dismantling or questioning will be perceived by the powerful as a threat or insult and thus punished (Gharajedaghi, 2007).

Methodological Approach

To collaboratively investigate the disturbances within the culture of the public organization, SSM was chosen as a leading or guiding methodology. SSM has been acknowledged within the management sciences and systems thinking domain (Paucar-Caceres & Pagano, 2009) and successfully used in many projects (Checkland, 2010). However, the methodology faces problems especially with regard to power, power relations, powerful people, and conflict (Jackson, 2010; Staadt, 2012). The analysis and disclosure of these issues is hampered if the facilitator of the intervention, in the form of an external consultant, is directly commissioned by top management. In this study, the employee/researcher has, on one hand, initiated the research project and conducted the different research phases but, on the other hand, has acted as participant and observer, and is thus inherently involved in the web of power relations and politics. To protect the anonymity of the people who participated in the research project, pseudonyms have been used instead of people’s real names (Van der Waal, 2009). Four different research phases (A) to (D) were performed in a sequential manner, which allowed each part of the process to be informed by the analysis of the one preceding it, thus creating a documented learning process (Staadt, 2014). As proposed by Yin (2003), the data collected were organized within a case study database (Table 1).

The first phase (A) was mainly concerned with participant observation, which provided at the start of the study a first guidance through the literature and in the search for the right methodological approach. Participant observation continued throughout the whole process and was accompanied by

Table 1. Components of the Case Study Database.

Phase	Notes		Interviews	Group work	Documents		
	n = 90	%	n = 22	n = 9	n = 35	n = 20	n = 15
First phase (A)	35	38.89			30 business reports + 5 further external documents	20 organizational notes from the chairman ^a	15 newspaper articles ^a
Early finding out	20	22.22					
Official finding out	15	16.67					
Second phase (B)	26	28.89	18				
Interviews	20	22.22	18				
Documents	6	6.67					
Third phase (C)	16	17.78	2	5			
Group work	11	12.22		5			
PM meetings	5	5.56					
Interviews			2				
Fourth phase (D)	13	14.44	2	4			
Workshops	13	14.44		4			
Interviews			2				
Total	90	100.00	22	9	35	20	15

Note. PM = project manager.

^aNote was written about relevant text passages for data analysis.

systematic note taking. Therefore, notes are the main source for the analysis of this first phase. The second phase (B) was mainly concerned with semi-structured interviews and a thorough analysis of documents. Two different groups were interviewed, thus representing the employees' level (14 interviewees) and the senior management level (4 interviewees). To take action in the situation, the third phase (C) was concerned with five group work sessions (employees' level) and two more interviews (management level). With regard to group work, different people from different departments, which included not just former interviewees, were asked to participate. The project manager (PM) meetings were considered a first activity to improve the situation. However, they were abruptly stopped after five sessions when rumors started to circulate that the chairman was not in line with the initiative. The three phases (A) to (C) just described enabled the completion of the first round of the SSM learning cycle. Although the process demonstrated that the activation of the SSM learning cycle was and still is feasible as well as desirable, its further continuation was jeopardized by politics and power (Staatd, 2012).

The design of the fourth phase (D) was thus built around the idea of enriching SSM with cognitive mapping with the intention of approaching the situation from a different angle. Whereas the first three research phases (A) to (C) were based on the four main activities of SSM (1) to (4), the further investigation concentrated on the credibility of the initial findings and the possibility to combine the organizational perspective with the countrywide perspective. This allowed the problem situation to be approached from a different angle, thus putting emphasis on the owner of the housing system, that is, government. Four mapping sessions were undertaken with the chairman of the organization and four

members of different ministries. Furthermore, two interviews were conducted with employees who had voluntarily left the organization. These two people, who did not participate in the initial interview session, provided further evidence in support of the findings. Because SSM could not properly respond to the oppressive social system within the organization, the fourth research phase developed toward a multi-methodology. Only the use of methods and methodologies in combination enables us to cope with increased complexity and change in problematic situations (Flood, 2001; Jackson, 2006; Kotiadis & Mingers, 2006). With regard to the timeline, the official data collection for the single case study undertaken between 2007 and 2011 was followed up by the employee/researcher in 2012 and 2013.

