

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis is about interpreting human interaction in cross-cultural work settings. It shows that globalization, information technology, socio-economic differences, and a growing need to build relations across cultures form a rationale for developing an intensified focus on the relationships between people, culture and work organizations. This thesis develops a theoretical framework for conducting focused interpretations about work relations in multi-cultural organizations. It also demonstrates the application of the framework through interpretations of field studies conducted in Norwegian companies in Vietnam in 1995. The case studies also give a general introduction to Norwegian and Vietnamese cultures as well as some aspects of the business environment in Vietnam.

The theoretical framework is grounded in the fundamental assumption that theoretical triangulation is an effective means of developing a more complete picture of organizational events. It integrates content theory with process theory. It furthermore develops a rationale for connecting macro-level theory with micro-level theory. The resulting integrated framework consists of four main areas of inquiry: 1) Cultural frames such as corporate culture or organizations as a meetings place of cultures; 2) Concepts of self and related socialization processes; 3) Interpretation of contextual factors such as history, socio-economic conditions, political systems, etc.; and 4) Interpretation of management techniques. The framework constitutes one possible approach for developing pragmatic

yet holistic knowledge about the interconnections between people, culture and work organization across cultures.

The theoretical framework is demonstrated through macro and micro-level inquiries into the meeting of Vietnamese and Norwegian cultures in organizational settings in Vietnam. On the macro-level, dominant cultural and contextual patterns in both cultures are compared and interpreted. On the micro-level, inquiries are made into specific organizational events and the people who take part in them. A number of critical events and cross-cultural experiences are identified and discussed to demonstrate how culture manifests itself in an beyond organizational settings. The integration of macro and micro-level inquiries form the foundation for a series of findings about work relations in these organizational settings. These findings are presented in the concluding chapter along with a series of pointed questions about the issues and implications around using cultural knowledge in organizations.

The findings highlight a series of differences and similarities found among Vietnamese and Norwegians organizational members in Vietnam. For instance, it is shown that Vietnamese people have a strong focus on building reciprocal relations and face while Norwegians are more task and result oriented. It is also shown how honesty and factual correctness are highly valued among Norwegians, while these are more flexible concepts in Vietnamese culture where face relations are more important. Findings are also made about socio-economic factors that complicate working relationships in Vietnam. These and other findings can be used among Vietnamese and Norwegian decision makers to evaluate forms of organization and management techniques in terms of cultural appropriateness. They can also be used to develop new and improved approaches of building sustainable cross-cultural work relations.

**An Exploration of People, Culture and Work Organization Across Cultures:
Theoretical Framework and Case Studies**

by

Erik A. Heim

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 PEOPLE, CULTURE AND WORK ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION	1
RATIONALE FOR CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF PEOPLE, CULTURE AND WORK ORGANIZATION.....	2
OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS.....	6

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION	9
CHOICE OF RESEARCH SETTING.....	9
THE INFORMANTS.....	11
DATA COLLECTION: INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION.....	12
SECONDARY SOURCES OF DATA.....	14
RESEARCH BIASES.....	14
ETHICAL CONCERNS.....	15

CHAPTER 3 INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND WORK ORGANIZATION

COMPLEXITY, PARADIGMS, AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING	16
THEORETICAL APPROACH.....	17
WHAT THE DOMINANT PARADIGMS TELL AND DON'T TELL US.....	19
CORPORATE CULTURE PARADIGM.....	20
NATIONAL CULTURE AND VALUES	21
CONCEPT OF DIVERSITY	22

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND WORK ORGANIZATION	24
CULTURAL FRAMES OF ORGANIZATION.....	24
CORPORATE CULTURE	25
PART-CULTURES IN ORGANIZATIONS.....	26
ORGANIZATIONS AS A MEETING PLACE FOR CULTURES	26
CULTURE AS AMBIGUOUS.....	27
THE SELF AND RELATED SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES.....	28
HISTORICAL CONTEXT ESTABLISHES MEANING, LOCAL CONTEXT DEFINES SETTING	33
MANAGEMENT METHODS: NOT A SURE THING	34
SUMMARY AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	35

CHAPTER 4 CASE STUDY: MACRO-CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION	37
VIETNAM	38
THE FOUNDATIONS OF VIETNAMESE SOCIAL STRUCTURE	40
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY	42
FILIAL PIETY AND MORAL DEBT	43
THE VIETNAMESE FAMILY BUSINESS.....	43
VIETNAMESE STATE BUREAUCRACIES AND INSTITUTIONS	44
FACE AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION	46
THE DIFFERENTIAL MODE OF ASSOCIATION	47
WINDS OF CHANGE IN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY	49
NORWAY	50
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MODES OF ASSOCIATION	51
THE NORWEGIAN CONCEPT OF FAMILY	53
PROTESTANTISM, CAPITALISM AND RATIONALISM.....	55
NORWEGIAN MAXIMS OF BEHAVIOR: JANTELOVEN.....	56
SUMMARY OF NORWEGIAN CULTURE	58
MACRO-CULTURAL COMPARISON IN TERMS OF CULTURAL TOPOLOGIES	58
INDIVIDUALITY VERSUS COLLECTIVITY	59
POWER DISTANCE	60
UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE	62

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

'LIVE TO WORK' VERSUS 'WORK TO LIVE'	63
BEYOND VALUE TOPOLOGIES	65

CHAPTER 5 CASE STUDIES FROM VIETNAM

INTRODUCTION	66
CASE ONE : A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MEANINGS IN AN OIL COMPANY OFFICE	67
INTRODUCTION	67
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES IN THE ORGANIZATION	68
DISCUSSION	77
CASE TWO: CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS IN A FOREIGN BUSINESS COMPOUND	82
THE FOREIGN BUSINESS COMPOUND	83
DISCUSSION	89
CASE THREE: VIETNAMESE-NORWEGIAN NETWORKING AND NEGOTIATIONS.....	91
THE SETTING	92
DISCUSSION	99
CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	103

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS.....	104
DISCUSSION	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	116

An Exploration of People, Culture and Work Organization Across Cultures:
Theoretical framework and Case Studies

CHAPTER 1 PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND WORK ORGANIZATION

Introduction

This thesis is about interpreting human interaction in cross-cultural work settings. It develops and demonstrates an integrated framework for interpreting the interconnections between people, culture, and work organization in multicultural organizations. From a theoretical standpoint, I will attempt to show why and how persons of different cultural backgrounds tend to attribute different meanings to organizational events. I will furthermore demonstrate how these perceptual differences easily can lead to miscommunications, conflicts, different perceptions of meaning, or potentially valuable learning opportunities between people of different cultural backgrounds. I will argue that the dominant models used for cultural analysis and management in many modern organizations do not establish learning-focused organizations.. As I will show, they provide us with only partial information about the complex relationships between people, culture, and work organization in multicultural organizations. A directed pursuit and application of a more holistic approach to cultural analysis can therefore have a positive impact in terms of developing multiple perspectives and understandings of organizational life and also in terms of creating a collectively oriented learning organization. Three case studies describing work relations between Vietnamese and Norwegian individuals will be used to illustrate how cross-cultural events can be better understood through the application of cultural theory. The case studies were developed from primary field research conducted in Norwegian companies in Vietnam during the summer of 1995.

This chapter introduces the topic and content of this thesis. First, I will explain why cross-cultural analysis is becoming more important in the organizational setting today. Thereafter, I will present an overview of the contents and progression of this thesis, chapter by chapter.

Rationale for Cross-cultural Analysis of People, Culture and Work Organization

Although the interest in the relationship between people, culture and work organization is hardly new (e.g. Chapple 1953; Warner and Lunt 1941), it has grown rapidly in the past decade (e.g. Erez and Early 1993; Hamada 1994; Alveson 1993).¹ What drives this growing interest about connections between people, culture, and their productive activities in modern organizations? Hamada explains that it is partly a result of the dominance of scientific and rational foundations in the Western cultural heritage (Hamada 1994:20). She asserts that dominant theories and methods applied to cross-cultural behavior in organizations predominantly build upon positivistic and profit-motivated foundations, primarily because they have been conceived by individuals socialized in Western scientific and capitalistic institutions. These theories are rooted in a relatively orthodox scientific epistemology that assumes: enduring linearity or logical connections between cause and effect that conceivably make predictions of events possible; problems can be reduced and simplified by experts according to universal structural criteria to explain and manage phenomena.

However, people from different professions and walks of life have discovered that established scientific theories and methods frequently fail to account for cultural ambiguity, variation, and unpredictability because their assumptions and methods are

¹ However, the content, domains of inquiry, and the underlying ideologies of these inquiries have changed according to the context and dominant ideas of different time periods.

inflexible. Theoretical and practical complications arise because human behavior is not linear nor readily reducible to simple generalities, particularly when behavior is driven by different historical constructions of meaning and cultural assumptions in different population groups. Therefore, new theoretical approaches that take cultural complexities into account must be further explored if we wish to develop organizations and relations across cultures that are driven by valid and relevant information about the human condition.

The link between work organization and culture is also of interest because technology and markets are influencing the way in which people work and live at an increasing rate (e.g. see Hannerz 1992; Barnet and Cavanagh 1994). Today, people and organizations operate in rapidly changing complex social, economic, and political environments that are characterized by interconnectivity across boundaries, rapid and vast information flows, and huge marketing machineries. People and organizations cross both national and cultural borders in search of money and work. Organizations are growing larger, more complex, and often have ambiguous borders as is the case with 'virtual corporations' that use technology to defy barriers of time and space. Knowledge and expert power driven by people and technology has become the most important resources in organizations. Transnational corporations have become more economically and politically powerful than the smaller nations they operate in. They reach into people's homes and hearts through the lures of media and consumerism. It is a necessity to develop cultural and market specific knowledge to operate an organization in these markets because nice business strategies continue to grow in importance (Peters 1987: 34) . Such knowledge is also required in the process of developing sustainable partnerships across cultures.

The growing importance of knowledge or core competencies in organizations has also resulted in an increased focus on people in organizations. Progressive contemporary organizational leaders are increasingly learning to view people as the most important resource, capital, or elements that make up an organization and its competitive advantage (Peters 1987: 34). Although many business leaders manage people as repositories of

competencies, the increasing focus on people holds the promise of introducing new human dimensions into organizational management. There is thus a growing need to understand how people work together in organizations and how the cultural baggage they bring with them influence organizational events. The key challenge in developing new practices in this area is to establish a good rationale for change and relevance in terms of organizational or societal goals.

The above indications point toward organizations characterized by change and unpredictability. I have asked myself if these changes are driving us toward a more homogenous world where the means of communication and thinking is becoming more similar. I have come to the conclusion that any assumptions that we are slowly converging into a homogenous 'global culture' overlooks the fundamentals of cultural process and human identity. People and societies are changing as they always have, although more rapidly than in the past. Yet we all hold on to some basic cultural building blocks that differentiate us from others and thus give us a needed sense of identity. Yet in this flux of chaos and change, there is also cultural continuity, stability and identity. For instance, most Vietnamese continue to practice ancestor worship, a custom that goes back to the beginning of Vietnamese history over two thousand years back in time. Given this interplay between cultural stability and change we need to better understand how and why cultural processes are played out in and beyond organizations.

The connection between culture and work organization has generated interest among researchers and professionals because historically rooted and transmitted elements of culture continue to influence personal perceptions, needs, ambitions, and behavior. Complex dynamics in and across these domains seem to have an impact on how organizations evolve and function, and on how people relate to management practices. We still do not completely understand these dynamics or their foundations completely, however. Some generalizations can be made though. For instance, many Vietnamese are uncomfortable with the individualism and high relational mobility common among Norwegians and other Westerners. Norwegians, on the other hand, frequently experience

frustration over nepotism, greed and suspicion towards strangers, and avoidance of direct conflict in Vietnamese and other Asian cultures.

The cultural foundations of these differences are frequently ignored or not understood in the organizational or business context, yet they are continuously being played out there. It is not uncommon that people react to these differences consciously or unconsciously through a process of emotional distancing from what they consider as “foreign elements” while they legitimize and reinforce the value of the familiar. This dynamic is responsible for what is commonly referred to as human resistance to change and works as a counterforce to learning. It is a psychological process that closes many doors of understanding, respect, and cooperation. There is thus a need to further examine patterns of culture, individuals that operate in and between these, and instruments developed for managing both of these (such as management techniques) to increase our understanding how persons perceive and maneuver through multi-cultural work settings.

A final reason for inquiring into the connections between people, culture and work is the concern with power dynamics frequently discussed in anthropological studies. Many of these studies have been widely concerned with investigating elements of power, repression, and various forms of resistance to domination in and around work environments, particularly in context of developing countries (see Wolf 1992; Hamada 1994). Anthropologists generally agree that power is often created through asymmetric distributions of knowledge and wealth, through the manipulation of scarce resources in political systems, and through exploitation of marginalized people. Anthropological studies also show that opportunities to exercise power and the effects of its use tend to be magnified in developing countries such as Vietnam where economic development is desperately sought by a large and poor population (e.g. see Wolf 1992). Power is also magnified in these settings because cultural perceptions of power differ between Western and Asian cultures, creating new and unpredictable socio-economic dynamics. There is arguably a moral dimension to how power should be used, as is frequently pointed out by anthropologists. I recognize the need for morals and criticism when power is used for

ethically questionable purposes. However, I do not intend to pursue moral criticism or to judge others in this thesis because this is beyond my theoretical and analytical scope. My purpose is rather to inform about what forms power may take in cross-cultural business contexts.

I have attempted to show that there are many factors and circumstances that motivate inquiries into the connections between people, culture and organization in cross-cultural contexts. Much of the mainstream research done in this area is troubled by quick and easy management-centric approaches. Historical constructions of meaning and cultural differences are often disregarded. And popular theories frequently do not account for power in cross-cultural terms (Hamada 1994:18-22). In contrast, many other research accounts are too unstructured to be very useful for practical application. More theoretical inquiries are therefore needed. More context specific inquiries are also needed which is why I focus on relations between Vietnamese and Norwegians; an area previously not explored in published research. In this thesis, I will attempt to develop a conceptually integrated framework that fills some of the gaps in dominant theories by drawing on cultural theories from a number of different academic disciplines and field research materials. I will furthermore attempt to ground it in the specifics of the Vietnamese context to demonstrate the knowledge, issues and complexities involved with conducting cultural interpretation.

Overview of the Thesis

My first objective in writing this thesis is to develop a conceptual framework for interpreting and developing knowledge about cross-cultural work relations. The framework is developed through a critical discussion and integration of a range of cultural and organizational theories, as well as my own observations and experience. This framework consists of four domains of inquiry: (1) cultural frames and configurations; (2)

concepts of self and related socialization processes; (3) historical and local contexts; and (4) management techniques. After identifying and discussing inadequacies in dominant corporate culture, national values, and diversity paradigms, I will show that these provide insights into only some of the cultural configurations that exist in organizational settings. I will also argue that an inquiry into the concept of self in relation to macro cultures, corporate or institutional cultures, and other cultural configurations yields a more constructive and situationally valid picture of how people relate to various social environments. I will also argue that historical factors that drive socialization processes are a critical part of understanding both culture and the self as interconnected. Historical knowledge makes it possible to better understand the roots of systems of meaning, or in other words, the deeper meanings that persons attribute to the events around them. Knowledge about how people perceive their world and their work can eventually be used to design and develop mutually satisfactory relations in and around organizations to the extent that this is possible in context of power plays and intervening constraints. Management techniques often have a significant impact on how people relate to each other in the organizational setting, and may be one of the ways in which power is exercised by dominant figures. I will explore the connections between these various factors in Chapter Three.

My second objective is to present a comparative analysis of dominant cultural patterns and systems of meaning among Vietnamese and Norwegians in Chapter Four. I will frequently refer to these as macro cultural patterns because they are overarching systems of meaning shared by large groups of people. I have attempted to identify how differences or similarities in the systems of meaning, organization, and values affect the way in which people from these two cultural groups work together. However, I will also demonstrate some of the dangers of equating macro culture with national culture, and show how economic development activities influence and are influenced by culture. The paradigm developed in Chapter Two will be applied to systematically reveal both overt and covert cultural patterns among Vietnamese and Norwegians. Qualitative data from primary and secondary research will be used to illustrate cultural characteristics.

In Chapter Five, I present three case studies developed from field research in Vietnam. Qualitative data collected from two research settings in Vietnam and the individuals who worked there will be used to identify cross-cultural issues that were perceived as relevant by research participants and myself. I have attempted to reconstruct some key organizational events seen to create a glance into organizational life and cross-cultural events in Vietnam. The three particular case studies were selected from among a number of research settings because they demonstrate how and why cross-cultural challenges between Vietnamese and Norwegians may occur. The paradigm from Chapter Two is applied flexibly to these particular cases to demonstrate how misunderstandings, conflicts, different attributions of meaning, and synergies in the work place can be explained at least partly through cultural analysis and interpretation. The discussion will as a result also indirectly show that Scandinavian as well as other companies in Vietnam could benefit from increased development, dissemination and application of cultural knowledge in their operations.

Perhaps the greatest challenge associated with the use of cultural knowledge and theory is their applicability in the everyday work situation. How, if at all, can these be translated into practical instruments of knowledge and change that can have a positive impact in cross-cultural partnerships? In Chapter Six, I will pull together my field research findings and my theoretical inquiries into a series of findings. I will discuss how and why interactions between people, culture, and work organization had a significant impact on cross-cultural work relations in Vietnam. Finally, I will leave the reader with some fundamental questions related to the challenge of bridging the gap between obtaining cultural knowledge and actually using it for applied purposes.

Introduction

This thesis's research methodology was designed to capture information related to people, culture, and work organization and their interactions in multicultural work settings. I adopted the role as learner and inquirer throughout the course of this research project to develop theory and collect qualitative data related to these domains of inquiry. My approach was grounded in a fundamental relativistic assumption that the relationships between people, culture, and organization cannot be satisfactorily unraveled in terms of rigorous scientific methods alone. My field research was therefore directed toward balancing conceptual thinking with probing, listening to, and describing subjective accounts. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how I planned, conducted, and managed the collection of data in the field. Background information about theory development is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

This chapter gives a brief overview of the design and methodology issues related to the planning and development of this thesis. I will cover the following issues: (1) choice of research setting; (2) informants and their selection; (3) interviews and participant observation; (4) secondary data sources; (5) research biases; (6) ethical issues; and (7) definition of terms frequently used in the thesis.

Choice of Research Setting

I selected Vietnam as the field research location for this thesis because the people in this country are currently experiencing rapid economic and social development. Businesses

and organizations have continued to pour into Vietnam after the communist party opened the country to outside world in 1987 as a part of its economic renewal program, *Doi Moi* (see Jamieson 1993). Yet many foreigners who live and work in Vietnam, or those who otherwise have involvements there, know little about the country and its peoples. Most expatriates rarely travel outside of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, or other commercial centers to experience how the majority of the Vietnamese people live and are connected to agrarian lifestyles in rural areas.

Vietnam is interesting in both cultural, political and economic terms because the communistic government has since 1988, increasingly allowed market reforms and capitalistic activities to develop alongside a communist political system. Cheap labor, cheap resources and a huge market of 72 million people, geographically placed as a natural trading gateway between Southeast and East Asia, constitute some of the attractions that draw investors to Vietnam. But Vietnam and its peoples are vulnerable to foreign influences. After several devastating wars, having been isolated from the rest of the world since 1975 and for many to this day, and having suffered through many centrally planned development programs gone awry, the Vietnamese people is in economic terms one of the poorest in the world. Average per capita income was about USD 200 in 1995 (Thornton 1995), one of the lowest in the world. Development and change is now on the minds of many Vietnamese. Despite all these changes and social upheavals, many aspects of Vietnamese culture remain stable and important to the Vietnamese identity. These stable elements are easily overseen or ignored by the expatriate who is engulfed in work in busy urban environments. Exploring and disseminating ideas about these cultural factors is therefore a challenge that requires more attention world wide.

My interest in cultural processes and patterns in cross-cultural settings required that I select multicultural settings in Vietnam where such dynamics could be studied and described. These had to be settings where people of different cultures meet and work together. Given my Norwegian cultural heritage, the growing economic interests of Norwegian economic entities in Vietnam, and the non-existence of literature discussing

cultural dynamics between people from the two cultures, I decided to conduct my research in Norwegian companies located in Vietnam. My choice of companies as the appropriate research settings was based upon the practical consideration that business ventures constitute the only accessible and relatively stable contact point between people from the two cultures in Vietnam. I used contacts in Norway to develop entry points into Vietnam and to network with most Norwegian companies located there.

The entire field research effort involved twelve Norwegian companies, some more than others. These companies were concentrated in the commercial centers of Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang, and Hanoi in Vietnam.

The Informants

A snowball approach was pursued to identify and select informants. Russel Bernard describes snowball sampling as "...you locate one or more key individuals and ask them to name others who would be likely candidates for your research" (Bernard 1994:97). I adopted a snowball sampling technique because I arrived in Vietnam with only three solid Norwegian contacts. By using their networks within the relatively small Scandinavian expatriate community, I reached most Norwegians in Vietnam and also networked with many of their Vietnamese colleagues. This strategy did not give me a random sample group. However, random sampling was not appropriate because the Norwegian community was small and because I could only gain access to Vietnamese workers in a reliable manner through Norwegian contacts. I therefore ended up with a purposely focused sample group that held experience and information relevant to my project. This saved me an enormous amount of time in terms of finding and organizing informant groups.

The formal sample group consisted of twelve Norwegian and thirteen Vietnamese informants. In addition, there were a much larger number of informal participants who provided valuable cues, hints, and information. The group of informants was demographically dominated by young to middle aged married males. In the sample of twenty five formal informants there were only three women. This asymmetry is more a reflection of the demographic composition of most foreign organizations in Vietnam rather than the result of research biases. In the formal sample group approximately thirty percent were in their twenties, forty percent in their thirties, and twenty percent were forty years or above. Everyone in the informant group were married except two Norwegians. In terms of expatriate experience, three Norwegians had more than one year of experience in Vietnam while the remaining Norwegians had less than one year experience. All the Vietnamese respondents had less than one year of experience of working with Norwegians. Three case studies were developed from the field research to demonstrate the interaction between people, culture, and work organization.