Manual and Computer-Assisted Noticing Collecting Thinking (NCT) Analysis

The long table approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000) was applied in the second research phase (B), that is, in the interview session. Consequently, the manual analysis did not incorporate all the notes taken during the whole process. To sufficiently analyze all the data collected, a computer-assisted NCT analysis by means of ATLAS.ti (Frieze, 2012) was undertaken to find commonalities and differences between the results of the analytical methods used. All 90 notes taken between 2007 and 2012, the interview transcripts, and the transcripts elaborated in the group work sessions were set up in the program eventually producing the primary documents P. 1 to P. 117. This approach made it possible to gather three different sources of categories/codes as depicted in Table 2. The process of using predetermined

Table 2. Composition of Categories and Codes ($n = 55$).

Predetermined categories from Fink, Yolles, and Dauber (2013)		Predetermined categories from manual methods		New codes developed with computerized method	
$n = 16$ categories	Q	$n = 17$ categories	Q	$n = 22$ codes	Q
Clarity of strategy (PO)	243	Board-legal decision taker (IS)	220	Behavior of the chairman (IS)	287
Hierarchy of authority	153	PM methodology (PO)	202	Organizational atmosphere (IS)	270
Legitimization management	42	Clarity of operations (IS)	192	Responsibilities of PMs	194
Single-loop learning	21	Power relations	186	Behavior of powerful people	170
External communication	9	Project portfolio management (PO + IS)	120	Political will/influence	118
Double-loop learning	8	Information flow (IS)	101	Clarity of responsibilities	112
Flexibility	8	Communication problems (IS)	94	Clarity of structure	104
Resource-based view	6	Decision taking (IS)	93	Organizational performance	90
Market-based view	2	Team building and team learning (PO)	84	External relations	63
Level of formality in internal communication	2			Project-based organization	46
Level of market dynamism	2	Leadership in PD (PO)	82	External image	29
Level of market complexity	1	Project duration (PO)	79	Availability of chairman (IS)	28
Level of action orientation	1	Internal personal conflict	71	Board member interests	25
Loyalty	1	Personnel growth (IS)	60	Resistance to change	21
Level of formalization	0	Clarity of vision (PO + IS)	58	Ext. relationships chairman	15
Preference for adjustment processes	0	Motivation	38	Unfair salary classification	11
		Informal communication (IS)	26	Withdrawal of people	8
		Management skills (IS)	15	Education	7
				External personal conflict	3
				Job security	3
				Civil servants	1
				Value creation	1
Total (Q)	499		1,721		1,606

Note. Q = quotations; PO = participant observation; IS = interview session; PM = project manager; PD = project development

categories from the configuration model of organizational culture (Fink, Yolles, & Dauber, 2013), predetermined categories from the manual analysis methods and new codes using the computerized method resulted in 55 categories and codes. The large number of quotations created (1,721 in total), based on the predetermined categories from manual methods, is not a big surprise. However, the additional 1,606 quotations developed by means of a computerized method, that is, ATLAS.ti demonstrate that cultural aspects of the organization, such as the behavior of the chairman, were directly used in the manual analysis to develop the socio-political system where the most powerful people gather together.

This concept of power relations within the organization, as depicted in Figure 3, was developed on the basis of the cultural analysis of SSM (Checkland, 2000) and more precisely based on Analysis Two (II) and Analysis Three (III). With regard to how power is expressed in the problematic situation, it was found that contact to the leader of the organization is of vital importance. People with a close relationship to him serve as "advisors" and thus in a way influence the chairman in his decisions on organizational issues. However, these powerful people are expected to deliver information to the chairman such as professional information, accusations, and rumors. In the middle of Figure 3, we have the chairman

surrounded by an inner circle, which is composed of the most powerful people in the organization who are not necessarily the departmental leaders. The connection between the powerful people in the inner circle is contrasted by the connection between the chairman, who has been in charge of the organization for more than 19 years, and Nikos, who has been working in the organization as a technician for 18 years. The protection provided by the chairman allows Nikos to fight against any possible modifications coming from the inner circle and also to fight against the PMs. Martha (see Figure 3) who has been working as PM for the organization since its foundation in 1979 provides additional reasons for his ever-growing influence.