Data Collection: Interviews and Participant Observation

Semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with various company employees. I developed a semi-structured format where pointed and predetermined questions related to the topic of this thesis were used to keep interviews focused. However, I also encouraged informal, two-way, active participation in the informant interviews. The primary areas of inquiry were related but not limited to experiences of working with people from other cultures, decision making procedures in the companies, personnel practices, issues of authority and power, and perceived personal roles, needs and priorities. The semi-structured format was functional in the given context because it allowed me to collect data efficiently within a time constraint of ten weeks. It was also effective because longer interview processes would have been obtrusive in the work environments. Shorter interview processes would have resulted in an emphasis on one-

way interviews, and thus a loss in important subjective information. Informal interviews were also pursued in various social and work settings. Although the informal information collected was not always directly related to the work setting, it provided many important insights into the lives Vietnamese and Norwegians lead in Vietnam.

One challenge encountered during the interview processes was the difficulty of obtaining the information I sought. Norwegians and Vietnamese manage and share information with different social goals and strategies in mind. While Norwegian informants generally did not hesitate to share personal opinions, such information was often not possible to obtain from Vietnamese informants. As will become more clear in my discussions of Vietnamese culture in Chapters Four and Five, it is common in Vietnamese culture to manage personal information carefully in the processes of building and maintaining relational structures. My biggest problem in context of the Vietnamese customs, was that I did not have an opportunity to build long-term and mutual exchange relations with all Vietnamese informants. These are important aspects of building trust. I furthermore had my own Western assumptions and expectations to deal with. I at least partially overcame this challenge by cross-checking information repeatedly with different people. Information which was completely withheld can of course not be accounted for.

I also conducted a few hours of participant observation in some of the work settings. The participant observations collected were related to formal and informal interaction patterns in the offices and to informal social activities outside the office setting such as work lunches or social gatherings. However, the extent of these activities were limited because offices were usually small with less than a handful of employees. Space and time were always pressing constraints. Efforts aimed at avoiding obtrusiveness in the settings was a key concern.

The interviews and observations were recorded on tape, in interview notes, and a field note diary. Relevant interview sections were transcribed and used in Chapter Five.

In terms of data validity, I must fall back on the relativistic stance I developed in the beginning of this chapter. Internal validity was maintained by re-checking information with informants to ensure that I had captured their words, actions, and meanings correctly. In addition, my position in terms of validity is that the data presented in this thesis are subjective and their intended purpose is to illustrate, not to prove issues related to cross-cultural relations.

Secondary Sources of Data

In addition to face-to-face encounters and interviews, I also followed the media in Vietnam closely to develop a more complete understanding of the Vietnamese and Asian political, economic, and cultural discourse. Among the publications I followed closely were: Vietnam Investment Review, Vietnam Economic Times, Bangkok Post, and Far Eastern Economic Review.

Research Biases

As I have stated before, I do not claim to have produced an objective scientific account in this thesis. Although informant statements have been checked for validity, I have personally edited and organized these. My own academic and personal biases have therefore influenced the contents, structure, and intentions behind this research effort. My experience in management and anthropological studies both influenced and balanced my effort in philosophical terms; pragmatism complements relativism. My dual Norwegian and American history and identity have also set their marks on this work in ways which are both obvious and perhaps not so obvious. I therefore ask the reader to critically read this thesis with an awareness of these biases and to judge it in terms of them.

Ethical Concerns

My primary ethical concern in this research project was to avoid disrupting organizational environments and the people who worked there. While working in the research settings, I attempted to pursue unobtrusive measures such as discussing the purpose, scope, and implications of the interviews with informants and managers before they were conducted. These measures were aimed to establishing a clear understanding of the scope, intentions, and consequences of the research among participants. For instance, some informants were concerned about consequences in terms of discussing political issues; the Vietnamese government forbids Vietnamese people to discuss democratic ideology and ideas. In addition, I also addressed the potential problem that work flows could potentially be disrupted by my presence in the organizational settings. I therefore explained what information I was seeking, how I intended to get it, what I intended to do with it, and that although I would do my best to keep it confidential I could offer no guarantees. To the best of my knowledge, this approach to addressing ethical concerns established realistic expectations among participants about the research process.

CHAPTER 3 AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING PEOPLE, CULTURE AND WORK ORGANIZATION

Complexity, Paradigms, and Cultural Understanding

“You cannot find a rock in a field without a theory.”

Agar 1986:24

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing culture, people and organization in the multi-cultural organizational context. Emphasis will be placed on defining and discussing theories for the analysis of the domains of culture, people, and organization rather than developing detailed methodologies for studying them. Furthermore, I will emphasize connections and interactions between these domains to account for cultural ambiguity and complexity in the quest for a holistic understanding. To accomplish this purpose, the integrated framework I discuss in this chapter draws upon multiple theoretical traditions and paradigms. This integrated framework will form the theoretical backdrop for the case analysis that follows in Chapters Four and Five.

An investigation of culture, people, and organization in organizations should begin with questions about the purpose and assumptions of such inquires. Ideological and philosophical convictions influence the form, intended use, and application of cultural knowledge in every setting. This is perhaps best illustrated by the vast divergences between paradigms related to organizational culture, cross-cultural analysis and cultural knowledge. Each paradigm purports to rest on a scientific foundation. However, paradigms and theories are often theologies or ideologies that preach only one version of scripture or different agendas. Although each paradigm and its theories generally are helpful in exposing different aspects of human activity, each also has its blind-spots. We tend to get a small piece of a larger picture or one among many truths when we apply

them. Moreover, the truth we look for is frequently an extension of our own preconceived notions of how things should be or answers which somehow cater to our needs. No scientist, researcher or administrator can completely escape from this dilemma. However, a multi-perspective, multi-paradigmatic or triangulation approach improves the chances of arriving at a more situationally valid understanding of events. By carefully examining the assumptions of different theories, it is possible to build an integrated paradigm where various theoretical components cover each others' blind-spots and complement each others' strengths. I have attempted to do exactly this in this chapter without becoming either too unfocused or narrow in the theoretical approach. The framework developed is sufficiently narrow in scope to capture important human dynamics in the organizational context, while also accounting for the influence of less obvious societal forces that transcend organizations. This thesis is thus based on the assumption that a theoretical foundation is required to make meaningful inquiries in the cross-cultural setting. The beginning quote from Agar is a metaphor of this assumption.

Theoretical Approach

The eclectic theory building in this chapter is based upon a synthesis of different bodies of theory and elaborations about their interconnections. I have attempted to build a problem-focused and pragmatic framework that can guide organizational researchers in keying in on the various forces and elements influencing cross-cultural work relations. The framework integrates cognitive or person centered theory with symbolic theory to clarify how cultural meanings flow between the private and public domains of culture. The resulting approach consists of four main domains of inquiry.

The first domain establishes three frames for analyzing different forms of cultural configurations. These cultural frames are: corporate culture; the existence of several part-cultures within organizations; organizations as meeting places of various cultures. Some

points can be made in relation to these frames: when these frames are viewed together in the organizational setting, culture becomes an ambiguous, variable, and messy phenomena; and distinctions can be made in relation to macro-, part-, and micro-cultures (see page 24 for a definition of these terms). These frames are in no way mutually exclusive units of analysis nor necessarily the only frames to look at. But they provide a useful starting point for unraveling cultural patterns. By themselves, each of the frames only offer a part of a larger story. However, when they are integrated with other domains of analysis they offer a more complete understanding of how and why people organize themselves into various social patterns.

The second domain, ties the concept of self to that of social organization. I assert that people are not simply repositories of culture; they actively interpret, embrace, maintain and resist meanings in their environment. They do this because they have different experiences, socialization processes, and frames of reference. I therefore examine how meanings and practices are carried forward through generations by socialization processes, and how they results in considerable variations in terms of conceptions of self.

In the third domain, historical and local contexts are considered. It groups together various contextual influences that may not appear to have an obvious link with studying culture, people, and work organization in the organizational context, but which nonetheless have a strong and lasting influence on organizational events. The better these contextual influences are understood, the more we will be able to understand the drivers behind socialization processes and conceptions of the self in various cultures. Context largely defines human identity and it is thus vitally important in studies of the human condition. Inquiry into this domain can potentially become a never-ending venture, however, it is critical to remain problem-focused to avoid this trap.

Management techniques form the final domain of inquiry. Management techniques are built on many assumptions which are substantially shaped by the cultural biases and ideologies of their creators. Because these techniques predominantly are concerned with

manipulation of people and resources, their impact social in the organization can be substantial, particularly in multi-cultural settings where people may operate on very different assumptions.

The main four domains of analysis are interconnected and constantly revolving in relation to each other in and beyond the organizational setting. They combine both static and dynamic models of culture. Before I develop the theory behind each domain in more detail, however, I will build the rationale for this approach by identifying some of the key strengths and weaknesses of the three most dominant paradigms used today to analyze culture in contemporary organizations.

What the Dominant Paradigms Tell and Don't Tell Us

One of the critical questions brought into the field of organizational studies through the cultural paradigm was why the application of managerial and motivational techniques seem to produce predictable results across different cultural contexts. This problem, which became more obvious with the globalization of business, prompted an explosion of research in the 1980s in the field of business and culture. Yet much of the resulting knowledge about culture and people in organizations has not reached those who need it and who can make a difference in the field. Three paradigms or concepts of cultural analysis have remained dominant since the early eighties: the first, the corporate culture paradigm; the second, the national culture and values paradigm; and thirdly, the concept of diversity. I will discuss each of these paradigms and concepts to uncover what they tell us and what they don't tell us.

Corporate Culture Paradigm

The corporate culture paradigm was developed for the purpose of influencing people's values, beliefs, and behaviors from the top and down in an organization. One of the leading organizational behavior researchers, E.H. Schein, sees corporate culture as shared unconscious and conscious beliefs and assumptions that emerge from a small dominant group within an organization (Schein 1985:11). Davis, Peters, and Norman hold similar views to Schein's in that they see organizational culture as the property of an organization that is maintained through internally developed heroes, myths, symbols, and rituals (see Hamada 1994:24). Prescriptions for building "good" cultures, that is productive and cost-effective cultures, revolve around ways to build consensus around the organizational founder's vision, mission, organizational goals, and how to pursue these. From a discourse perspective, corporate cultures can be viewed as goal- or function oriented systems of discourse, where a dominant utilitarian mode of discourse is created and maintained at the top of the organization. Scollon and Scollon define such systems by four characteristics: (1) members hold a common ideological position and recognize a set of extra-discourse features which define them as a group; (2) socialization is accomplished primarily through these forms of discourse; (3) a set of preferred forms of discourse serve as banners or symbols of membership and identity; and (4) face relations are prescribed for discourse among members or between members and outsiders (Scollon and Scollon 1995:165).

The corporate culture paradigm offers a valuable peek at how culture can be influenced by key persons in an organization, and how shared systems of discourse are important in aligning people in an organization. However, the paradigm is ideologically biased toward management purposes and focuses almost entirely on achieving cultural homogeneity. Schein's perspective that "all definitions of culture involve the concept of shared solutions, shared understandings, and consensus" is typical of the corporate culture paradigm, but not correct (Schein 1985:49). Alvesson says, "where 'corporate culture' is in fact the research object, researchers should explicitly recognize that their approach is

‘management-centric’- that they are in the business of ‘thin description’, concentrating on a limited but in certain respects important set of values, beliefs, meanings, and symbols, in contrast to ‘thick description’ which examines complex layers of meanings in the anthropological tradition” (see Aleveson 1993:17 and Geertz 1973). The corporate culture paradigm reveals valuable cultural information when placed within a larger framework, as I will demonstrate in my theory development.

National Culture and Values

The second dominant paradigm in modern organizational culture studies is the national culture and values paradigm. The concepts of national culture and national values do not necessarily have to go together, but here I will discuss them within one paradigm because this is frequently how it is done in cross-cultural business studies. For instance, Geertz Hofstede developed a famous cultural topology consisting of four fundamental value dimensions in attempt to measure national cultural values: Collectivism versus individualism; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; and masculinity versus femininity (Hofstede 1980, 1984). His topology can for example be used to show that Norwegians statistically have a higher score in individualism, lower score in power distance, lower score in uncertainty avoidance, and higher masculinity score than Vietnamese. Hofstede thus argues for a link between national values and people’s nationality. As I will show in this thesis, his argument does not hold water because values and nationality do not always go hand in hand.

Multi-dimensional culture topologies such as Hofstede’s are relatively easy to apply, but one inherent problem with them is that they emphasize deterministic rather than interpretive methods. We run into the danger of cutting many corners to fit people into predetermined and scientifically validated ‘boxes’. Four or more predetermined value dimensions may or may not be appropriate in different contexts, and even if they are, they

are likely to miss important details which may not be obvious to the researcher but which may be loaded with meanings for others. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, cultural and theoretical blind-spots can prevent us from seeing important things. Focusing analysis of people along four main dimensions can potentially lead to reductionism, stereotyping, and incorrect assumptions about people. Hofstede does not go into detail about how concepts such as 'collectivity' may have different meanings in different cultures. Hofstede does not develop a methodology for answering questions about why a Vietnamese person might feel or prefer a higher power distance than a Norwegian person. Nor does he focus much on how meaning is attributed and developed among organizational members. National culture and values paradigms such as Hofstede's may be useful as long as it is not applied deterministically and by itself.

Concept of Diversity

Diversity has become a popular term in academic and work environments, particularly in America but increasingly elsewhere as well. Cox defines cultural diversity as "the representation in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance" (Cox 1993:6). Proponents of the diversity concept have been particularly concerned about offering equal opportunities for minorities and "disadvantaged" groups in the work place or in society in general. Minorities are typically classified in terms of racioethnicity, gender, and nationality. A common argument in the corporate world is that managing diversity makes economic sense for today's companies because many of their customers increasingly come from minority groups. A second argument is that heterogeneity in the work place results in more creative and less complacent organizational cultures. From a social perspective one can also argue that diversity programs open up opportunities for those who need them most and also motivate changes in the majority population's perceptions of minority groups.

Although the concept of diversity may have resulted in various positive applications and outcomes, it remains an ambiguous, misunderstood, and thus frequently misused concept. Very few organizations have a holistic approach toward embracing diversity, nor do they usually have a very clear understanding of what diversity entails. Sometimes words and dialogue are left hanging in the air without commensurate actions because it is unclear what diversity entails and how it can be implemented through the organization. In other cases organizations adopt diversity themes for self-promoting purposes rather than out of genuine interest. Most organizations are also stuck at the level where they classify diversity in terms of non-voluntary characteristics such as sex or skin color. Clearly one must also step into the cultural and socio-economic realms to gain an appreciation of what diversity truly entails both inside and outside the work place. This thesis addresses diversity issues in an effort to elaborate and define the cultural dimension of diversity, although I generally avoid using the term diversity because it has previously been applied within a large range of meanings.

Corporate culture, national culture and values, and diversity paradigms expose different aspects of culture in organizations, but standing alone each one of these paradigms and concepts offer limited understandings of how culture, people, and organization are interconnected. Conceptual means for unraveling mysteries caused by ambiguity, variation, and unpredictability are lacking or at least not widely addressed in these paradigms. The need to further understand the interplay between these and other factors is growing with internationalization and globalization; further efforts aimed at developing comprehensive yet pragmatic frameworks for analysis are therefore needed.

An Integrated Framework for Analyzing People, Culture, and Work Organization

A well defined and somewhat bounded approach to cultural analysis is required to make dissemination and understanding of cultural knowledge in the organizational context a realistic goal. Highly relativistic approaches that seek to establish extreme holism by including everything will not lead to practical applications of cultural knowledge. Ambiguity and confusion will most likely increase in such cases because it will be more difficult to identify and define key issues. On the other hand, narrow models such as the corporate culture paradigm define issues very clearly, yet they miss a lot of information critical for developing a holistic understanding of culture, people and organization in a given setting. I have therefore come to the conclusion that a problem-focused and integrated framework which borrows from both of these extremes constitutes one of the most effective means for developing a well defined, bounded, yet holistic paradigm.

Cultural Frames of Organization

Anthropological researchers and theorists have always struggled with defining and bounding cultural patterns. Hannerz says that to study culture is to “study ideas, experiences, and feelings, as well as the external forms that such internalities take as they are made public, available to the sense and thus truly social” (Hannerz 1992:3). He continues, “culture...is the meanings which people create, and which create people, as members of societies. Culture is in some way collective.” Culture is in other words somehow created and maintained by collective patterns of meaning and information that are shared. But how do we determine the size, distribution, and attributes of these various forms of collectivities? One popular way of doing this is to conceptualize culture in terms of macro-, part-, and micro-culture levels. This is a matter of scale. A macro-culture is a dominant culture distributed on a large scale such as a national one. A part-culture generally has its roots in a larger dominant culture such as a macro-culture, but is placed

within it such as is the case with a local community culture. A micro-culture is a small-scale social grouping such as a small religious sect or business where particular meanings are shared and maintained (see Hannerz 1992:77). Another way of perceiving cultural patterns is as social fields where membership is defined by attainment of certain competencies and command particular forms of symbolism (Bourdieu 1977). A professional culture is an example of a kind of social field. These different conceptions of cultural configurations are useful in deciphering cultural patterns in an organization setting. However, Alveson suggests a more context- and problem focused framework for this kind of analysis. He suggests that people, culture and organization could be viewed in terms of a dominant corporate culture frame, a meetings place for cultures frame, a social setting where numerous part-cultures exist frame, and as an ambiguous frame (Alveson 1993). Let us look at these frames in turn.

Corporate Culture

The corporate culture paradigm is “thin” description by itself, which is why it is integrated only as a part-component in an integrated framework in this thesis. This narrow view does not render the perspective useless, however. On the one hand, this frame focuses our attention on cultural patterns that somehow may be shared uniquely among members of an organization. On the other hand, patterns of organizational domination and resistance to domination, politics, meanings attached to particular tasks and work, organizational stories and so on all belong in this frame. The role of leaders in disseminating visions, standards, and values as well as how these are reacted must also be questioned. Is it possible to examine corporate culture by observing language, behavior, and arrangements between different people in the organizational setting. How people react to each other, how they react to authority, what they say about authority, and what they say about their work experiences reflect on the nature of corporate culture.

Part-Cultures in Organizations

Different part-organizational cultures or social fields may also exist. These may for example take the form of functional, professional, or informal social groups. They may also exist as counter-cultures to a dominant corporate culture, where repression or alienation is resisted in various covert or overt ways (e.g. see Morgan 1986; Hamada 1994). These part-cultures may affect the way in which informal and formal communication is conducted internally and externally to these groups, and may have social implications beyond the organizational setting. Members of these part-cultures may share jargon and experiences which work to exclude those from other part-cultures. They may furthermore have political agendas that could be counterproductive to the welfare of the total collectivity. Mapping and understanding part-cultures in an organization may therefore be critical in understanding human interaction, conflict, or perhaps dynamic synergies.

Organizations as a Meeting place for Cultures

The organizational setting can also be perceived as a meeting place of cultures. The case study later in this thesis, for instance, looks at the meeting of Norwegian and Vietnamese macro-cultures among others things. But this frame could also include the coming together of different external professional cultures, perhaps religious cultures, ethnic cultures, social class cultures, local part-cultures, and so on depending on the context and the people working together. The possibilities are virtually endless. The challenge we face is to trace these cultural patterns outside the organizational setting, examine their influence on people's lives, and then question how these patterns make themselves present in the organizational setting. As an example, the popular national cultures and values paradigm discussed previously constitutes one possible way of determining characteristics of different macro-cultures meeting in the work place. What is important to note is that these

cultures have strong roots outside the organizational setting, likely are extremely important to people, and may be extremely difficult to change or influence.

Culture as Ambiguous

The three frames of cultural configurations I have discussed, illustrate that great variations in cultural configurations is possible and highly likely between different organizational settings. However, there is also a danger of viewing such settings as clearly bounded and static cultural spheres which can be reduced into neat and easily defined cultural 'packages'. For this reason, Alvesson suggests that the concept of ambiguity must be included in the analysis of cultural frames and culture in general (Alvesson 1993). The need to include the concept of ambiguity is also a response to the dominance of the idea that culture is a clear and well known entity that works to create harmony and to solve problems within organizations. Patterns of dominance, resistance, variation, and change argue against static and harmonizing perceptions of culture. Moreover, people also have differing perceptions of the same phenomena, which means objectivity is a problematic concept on the philosophical level. In fact, there are so many social and non-social influences affecting culture, people and organizations that it would be foolish to claim that we have a clear understanding of them.

The three frames and the complementary 'checks and balance' function of cultural ambiguity, constitute a framework that can be used to deconstruct cultural patterns and configurations in any organizational setting. Other frames for cultural configuration can be added depending on particular contexts and configurations discovered in an organization. However, it is essential to view these various configurations in a systemic perspective; their co-existence in and beyond the organizational setting produces unpredictable cultural and behavioral dynamics because they continuously interact and effect each other. A systemic perspective also exposes how difficult it is to establish clear boundaries on

cultural configurations. When people share meanings and proficiencies across a number of different cultures and to different degrees, boundaries seem to become less clear. As people transfer ideas and meanings from one culture to the other, ambiguity increases even more. In addition, as our inquiry into people and culture goes deeper we uncover more of these complexities and thus encounter an increasing level of ambiguity. This ambiguity cannot be avoided, but can be accounted for and taken as an assumption in the process of mapping various cultural configurations.

While including an ambiguity frame in cultural analysis is important, it is also given that if it is taken to the extreme and used to classify everything as subjective and ambiguous, no constructive knowledge would be forthcoming. If used as a complement to the other domains of analysis, an ambiguity frame can serve as a 'checks and balances' function that encourages multiple and dynamic perspectives on issues and events. One way to achieve this process, is to actively question assumptions and to be prepared for surprises, changes, and the discovery of new and unexpected connections.