It is not just the relation to the chairman but also his position as representative of the personnel which is another source of information for him. The election next week of new representatives will hopefully change this situation since it has given him too much power because people have become dependent on him. It is certainly interesting for the chairman to get this kind of information as well since Nikos is a rumormonger. (p. 101)

The above explanations lend support to the claim that rumors or so-called shadow themes, as described by Stacey (2001), play a vital role in the organization. The chairman is

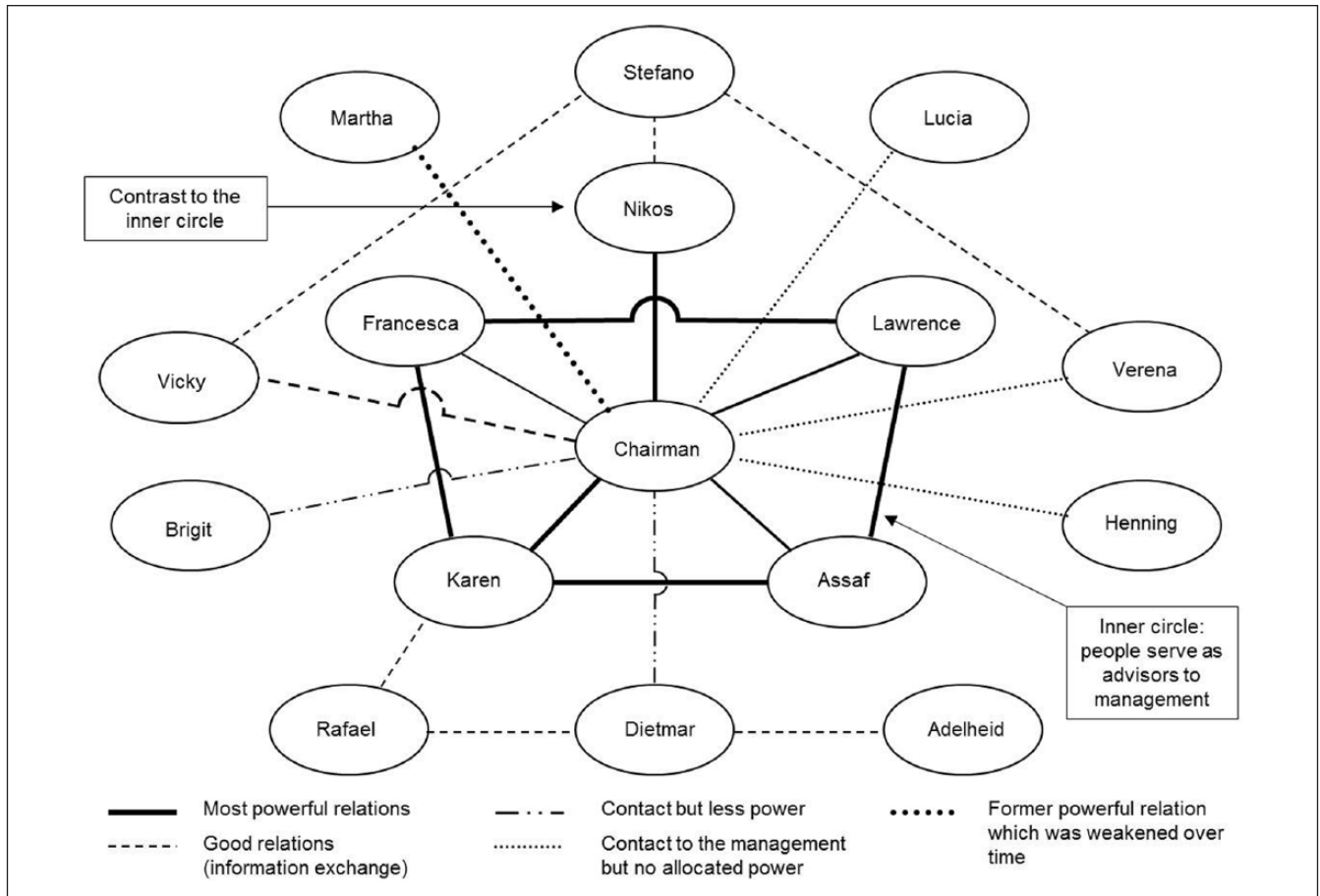


Figure 3. The socio-political system and its power-related connections.

not simply influenced by these issues, he deliberately manipulates or uses them so as to further foster his own personal as well as political power. Comparable with the description of Magala (2009), the socio-political system depicts the hidden power structure within the organization, which is in stark contrast to the neat depiction of the organizational chart. To understand the influence of the socio-political system on the development of the organization, the preliminary findings were compared with the configuration model of organizational culture.

This was undertaken using the network view function of ATLAS.ti, which is, according to Frieze (2012), “a tool that allows you to explore your data visually” (p. 191). The network view of the second research phase (B), as depicted in Figure 4, illustrates the results of the interview session and highlights the influence of the socio-political system. The first phase (A) demonstrates that missing clarity of strategy has repercussions on the structure as well as the operations of the organization as argued by Dauber et al. (2012). This could be seen, for instance, in long project duration, the absence of a project management methodology, and the missing allocation of responsibilities to the PMs. The interview session (Phase B) confirms these results given the

strong relations between the categories mentioned. Although these issues are equally important for the management group, no adaptation or change has been initiated. With regard to the reasons for this reluctance, the co-occurrence frequency demonstrated strong links regarding the behavior of the chairman in relation to power relations, organizational atmosphere and behavior of powerful people (cf. *c* coefficients in Figure 4). This is further accentuated in the interplay between power relations, the behavior of powerful people, and the organizational atmosphere. According to Karen (see Figure 3), the chairman is not only the cause of the problematic situation but he is also responsible for the development of the current socio-political system. The other sources are the management board and the employees who profit from the unstable situation. However, “the biggest problem is the second point. It is the chairman who causes the others. His attitude towards us is similar to that towards the board” (p. 102). As mentioned by Dauber et al. (2012), the organizational culture directly affects the domains strategy, structure, and operations. This applies to the disturbed organizational culture within the organization, which is intimately connected with the board level. The missing allocation of appropriate responsibility and power to the PMs is connected with all