Simply understanding cultural patterns in an organizational setting is not enough to understand how culture, people and work organization interact in the multicultural setting, however. People are not simply products of cultural patterns; they are individuals who make independent decisions and who bring with them unique socialization experiences and resulting identities. I will develop the second domain of the integrated framework; the concept of self, to account for concepts of self and socialization. This constitutes a move from content to process.

The Self and Related Socialization Processes

The concept of self brings attention to how individuals learn about, perceive, react to the world around them, and build their identities. No two individuals do this in exactly the

same way, although the self generally is at least partly rooted in shared cultural meanings and values. In the Western tradition, the self can be described as, “all statements made by a person, overtly or covertly, that include the words, ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘mine’, and ‘myself’. A person’s attitudes, intentions, roles, and values represent the self” (Erez and Early 1993:26). Erez and Early further describe the self as “a composite view of oneself that is formed through direct experience and evaluations adopted through significant others [socialization]. The self is viewed as a dynamic interpretive structure that mediates the most significant intra-personal and interpersonal processes. The functioning of self depends on both self-motives being served and on the configuration of the immediate social situation” (ibid. 1993).

Conceptually speaking, the concept of self holds the promise of focusing attention on individuals as active, engaged, and critical interpreters in socio-cultural landscapes, in contrast to utilitarian ideas of people as passive receptors and followers of dominant culture and ideology. By imbedding the concept of a private self within public cultural domains (corporate culture, macro cultures, etc.), it becomes possible to develop an understanding of how persons negotiate and maneuver between various environments, events, and cultures. In fact, the concept of self constitutes the link between the personal sphere and the public spheres of culture, as will become more clear when I discuss the concept of socialization. Inquiries into the self can reveal how the public sphere of externalized meanings influence the individual and the other way around. Such inquiries must be based primarily on discourse analysis and observations of events in relation to individuals in and beyond organizations. Such inquiries certainly do not constitute a short-term project, but they will in time reveal invaluable insights into how and why individuals act in relation to their surroundings.

If the concept of self is to be utilized in multicultural organizational settings, however, it is critical to investigate the different conceptions people have of the self in different cultures. Nearly all theory around the concept of self is developed in Western studies, thus leaving open the question about its applicability across cultures. Western scholars and

researchers have frequently attributed values of individualism, self-motivation, and the self-centered ego to a person's self without regard to the fact that these are Western cultural constructions (see Scollon and Scollon 1993:36). I believe that cultural backgrounds must at the very least be scrutinized before ideas of self are developed in relation to particular persons. In the Asian and Vietnamese context, for instance, it is often appropriate to talk about a substantial collective self in addition to an individualistic self. In her discussion of the self in Japanese culture, Rosenberger discusses a view of the self as multiple and shifting (Rosenberger 1991:16). She discusses the Japanese self as human thinking which emphasizes an indexing of multiple meanings rather than a referencing to fixed meanings. Japanese can thus be perceived as shifting between different modes of experience where the self adopts different frames of association depending on the social context and actors present. This shifting of self results in neither a pure individualistic nor pure collective self (Rosenberger 1991:13). It is therefore apparent that classifying people as purely individualistic or collective selves may be an act of stereotyping. A shifting of the self according to context takes place in most cultures, yet how, why, and when it takes place is determined by individuals' concept of self as well as socialization processes and thus warrants careful interpretation in each context.

Why is it nearly impossible to enculturate people uniformly into a corporate discourse system? Why do people attach different meanings to identical events, practices, and outcomes? Why are people resistant to change? An understanding of socialization, a concept closely related to concept of self, provides insights into how selves are developed and how cultures are maintained or changed. Socialization is a process-oriented concept that can be used to explain how people acquire, maintain, and resist cultural influences.

Socialization processes in early childhood, or primary socialization, helps us become competent members of society and load us with systems of meaning which we carry with us throughout our lives. In the early years of people's lives, fundamental systems of meaning such as language and values are constructed and internalized through interactions

with the physical environment and relationships with significant others². Berger and Luckman see this as a process where meanings are externalized by people in the public sphere where they become socially distributed and then internalized by emerging generations in the private sphere (Berger and Luckman 1991). Socialization is thus a historical transmission of meanings by which people encode and decode events and their surroundings. Once internalized, socialization from childhood is difficult to change because it establishes the most fundamental filters through which humans interpret the world in terms of perceived realities. Given that these processes differ among cultures and that people are resistant to changing them, they are useful to inquire into for the purpose of understanding why persons or groups think and behave as they do.

Socialization in adult life, or secondary socialization, is the internalization of institutional roles and roles in various part-cultures through life which are, conceptually speaking, practically built on top of the cultural foundations of childhood socialization. Internalization of a corporate systems of meaning is an example of secondary socialization; people absorb and interpret experiences, meanings and knowledge from organizational settings and groups of people to function as organizational members. However, conflicts may arise between primary and secondary systems of meaning because the two may be based on radically different assumptions or values. For instance, a person primarily socialized in a culture characterized by strong individualistic and egalitarian values may experience personal conflict when attempting to adjust to a business where people are expected to sacrifice important personal needs for the benefit of the group and where paternal authority is the law. This is a simplistic example of cultural conflict taken out of context, but it illustrates a common problem.

It is important to note that in the processes of secondary socialization, unlike in primary socialization, people are capable of critically questioning and weighting what information to discard or to internalize. They do this by referencing their primary systems

² By significant others I mean key people which a child has close relations to and who thus become a child's models for learning and cultural reference. These models are usually imposed on a child.

of meaning and their accumulated secondary experiences. Primary socialization can also work covertly in this regard as a filter which selectively edits events and experiences in terms of primary values and meanings. It is obvious then that secondary socialization efforts, such as attempting to enculturate people into a corporate culture, does not produce predictable results. This is true because the content of secondary socialization processes is more easily subject to negotiation, change, or abandonment among individuals than primary socialization values which were acquired involuntarily.

Scollon and Scollon point out that “There are no particular problems if employees can maintain separations between their purely instrumental corporate identities and their more fundamental, non-corporate identities...problems arise, however, when employees are expected to break down the separations between these two discourse [value and meaning] systems” (Scollon and Scollon 1993:181). For instance, the assumption of the corporate paradigm or utilitarian ideologies is that people can be enculturated through secondary socialization processes in organizations regardless of primary cultural values. An assumption is thus implicitly made that people can keep these social settings separate or merge them emotionally and in practice. Realistically speaking, this is often difficult for people to accomplish, especially in societies where primary social norms do not treat these two social domains as a dichotomy. This is particularly true in Vietnam and other Asian countries where work historically and to this day has been built upon social networks and family relations. The Western assumption of a rational separation between work and private life may thus not be valid different cultural contexts.

I therefore propose that a thorough understanding of the experiences, histories, and events which drive people’s socialization is an important step toward understanding their systems of meaning. Meanings are constructed from a history of experiences; analysis of historical context is therefore vital and also the next element of this framework.

Historical Context Establishes Meaning, Local Context Defines Setting

Every culture has myths, events, stories, stratagems, languages, and customs which create and maintain cultural meanings. These are the collective history of a culture and are transmitted through processes of socialization. These histories may be national, ethnic, organizational and so on, although we recall that histories driving primary socialization have the most fundamental impact on people's behavior and systems of meanings. And understanding of historical context makes it possible to better understand language, the basis for work- or social organization, and patterns of behavior. It helps us to understand why some things were carried forward through generations in a particular culture and why other things were not. Thus as we examine different frames for social organization in organizational settings, the self as navigating through these settings, and the self as negotiating in socialization processes, we will find that historical context analysis brings with it an understanding that increases identification while reducing ambiguity. For instance, by examining the historical relationship Vietnam had with China, we can uncover the meaning of Confucianism in people's lives or inquire into the role of bureaucracy in Vietnamese society. However, historical context analysis must somehow have its foundation in behavior and meanings which make themselves known in the organizational setting or is of central importance to organizational members. This is a matter of limiting the scope of inquiry; a necessity because historical inquiry by itself knows no boundaries.

In addition to historical context, the local context provides many cues about particular settings and the people who live in them. Analysis of current context includes inquiries into political, economic, social, environmental etc. characteristics that influence people, culture, and organization. Local labor laws would be one example. Political issues affecting people's lives such as freedom of speech would be another. Local contexts must be analyzed to identify their effect in or beyond the organizational setting if influences the lives of employees. Great care must of course be taken to focus on only the significant contextual factors; otherwise information overload will quickly result.

Management Methods: Not a Sure Thing

Employees interpret the meaning, value, and implications of various managerial techniques in terms of their own well being. It has been widely documented that different managerial techniques are developed in different cultures to maintain some sort of consistency between national or group cultures and organizational cultures (e.g. Hamada 1991; Hamada 1994; Morgan 1986; Alveson 1993). Frequently concepts such as the bureaucracy exist in different cultures, yet they may operate on very different rules and assumptions. For instance, the nepotism and social networking found in Vietnamese state bureaucracies would not be possible in the Norwegian context where equal rights and egalitarianism are taken for granted. Local adaptations and variations of techniques must therefore be scrutinized closely to discover differences. I have realized that management techniques are not only instruments used for particular purposes, they reflect the meanings and values of the cultures they were conceived in. When attempts are made to transfer these techniques into other cultures their effect becomes less predictable, particularly if these techniques are based on assumptions that directly conflict with the fundamental systems of meanings that people hold in other cultures. I would assert that in such cases the techniques will fail or not serve their intended purpose. That is, unless techniques of manipulation are enforced by coercion or power, which is not unheard of in developing countries. This line of argument therefore supports a management approach which adapts to local cultures and conditions

Conceptions of self and systems of meaning in a given culture should be carefully analyzed to determine likely reactions to management techniques. Erez and Early give the following warning, "Since most of these models [organizational and human resource models] have been developed in a Western cultural framework dominated by individualistic values, they are chiefly concerned with individual behavior. For example, models of HRM [human resource management] that attempt to match individuals and jobs ignore the person; group fit or the person; organizational culture fit" (Erez and Early 1993:9). This is only one of many examples of how there are culturally biased assumptions

implicitly hidden in models or techniques. Another one is MBO (management by objectives) which also focuses on individual efforts and results, while leaving out factors that are difficult to measure such as networking, but which are critical in Asian cultures. Accounting for management techniques therefore encompasses a careful analysis of their implicit assumptions, how they measure progress, what outcomes they assume, and so on. Connections with ideology and corporate culture should be explored, as should management traditions in organizations or local contexts. These can then be compared with cultural data developed from the other domains of the integrated conceptual framework to identify differences, similarities, areas of conflict etc..

Summary and Methodological Considerations

The integrated conceptual framework defines four domains of analysis that together give a more holistic analysis of people, culture, and work organization than dominant paradigms used in organizational settings today. The domains of cultural configurations, the self and socialization processes, historical and current contexts, and management techniques tie together multiple paradigms and theories to achieve this triangulation effect. When placed together in a framework they show how interconnections, changes, reactions, and meanings exist in and across each of the domains. Each domain effects and is effected by the other domains. This reflects the complex, systemic, dynamic, and ambiguous nature of culture and people in the work place. It furthermore demonstrates how this kind of analysis cannot be a one day or one time venture; it must be a long-term commitment to uncovering deeper truths about events seen from multiple perspectives in an organization.

One question remains as to what kinds of tools or methods should be used to map or capture data from each of these domains. I have primarily focused on the conceptual level of paradigm building by defining domains, their content, and some of their possible

relationships, but a quick word about methodology will bring the framework into a more applied perspective. The mapping of the four domains primarily entails collecting qualitative data, much of which is subjective data because it relates to private perceptions. Other data is public in nature, that is, it can be collected from public resources, secondary data sources, or observations of public events. In terms of the domains of the integrated framework, I have found it most useful to list the kind of data involved with each domain. Methods such as the cultural topology developed by Hofstede, or ethnographic methods, or various exercises such as focus groups could be selected and tailored to capture this information. Various methods were also described in the methodology section of this thesis in Chapter Two. However, a triangulation of methods and an iterative learning approach as recommended by Beebe encourages experimenting with multiple methods (see Beebe 1994). Such methods should of course be adopted to local contexts and cultures and could in fact be analyzed on the same terms as management techniques to determine their appropriateness. The critical validation test for the data produced by various methods is whether the participants themselves agree with and can validate the data. In fact, they should be involved with the process itself to develop, implement, test, criticize, and improve it for the benefit of all organizational members.

This completes the development of the integrated framework for analysis of people, culture, and organization. The direction of this thesis will now change and embrace the case studies conducted in Vietnam. The integrated framework will be applied through comparative context and macro-cultural analysis in Chapter Four. I will interpret the Vietnamese setting and culture and compare it with Norwegian cultural characteristics. I will narrow the scope in Chapter Five by applying the framework specifically to the organizational setting and the people working there.

CHAPTER 4 CASE STUDY: MACRO-CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter applies aspects of the integrated framework developed in Chapter Three to the Vietnamese setting and context where I conducted my field work in 1995. As I asserted in Chapter Three, interpretations of human interaction in organizational environments must be grounded in an understanding of macro-culture and roots of primary socialization among organizational members. These are important to map and to at least partly understand because they are a form of shared social reality through which people see and experience their world. For instance, Vietnamese people share unique cultural meanings at the macro level such as the Vietnamese language, *Tieng viet*. These primary cultural structures and systems of meaning are grounded in the past, yet are also subject to continuous reinterpretation by people living today. A discussion of the macro context of cultural interpretation must thus focus on the historical roots of culture, elements of cultural continuity, and elements that spur cultural change. The challenge is to identify what can be characterized as Vietnamese, and to put this in context of a changing society imbedded in a global market economy. In terms of the domains in the integrated framework, this chapter focuses on the frame of organizations as a meeting place of macro-cultures, on historical and local contexts, and on ideas of the self.

A comparative analysis of Vietnamese culture will be made in relation to the Norwegian and Western cultural heritage. This background analysis will be used as a foundation for discussing specific case studies in Chapter Five. I will discuss macro-cultural and -social characteristics in terms of the three following categories: (1) social organization, with emphasis the role of the family, business, and state; (2) dominant social

values and philosophies; and (3) analysis of cultural values in terms of Hofstede's cultural typologies as well as reflections about the applicability of Hofstede's framework.

Analysis of macro-culture and context must necessarily become somewhat superficial and incomplete. There is always more to include and some generalizations must be made. However, I have attempted to construct an analysis that at the very least reveals some of the most important features of Vietnamese and Norwegian cultures. I will base my inquiry into Vietnamese culture on the dominant Vietnamese ethnic group in Vietnam. There are a multitude of other ethnic groups spread throughout Vietnam, but few of them are involved in contemporary organizations at this time because their populations and distributions are relatively small in scale. I will also use references describing the *Han Chinese* culture in this chapter because references related to Vietnamese culture are limited. Although many Vietnamese certainly would challenge this kind of a generalization, their culture is marked by many of the same cultural traditions and philosophies on the macro level as Han Chinese culture. This is not to say that their identities are the same because they are not and never will be the same. References to *Han Chinese* culture are therefore made with great care to avoid faulty assumptions.

Vietnam

Vietnamese history goes back over 2000 years and has been dominated by an agrarian economy. In 1995 agriculture continued to dominate the Vietnamese economy with a 27.7 percent share of GDP (Schartz 1995:48). Rice is the primary crop, followed by other popular crops such as dragon fruit, rubber, and bananas. Industry has been dominated by communist style state factories in the past two decades, although this started changing with the Economic Renewal Program (*Doi Moi*) in 1987. The Vietnamese Communist Party is now trying to become friends with everyone on the international level with its new paradoxical mixed-marked approach to economics that the Party's constitution defines as

a “socialist-oriented multi-sectoral economy driven by the state-regulated market-mechanism” (see Far Eastern Economic Review October 12, 1996:11). Putting these contradictions aside, the two largest cities in Vietnam, Hanoi and Saigon, are currently experiencing an economic growth of 15 percent. The full economic and social impact of this growth remains unclear, but it is having a profound impact on Vietnamese society in terms of consumerism, economic stratification, the spread of prostitution, and also of course a slowly emerging middle class. This growth is sorely needed in a country where the average per capita GDP is only slightly more than 220 dollars a year, although it is criticized by many as being too fast and without enough checks and balances.

The context for the case study presented in this thesis is the new wave of foreign involvements in Vietnam. Although this wave was at its highest in 1994 and 1995, it remains high; in 1996 foreign companies were still moving in to Vietnam to explore the huge potential of a market composed of 74 million people who have a tremendous potential in terms of economic development, consumerism, and increased standards of living. The Norwegian companies I was in contact with were primarily involved in partnerships with Vietnamese organizations for the development of infrastructure and natural resource development.

The majority of the Norwegian business people I interviewed pointed out that Vietnamese people have strong collective values stemming from harmonious social lives. Yet in over half of the cases the interviewed respondents could not explain in detail how these collective values worked or how they had originated. Particularly troubling to many of the respondents, was what they perceived as frequent back-stabbing and dishonesty by Vietnamese business persons; hardly collective and harmonious behavior in the eyes of the Norwegians. An inquiry into the history, structure, and form of the Vietnamese family can explain some of these apparent paradoxes and misconceptions of Vietnamese behavior and social life.

The Foundations of Vietnamese Social structure

The extended family (*gia dinh*) has historically been the most basic and important social unit in Vietnamese society, and it remains so among large parts of the population today. Most Vietnamese persons' world views are firmly grounded in the social structure and customs of the family. It is in the family that the locus of social control traditionally has rested for men and women of all ages. Attachment to past and future ancestors in these structures lock individuals into a collective structure of obligations. The Vietnamese concept of family permeates all spheres of the culture from politics to the language. It is essential to have knowledge about the foundations of the Vietnamese family when attempting to understand how Vietnamese people are socialized and how their systems of meanings can be described.

The Vietnamese family is dominated by patrilineal structures of authority in extended families. In the past these were embedded in a much larger partilineages (*ho*) which could encompass entire villages, but these have in recent history been broken up into smaller extended families (see Tu Chi 1993: 67). The concept of three or four family generations living under one roof on one piece of land, headed by a father figure, is the dominant and idealistic picture of the Vietnamese family structure. These patrilineal households are carried forward by the male line of descent. Each generation has a moral obligation in relation to past and future ancestors to ensure that a male is born to carry the family name forward and to protect the ancestral line in the future. A failure to do so is disastrous because the chain of ancestors is discontinued; this is considered a betrayal of past and future ancestors. This partly explains the high priority given to producing sons in Vietnam and some other Asian cultures. Daughters, in contrast, are married out of the family have little importance in patrilineal terms.

The importance of the patrilineal organizational form is reflected in many rituals. For instance, during the celebration of lunar new year (*Tet*) in January, lineage and family members travel far to celebrate their ancestors and to visit family members. Ancestor

worship is also widely practiced in individual homes throughout the year where the death anniversaries of important ancestors are celebrated. Incense is, for instance, burned on the ancestral altar each morning. For each family member, the family and its ancestors constitute social anchoring points which provide existential continuity, stability, and security. They provide people with a family history and identity. Actions by family members that keep ancestors happy are also believed to provide luck. A invisible force of moral social controls is thus imbedded in ancestor worship; this social control has a substantial part of its morals and rules from the Confucian heritage.

Confucianism

Much of the societal focus around the authoritarian male figure is rooted in the Confucian ideology (*Khong-giao*) that reached Vietnam from China over two thousand years ago.³ Confucianism provided strict guidelines for how social relations should be organized in the family and beyond by establishing social hierarchies between father-son, husband-wife, older brother-younger brother, teacher-student, and ruler-subject (for more details see Bond and Hawing 1986:213). These prescribed structures for social relationships produce family hierarchies organized according to age and sex. It is still common to encounter the Vietnamese family where the oldest male is an authority figure that makes important decisions on behalf of the family. For instance, one highly educated young Vietnamese woman I interviewed informed me that her father had decided what kind of an education she should have and had influenced her choice of a marriage partner. This broad use of senior authority is reinforced by and a natural outcome of the partilineal system. The Confucian tradition lives on in Vietnamese culture and socialization processes perhaps covertly at times, but still powerful. Confucian ethics have historically been reinforced by Vietnamese Emperors and Chinese Mandarin rulers, and the historical construction of these deeply imbedded cultural values will not unravel easily or quickly (see Jamieson 1993:39). Males continue to dominate in politics, business, education, birthrates, and good paying jobs.

The Role of Women in Vietnamese Society

Although Confucianism and patrilineal structures place women under the control of their parents, husbands, or oldest sons, they have considerable power in family matters, but must often work harder than men to sustain families economically. This in turn gives them less social flexibility. According to Vietnamese family morals, a wife must be self-sacrificing, frugal, industrious, and totally devoted to her husband. Jameson gives a descriptive account of the male and female roles in the family, “Bound by behavioral code and internalized values that stress the maintenance of face, public generosity, and a preoccupation with lofty affairs, in folklore and in daily life Vietnamese men often appear less adept than [their] women in practical economic matters. Each family is like a nation. The husband is the nominal head of state and in charge of foreign relations; the wife is the minister of the interior and controls the treasury” (Jamieson 1993: 27). Women have without question endured much hardship in Vietnamese society as objects for sale, a trade that continues today although on a lesser scale than in the past. Vietnamese females have also been assigned a lower value compared to male brothers as a result of patrilineal philosophies. Women have furthermore been held responsible for producing male descendants for families. In the 1990s, women increasingly take on the role of the single parent who must manage households because husbands travel to Hanoi or Saigon to find better paying jobs (see Vietnam Investment Review, September 3, 1995:2). Change is coming, though, because there are more women representatives in Vietnamese politics than in any other South-east Asian country.

³ Confucianism has its origins in China where the teacher and philosopher Confucius develop his models for moral and social order around 500 B.C. It has since then spread over most of East- and Southeast Asia where it has become a fundamental aspect of the Asian cultural heritage.