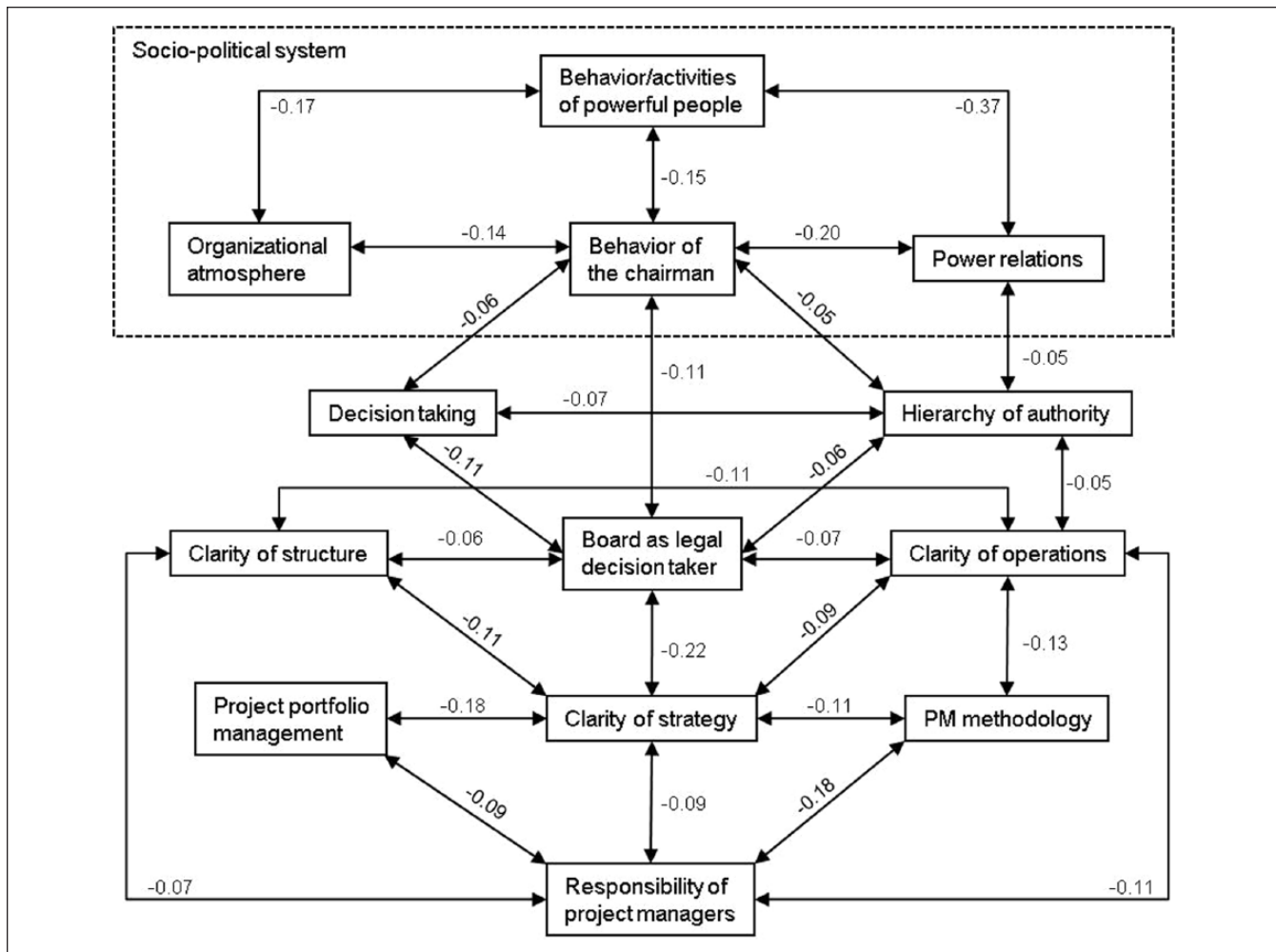


Figure 4. Network view with *c* coefficients of the second research phase (B).

Note. PM = project manager.

domains and is manifested in that neither a project portfolio management nor a project management methodology has been developed and implemented.

Discussion of the Findings

The first phase (A) was mostly focused on management issues and brought to light many deficiencies within the organization, which concern operational as well as strategic management and hence the whole organization. The further research process, especially the interview session (Phase B), then revealed the major problems that hinder the further development of the organization. They are to be found in power relations between people, which are explained in the socio-political system of the organization. It was found that people use their acquired power against others to push forward their ideas and personal interests. Moreover, it is sometimes just used against people because they are disliked or considered incompetent. The so created “outsider” groups

(Stacey, 2001), who have realized their powerlessness, frequently react with simple disappointment or loss of motivation. Sometimes, there are even psychiatric responses such as panic attacks. The working environment is thus polluted with mistrust, which is, according to Hancock (2010), “the dark heart of wicked problems” (p. 54) because it prevents real listening and dialogue and consequently learning. This situation is in a way initiated as well as fostered by the chairman due to the development of special relationships with different organizational members along with the allocation of covert or overt power. The constant growth in personnel is aggravating the situation because people try to keep their power by avoiding any possible change.

The socio-political system (Figure 3) was brought to the surface by using the cultural analysis of SSM (Checkland, 2000), that is, an action-oriented approach (Sykes & Treleaven, 2009; Yolles, 2006) for collecting emic data (Xia, 2011). However, only through the application of the configuration model of organizational culture (Dauber et al., 2012)

was it possible to highlight the impact of the disturbed organizational culture on the whole organization (Figure 4). Given the overall result, the two should be used in combination. This proposition is reinforced if we look at the interrelationship between the socio-political system and the external environment. Based on Analysis Two (II) and Analysis Three (III), it was found that the politically strong chairman (a high civil servant acting at the same time as governmental advisor to the housing minister) is able, even within a representative democracy, to block citizen control and criticism of his activities (Staatd, 2014). The political dependency of the minister in charge on his support represses rapid interventions from government which confirms the involvement of power issues at all levels and the need for a closer look at them. Dauber et al. (2012) describe the legitimization environment as a part of the external environment and the possible cultural pressure as well as compliance requests it might provide for the internal environment. The politically strong position of the chairman enables him to fence off the internal environment from external influences or control. These power issues thus demonstrate why the leading public housing organization was never really questioned though its performance constantly decreases with the consequence that people in need are not provided with sufficient affordable housing (task environment).