Filial Piety and Moral Debt

The concepts of filial piety (*hieu*) and moral debt (*on*) are the fundamental social mechanisms which regulate the patrilineal family system. Filial piety is expected of all people, young and old, male or female, but particularly of children in relation to parents and seniors. Filial piety entails following prescribed principles of respect and obedience in relation to the Confucian social hierarchies and the situational context. Strong loyalty, obedience, and humility toward seniors is expected by those in a lower hierarchical position. However, hierarchical relationships are reciprocal, meaning that those of high status must lead by example, be generous, and virtuous toward those in lower positions. These roles are followed because deviations upset the social order and may result in severe social consequences for persons and their families. Everyone must in other words know their role at all times. Francis Hsu describes the extent of filial piety: “support of the parents came before all other obligations and this obligation must be fulfilled even at the expense of the children” (Hsu 1981:81). The objective of filial piety is to please parents or those who are prescribed respect to help them achieve peace of mind. This is a moral obligation which in turn will give luck to those who live out this role. These obligations never cease to exist; they continue after the death of a father in the form of ancestor worship, although they are somewhat reduced in practical terms. As a result, Vietnamese people have for centuries been closely tied to their parents both socially and economically to such an extent that their obligations toward them may precede any other considerations.

The Vietnamese Family Business

It is not surprising then, that nearly all private businesses (*long vice line con*) in Vietnam are organized around families and relatives.⁴ Placing family members in company

⁴ *Doi Moi*, the economic renewal process, is motivating privatization of larger companies and thus changing this picture somewhat. However, the family type business remains dominant along with highly bureaucratic state corporations.

positions with responsibility is considered a fool-proof method of ensuring loyalty in business matters. As in the family, relations are rigid and hierarchical with a father figure or older brother in control. Family members typically do not dare to betray or fail the head of the family business because they are bound by filial piety principles and moral obligations toward the family. A failure to fulfill such obligations would result in a loss of face and thus collapse of a person's social world; an unbearable thought to any Vietnamese. A link is thus maintained between family and business matters that ensures a high level of permanence, loyalty, and hierarchy in relations (see Bond 1986). This is important to remember when associating with Vietnamese persons or companies; they are likely to have strong social and economic strings of various sorts with relatives and family.

Vietnamese State Bureaucracies and Institutions

The Vietnamese family concept is also played out within state bureaucracies (*che-do*) through various forms of ancestor worship, reciprocal networks, and social controls. The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum houses the nation's and people's most important founding ancestor, uncle Ho Chi Minh (*Bac Ho*), who is a loved father figure in Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh is credited with freeing Vietnam from French colonialism, for proving that colonial powers could be beat in war, and for laying the groundwork that united North and South Vietnam after the Vietnam War. He is a symbol of national independence, a virtuous and exemplary authority figure, and lives on in ancestor worship in private homes and in national political discourse. Pictures of him are on display and incense is burned in honor of him everywhere. The fact that his body has been preserved and is on public display, demonstrates the symbolic importance of him as founding figure for both the nation and the people. Every year millions of Vietnamese come to Hanoi to catch a glimpse of and honor him. The communist state has manipulated the concept of ancestor worship in nation building to make it a powerful and important social force that appeals to the very essence of the Vietnamese world view; the family. Americans learned this the hard way during the Vietnam War when they assumed that the death of Ho Chi Minh would

discourage the North Vietnamese Army; in fact his death had the opposite effect because he turned into the people's most important ancestor.

The family element is furthermore played out in state institutions through nepotism and corruption. Nepotism exists because improving the status position of the family and maintaining reciprocal networks of favors and obligations is extremely important⁵. Constitutionally illegal connections between state and private activities are common, as are exchanges of formal and informal favors within state systems. The powerful primary socialization around the family, reciprocal relations, and non-interference with the affairs of those in power continue to overshadow the state's attempts to socialize people into bureaucratic structures with checks and balances on corruption. As a result, roles in rational organizational structures are interpreted and manipulated by many Vietnamese in terms of relational networks, while others follow communist ideology more loyally by refraining from corruption. Conducting official and business affairs in terms of relational networks and not institutional boundaries, is common. This tendency is furthermore reinforced by Vietnamese culture because people are expected to use their position and resources to improve the status of their family, neighborhood, and close connections. Social pressure is thus exerted on individuals to fulfill social obligations within the auspices of institutions, despite its illegality.

Reciprocal relationships in and across institutions or companies also include non-family members, but these still function in accordance with the family model. Networks with non-family members are not considered as important as those with immediate family, but a strong sense of obligation, respect, and permanence characterize many of these relationships as well. It is not easy to get business or other affairs done in Vietnam without tapping into these relational networks. Personal, family, and professional success depend on them. People thus constantly strive to develop and maintain these networks. It is commonly stated that business is best done through connections and friends in Vietnam, a reality which cause both Norwegians and repatriated Vietnamese (*Viet Kieu*) much

⁵ This is commonly referred to as building status and face (e.g. see Bond 1986).

frustration. This is particularly true because the strong inward focus on the family and reciprocal networks results in a commensurable level of distrust toward strangers in matters such as business (see Fei 1992:123). Eleven of the thirteen Norwegians I interviewed indicated that they had problems with establishing relations based on trust with Vietnamese counterparts. The key issue in the business setting, is that it is frequently a person's family and reciprocal network which matter the most, not rational or contractual business agreements.

Face and Conspicuous Consumption

Face is a concept which is continually underestimated by foreigners in Vietnam. Bond and Hawing quote sociologist Goffman as describing face as: "an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Bond and Hawing 1986:224) Every word uttered constitutes a chance of losing face. Words are thus not unnecessarily used in Vietnamese culture, as in many other Asian cultures. Bond and Hawing continue in their description of face, "in games of face, situations are different for each one of those who are playing the game. One has to speak in the language suited to one's situation and play appropriate behavior and status symbols." Finally, they say "face work is...mainly a kind of 'front-stage' behavior which an individual performs before others in the mixed tie [social settings with mixed groups of people] ; 'backstage behavior is authentic behavior which can only be revealed to persons in the expressive tie such as family [private and intimate situations]" (ibid.). Face work is no game for Vietnamese in real life situations, however. A loss of face is devastating. Much effort is therefore spent on building face, saving face, and helping others do the same as a part of filial piety or reciprocal relations.

Another important aspect of face is conspicuous consumption. This kind of status consumption is widespread, but it must benefit family, relatives and neighbors in order to be socially acceptable. The more money is spent on others, the more face a person and

family builds. This is why many state bureaucrats turn to corruption; they need money to build face and reciprocal relations.

The Differential Mode of Association

Vietnamese society operates on culturally defined roles and modes of association which are reinforced by social structures. The Vietnamese mode of association can be described as differential (see Fei 1992). A differential mode of association can be explained as a setting in which each person's self is located at a center which is embedded in a network or web of relationships. Relations close to this center, predominantly family associations, are associated with a high degree of permanence. This culturally constructed feeling of permanence generates a high need to fulfill obligations. Relations removed further away from the self in the network, such as relations with business acquaintances are more impermanent. They are thus less pressing to maintain and thus less subject to prescribed roles of association. The Vietnamese self therefore shifts roles depending on how close or far away from the self other people are. But the self also shifts roles in relation to the context in which people interact as was indicated in relation to the concept of face. For instance, the father figure is usually addressed in a formal manner by other family members in public to build face, but the mode of association often changes to an informal tone when family members are alone with the same person in a private context. One could argue that this shifting of roles is present in most cultures. However, in Vietnamese culture it is more noticeable and important because face relations is an essential aspect of building relationships and developing reciprocal networks in Vietnam.

The central role of the differential mode of association in Vietnamese families and society can be demonstrated by analyzing the structure of the Vietnamese language (*Tieng Viet*). In Vietnamese, for instance, personal pronouns for addressing the self shift according to the context and the nature of social relationships. The context independent

personal pronoun for “me” is *toi*, but a male teacher addressing a student would refer to himself as *thầy giáo*, a personal pronoun commanding the respect of a teacher. In relation to his father, the teacher would refer to himself as *anh* while he would address his father as *ông*, indicating that he has moved to a position where he must show great respect toward a senior. In public this same teacher may be called *ba* or *cha*, meaning father, by his wife and children, a form of address which also commands great respect. They must address him formally in public to adhere to front-stage face rules, but may turn to informal forms of address in private back-stage settings. In each of these situations, he shifts roles and modes of association according to whom he speaks with and in what context. Along a similar line, a woman would be referred to or refer to herself as *em*, *chi*, *co*, or *ba* ranging from young to old. Males refer to themselves as *em*, *anh*, *bac*, *cha*, or *ông* ranging from young to old. Different levels of respect and formality are imbedded in these words. Use of *ba* to refer to an old woman requires formal and polite sentence structures, while use of *em* to refer to a young person never requires formal language. In addition to these personal pronouns, there are other modes of address in relation to profession, relatedness, status and so on that have role-specific norms tied to them. Thus the very structure of the Vietnamese language is built upon hierarchical and differential relations which have the family metaphor as its foundation.

The family and Confucian systems of meaning, face relations, and the differential mode of association together build a picture of some of the most dominant meanings which make up Vietnamese macro-culture. They explain why Vietnamese can seemingly be guided by strong collective and virtuous values in one situation, yet turn around and pursue exploitive behavior in another. For instance, fraud toward a stranger or government is relatively common in Vietnam, but rarely occurs among family members or neighbors. Although these traditional social structures and cultural universes of meaning remain strong today, opposing cultural forces must also be taken into account to build a more complete understanding of the Vietnamese cultural heritage as it is played out in modern-day Vietnam. It is increasingly marked by social contradictions, conflicts, and variations.

Winds of Change in Vietnamese Society

The French presence in Vietnam, which effectively began in 1859, and the accumulated contact with other cultures that followed, generated a strong counter-culture to traditional family and Confucian conservatism (see Jamieson 1993; SarDesai 1992). This contact and the imposition of Western social structures, art, architecture, and teachings, created a liberal Vietnamese intellectual movement which advocated more personal freedom, equal rights, and opportunities for personal expression. This movement reached its culmination through the American presence in South Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. Western lifestyles and Western capitalism spread rapidly to the point where the contradictions became so substantial that the social, political, and economic systems in the South collapsed. They collapsed because they were kept artificially operational by massive U.S. economic and military support until the mid-1970s when the Vietnam War ended. Despite the almost complete isolation of Vietnam from 1975 to the late 1980s, seeds of the Western historical influence in Vietnam remained latent and have bloomed since the opening of Vietnam to the rest of the world in the last half decade. This is particularly true in the south and Saigon which have been most exposed to the outside world as Vietnam's business and trade center. A generation gap is felt more than ever as Vietnamese society goes through rapid development with an associated pop culture bringing with it Western media, coke, video games, and so on. Increasingly, wives are also working out of the home with their own careers and are getting access to education. Many trends indicate that Western values are mixing with conservative traditional Vietnamese ones: young people are increasingly making their own marriage and schooling decisions; state institutions are slowly being restructured according to more Western economic modes of organization; divorces, social problems, and crime are on the rise (see Schwartz 1995: 48). These signs of both change and continuity in Vietnamese culture are likely to increasingly affect the manner in which Vietnamese relate to family, business associates, and friends.