With regard to Analysis One (I), the discovery of the socio-political system (Figure 3) after the second research phase (B) put the researcher in a somewhat tricky position especially with regard to the further work with the management group. Gharajedaghi (2007) mentions that the questioning of “sacred” cultural codes can possibly be perceived by the powerful as a threat or insult and thus punished. This required the employee/researcher to be brave and persistent but this will not necessarily work in other organizational settings. The unease researchers might experience in power-laden and oppressive environments explains, as stated by Magala (2009), the scarcity of research projects devoted to the problem of power and power struggles. With regard to action research in the context of systems thinking, Checkland (2012) regrets the rarity of work undertaken within actual situations. This is, according to Checkland, partly due to the limited use of action research in universities and the reluctance of academics to become accountable for their contributions as participants.

Conclusion

This article delineates how organizational culture is inherently connected with politics and power and how this requires flexibility and openness regarding the combination of etic and emic approaches. Based on the findings of the study, it can be argued that the combined use of the cultural analysis of SSM and the configuration model of organizational culture is mutually beneficial. The combination of the two seems to be particularly useful where the whole organization

is under collaborative investigation and where organizational culture is understood as a product of social and political arrangements within a web of evolving power relations.

This requires the organizational ethnographer to understand that the investigation itself is problematic, as described in Analysis One (I), which calls for sufficient reflection about the shareholders/co-researchers and to act critically, reflexively, and with the right intuition. Given the results, it would be of interest to investigate how SSM could be combined with the configuration model of organizational culture. This could bring about a means that supports the analysis of organizational culture based on human activity models. The overall research approach helped provide insight into the influence and the impact of the oppressive social environment on the further development of the public organization. It is hoped that the results of this intervention will encourage the board as well as the government to eventually develop an organizational design that replaces the traditional authoritarian style in favor of a democratic learning entity.

Acknowledgment

I thank my supervisor Slawomir Magala, professor of cross-cultural management at the Erasmus University, who accepted my research project and provided me with the academic freedom to develop into a reflexive and critical researcher.

Author's Note

This manuscript is based on data that were also used in the author's doctoral dissertation, defended on March 20, 2014, at the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Allaire, Y., & Firsirotu, M. E. (1984). Theories of organizational culture. *Organization Studies*, 5, 193-226.
- Chapman, J. (2004). *System failure: Why governments must learn to think differently* (2nd ed.). London, England: Demos.
- Checkland, P. (2000). Soft systems methodology: A thirty year retrospective. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 17(Suppl. 1), 11-58.
- Checkland, P. (2010). Researching real-life: Reflections on 30 years of action research. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 27, 129-132.
- Checkland, P. (2012). Four conditions for serious systems thinking and action. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 29, 465-469.
- Checkland, P., & Poulter, J. (2010). Soft systems methodology. In M. Reynolds & S. Holwell (Eds.), *Systems approaches to*

- managing change: A practical guide* (pp. 191-242). New York, NY: Springer.
- Checkland, P., & Scholes, J. (1990). *Soft systems methodology in action*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Dale, R., & Vinson, D. W. (2013). The observer's observer's paradox. *Journal of Experimental & Theoretical Artificial Intelligence*, 25, 303-322.
- Dauber, D. (2011). *Hybridization in mergers and acquisitions* (Doctoral thesis). Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria.
- Dauber, D., Fink, G., & Yolles, M. (2012). A configuration model of organizational culture. *SAGE Open*, 1-16 doi:10.1177/2158244012441482
- Fink, G., Yolles, M., & Dauber, D. (2013). *The role of managerial and organizational intelligences*. Retrieved from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2267750>
- Flood, R. L. (2001). The relationships of "systems thinking" to action research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The handbook of action research* (pp. 117-128). London, England: SAGE.
- Friese, S. (2012). *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS.ti*. London, England: SAGE.
- Gharajedaghi, J. (2007). Systems thinking: A case for second-order-learning. *The Learning Organization*, 14, 473-479.
- Hancock, D. (2010). *Tame, messy and wicked risk leadership*. Farnham, UK: Gower.
- Hatch, M. J., & Cunliffe, A. L. (2006). *Organization theory*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2005). *The action research dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Jackson, M. C. (2006). Creative holism: A critical systems approach to complex problem situations. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 23, 647-657.
- Jackson, M. C. (2010). Response and comments on the special issue: "Systems methodology and social development: A global conversation in China." *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 27, 241-244.
- Kotiadis, K., & Mingers, J. (2006). Combining PSMs with hard OR methods: The philosophical and practical challenges. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 57, 856-867.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups—A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Lowe, S. (2010). Schumacher's hierarchy. In S. Lowe (Ed.), *Managing in changing times: A guide for the perplexed manager* (pp. 3-63). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Magala, S. (2009). *The management of meaning in organizations*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Magala, S. J. (2010). Perplexing images: Relational identities in cultural tempospaces. In S. Lowe (Ed.), *Managing in changing times: A guide for the perplexed manager* (pp. 241-259). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Mowles, C. (2011). *Rethinking management: Radical insights from the complexity sciences*. Farnham, UK: Gower.
- Paucar-Caceres, A., & Pagano, R. (2009). Systems thinking and the use of systemic methodologies in knowledge management. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 26, 343-355.
- Pidd, M. (2003). *Tools for thinking: Modeling in management science* (2nd ed.). Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4, 155-169.
- Sankaran, S., Tay, B. H., & Orr, M. (2009). Managing organizational change by using soft systems thinking in action research projects. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 2, 179-197.
- Schein, E. H. (1985). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shotter, J. (2010). Perplexity: Preparing for the happenings of change. In S. Lowe (Ed.), *Managing in changing times: A guide for the perplexed manager* (pp. 137-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Staatd, J. (2012). Redesigning a project-oriented organization in a complex system: A soft systems methodology approach. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 5, 51-66.
- Staatd, J. L. (2014). *Leading public housing organisation in a problematic situation: A critical soft systems methodology approach* (ERIM Ph.D. Series Research in Management, No. EOS-2014-308-ORG). Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1765/50712>
- Stacey, R. D. (2001). *Complex responsive processes in organizations: Learning and knowledge creation*. London, England: Routledge.
- Stacey, R. D. (2007). *Strategic management and organizational dynamics: The challenge of complexity* (5th ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson.
- Sykes, C., & Treleaven, L. (2009). Critical action research and organizational ethnography. In S. Ybema, D. Yanow, H. Wels, & F. Kamsteeg (Eds.), *Organizational ethnography: Studying the complexities of everyday life* (pp. 215-230). London, England: SAGE.
- Van der Waal, K. (2009). Getting going: Organizing ethnographic fieldwork. In S. Ybema, D. Yanow, H. Wels, & F. Kamsteeg (Eds.), *Organizational ethnography: Studying the complexities of everyday life* (pp. 23-39). London, England: SAGE.
- Wastell, D. (2010). Managing as designing: "Opportunity knocks" for the IS field. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 19, 422-431.
- Xia, J. (2011). An anthropological emic-etic perspective on open access practices. *Journal of Documentation*, 67, 75-94.
- Ybema, S., & Kamsteeg, F. (2009). Making the familiar strange: A case for disengaged organizational ethnography. In S. Ybema, D. Yanow, H. Wels, & F. Kamsteeg (Eds.), *Organizational ethnography: Studying the complexities of everyday life* (pp. 101-119). London, England: SAGE.
- Ybema, S., Yanow, D., Wels, H., & Kamsteeg, F. (Eds.). (2009). *Organizational ethnography: Studying the complexities of everyday life*. London, England: SAGE.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Yolles, M. (2006). *Organizations as complex systems: An introduction to knowledge cybernetics*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Yolles, M., & Guo, K. (2003). Paradigmatic metamorphosis and organizational development. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 20, 177-199.

Author Biography

Jürgen Staatd is a registered German architect. He holds a PhD from Erasmus University Rotterdam. His special research interests include organizational behavior and in particular issues such as politics, power and oppression in the context of pressing societal problems.