Western values, or various hybrids of them, are thus not completely foreign to some segments of the Vietnamese population whether they realize this or not. Western values

are increasingly being disseminated through the growing market mechanism. Many young people do not wish to be subjected to the strict conservative practices of the past, such as arranged marriages. At the same time, they realize that it is difficult to survive without family and social networks, and that these fulfill important social and material needs. My own experience and that of other researchers indicate that people in Vietnam continue to practice filial piety and strive to fulfill moral obligations within a patrilineal system that is slowly adapting to a changing world (see Jamieson 1993). This simply demonstrates the complex and changing nature of culture, and how cultural contradictions or conflicts exist between generations and new and old. These patterns must be taken into account when conducting an interpretation of any macro-culture, context, or groups as they meet in organizational settings.

Norway

The roots of Norwegian culture and society date back some 1500 years when the country was sparsely settled by small farming and fishing villages. The 4.5 million people inhabiting the country today survive primarily on oil, fishery resource, timber, and shipping industries. A high standard of living is maintained as a result of the abundance of resources compared to the number of people. An extensively developed welfare state guarantees fulfillment of most material needs for inhabitants. The state guarantees access to hospitals, employment placement, schools, mail, telecommunications, housing, and energy for everyone. Norwegian society is governed by a democratic parliamentary political system that pursues a mixed-market approach. The country also has a monarchy, although the significance of this in social and political terms is mostly symbolic. Norway as a country is experiencing the steadiest upward economic growth among European countries in the 1990s and has the lowest unemployment statistics. Norwegian society is in a relatively stable development phase compared to Vietnamese society where significant transformations are rapidly changing social, political, and economic institutions.

Norwegian society has many social, political and cultural similarities with other North-European societies. I will therefore give some general background information about these fundamental similarities, but will also identify some of the unique characteristics not commonly associated with other Western cultures.

Norwegian Social Structures and Modes of Association

The fundamental structure of Norwegian macro-culture is based on an organizational mode of association with some additional cultural characteristics. In the organizational mode of association, roles, activity, behavior, and systems of meaning are primarily defined through membership in voluntary social- and work groups, in addition to that of the nuclear family (see Fei 1991:61). Because activities in various social- and work groups tend to be more separated from each other than in Vietnamese culture, this mode of association creates more distinct divisions between work and private life. The Western bureaucratic model among other things is widely used to enforce this division.⁶ It is thus unusual for spouses or families to work together. In fact, the presence of several family members inside the same organization is often viewed in negative terms because it is often not compatible with important personal needs relating to the separation of private and work lives which in turn is motivated by a need for personal independence. The mix of family in work life is also considered undesirable from a business stand-point because it may thwart work divisions intended to avoid personal conflicts, corruption, and so on. Friends, relatives, and neighbors do for this reason not have the same economic and material interdependence as they do in Vietnam. In times of need, people either turn to close family or to the state for help.

⁶ Western bureaucracies have their roots in the Roman form of organization and differ from those in Asia in that they revolve around highly rational divisions of work with checks and balances on work activities (e.g. Weber 1947). Asian bureaucracies tend to be manned by generalists and have relied on various forms of nepotism, despite the fact that Asian bureaucracies were created to limit nepotism.

It is common to switch involvements between many work and social groups in a lifetime in Norway, jumping from one to the other with a high degree of mobility and few strings attached. A person therefore typically goes through many secondary socialization experiences in a life-time. This shifting between groups is relatively easy because Norwegian culture and its part-cultures are based on relatively predictable and universal rules for interaction and low-context⁷ relational patterns (see Brøgger 1993; also see E.T. Hall 1976).

The voluntary nature of work and social associations and the many social options people have as a result of these also motivate social mobility. People can generally work wherever they wish as long as they are qualified. They associate casually with groups and individuals based on their own personal preferences, and of course based on approval from the other party. Voluntary associations give Norwegians a social mobility with many economic and social options. Many Vietnamese do not have this option because they are permanently locked into family and network structures.

Economic activities of groups and individuals are predominantly organized in terms of goal-directed social systems created around market, inter-group, or state ideologies in Norway. These systems bring together complete strangers in social structures where they are expected to work together toward organizational or institutional goals. This is indeed easily achieved because people are socialized into the organizational mode of association by which people are expected to adhere to fixed moral and cultural standards for interaction. Close personal relations are less important than effective communication, roles, creativity, and rapid progress toward goals (Brøgger 1993). In the eyes of a Vietnamese, such superficial forms of organization would bring into question issues of trust, loyalty, fulfillment of obligations, and so on.

⁷ A high context culture is one in which it is necessary to have detailed knowledge about local conditions and contexts to be able to communicate meanings effectively. Meanings can generally be clearly communicated across contexts in low context cultures (see Hall 1976).

The organizational mode is also achieved because each person expects to be treated according to fixed universal principles and values. These principles and values revolve around fundamental values of equal rights, solidarity, egalitarianism, and professionalism. They also revolve around the right to self-determination and privacy. Checks and balances are imbedded in laws, unspoken rules, and social pressures to ensure that these unconditional principles and values are adhered to in any social setting. In comparison, values and morals are differential and highly flexible in Vietnamese culture; they depend on situational contexts and the relationship between people.

The organizational mode of association operates on drastically different principles and assumptions than the differential mode of association. The first is organized around rational principles of organization, mobility and low-context systems of meaning while the latter is organized around the metaphor of the Vietnamese family. The family is, however and not surprisingly, also socially and culturally important in the Norwegian context.

The Norwegian Concept of Family

The Norwegian family's role and structure is relatively narrow compared to the Vietnamese family, and to a certain degree less continuous and permanent. The typical family has relatively clear and consistent boundaries: parents and their children form a nuclear family. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and so on are considered relatives toward which the family only has limited or no economic responsibilities, except through inheritance. The individual's knowledge of distant relatives and ancestors is usually limited because most people spend most of their time in voluntary association and work groups.

The nature of the nuclear family's relationship to other relatives is dependent on family agreements, conflicts, or convenience as opposed to the fixed over-arching

structure of obligations and reciprocity that typically links the Vietnamese family together socially and economically. This tendency is even true within the nuclear family. A cross-cultural comparison of divorce rates trends demonstrates this; nearly fifty percent of marriages end up in divorce in Norway while divorces still are relatively uncommon in Vietnam.⁸ The relative anonymity and mobility of individuals make it possible to break away from established social circles and seek new ones without too much of an existential trauma. In fact, because many do just this, and because people relate to each other in an organizational mode of association, it is relatively easy to establish relations with strangers and new social groupings. Family life is thus much easier to dissolve and abandon in Norway compared to Vietnam. This is culturally accepted and a guaranteed right by law.

The importance of tending to parents and relatives is imbedded in Norwegian socialization processes, but these processes also emphasize the individual's need to focus on individual success and separation from parents in adulthood. The state has made it possible for people to manage both of these challenges by taking over an increasing portion of responsibilities historically associated with the family such as caring for the elderly, the sick, and increasingly the young. However, the state's welfare support has also worked to increasingly reduce ties of material dependence between parents and children. The state gradually dissolved the need for the extended family in the 1700s and 1800s (Brøgger 1993). The market has also taken a central role in fulfilling social needs and substituting for social responsibilities. Individuals have therefore been freed from family and social obligations common in the past. Individual choice and actions, mobility, and the expectation of equal rights are taken for granted. The fact that poverty hardly exists in Norway makes it possible for most Norwegians to expect and exercise these rights and privileges in a self-determinative manner.

Relations between men and women have become more egalitarian through time so that each partner can balance work and private priorities in their separate spheres. This

⁸ This difference is probably also influenced by the fact that there is more freedom of choice, less coercion or pressure from parents, and higher economic independence for both men and women in Norway.

tendency has increased dramatically in the last half century as both women and men have become active workers outside the household.

Protestantism, Capitalism and Rationalism

It is a historical fact that capitalism had its break-through in Northern-Europe, of which Norway is a part. Capitalism evolved from the strong Protestant culture in these countries. Norway has a strong Protestant/Lutheran tradition dating back to the 12th century. Weber argues that Protestant individualism encouraged the belief in progress in hard work and trade. He therefore asserts that it was one of the primary cultural drivers behind the industrial revolution, capitalism, and the following modernization processes (Weber 1957; Brøgger 1993). Going back to the days of the Protestant Reformation in the fourteenth century, John Calvin (1509-1564) is the person who had the greatest influence in the early development of capitalistic ideology and social organization. Calvin criticized the European church's role of supporting the feudal societies in Europe. He also criticized lifestyles in which resources and money were wasted while he advocated frugality, emotional control, and progress. He disagreed with the catholic concept of forgiving sins because he believed that God pre-determines who goes to heaven or hell. According to Calvin, one of the signs that a person is going in the right direction, that is to heaven, is that this person is making progress in the Lord's Vineyard. Progress in trade and business have therefore been interpreted as important signs for the Calvinists that they are among the lucky. The impact of Calvin's ideas on Western culture has been a strong focus on work ethic, individual effort, rationalism, and the need to be successful in business.

Although very few Norwegians today would classify themselves as Calvinists and many not even as active Protestants⁹, the Calvinistic and Protestant ideologies remain embedded in market structures, academics, and Norwegian culture.

⁹ Approximately thirty percent of Norwegians are religiously active, mostly in the Lutheran state church.

The pragmatic and rational heritage of the Norwegian and Northern-European countries, is also rooted in the philosophical and scientific history of the region. Although I will not go into this history in detail, it should be noted that it has generally focused on humanity's struggle against nature, humanity's taming of nature, the search for existential meaning, and concepts of democracy. Ideas of change, challenging the status quo, equality, and universal truth are strong components of the Norwegian value system. This is reflected in social interaction and social structures. For instance, it is considered superficial and immoral to twist the truth to avoid interpersonal conflict. Issues and events are shared and discussed in a rational manner whether people like to talk about them or not. This norm grows out of strong task- and results-oriented values in Norway. Relations may often be neglected or not considered as important as the process of getting things done.

Norwegian Maxims of Behavior: Janteloven

The Norwegian culture shares many cultural, religious, and social characteristics with other Western Countries. But Norway has a history of more international isolation and cultural homogeneity than other Western countries. Norwegian society was until the last century been composed of small farm communities¹⁰ and neighborhood areas with strong elements of social control. The communities operated on strong values of collective solidarity and conformity; values that remain an important aspect of Norwegian culture today. Conspicuous consumption and status building, for example, is viewed as a selfish and as a kind of show-off or bravado behavior. If someone spends excessive money on themselves or status symbols, suspicion and disapproval results. The same negative reactions occur if someone is too loud or commands too much attention in relation to others in a group. People in organizations and friendship groups are expected to act

independently and self-determinative, but they must do so within certain social boundaries. This cultural characteristic is, for instance, more similar to Asian behavior than other Western cultures such as American culture where the individual is encouraged to distinguish him or herself from the group. This cultural system of conformity is in a sense a system of ‘checks and balances’ on uncontrolled individualism, opportunism, and waste. It is grounded in the Protestant ethic of moderation and a history of small-scale community norms.

The Norwegian maxims called *Janteloven* is famous in Norway as a model for these Norwegian values. *Janteloven* is a relatively new concept, but the social maxims it describes go centuries back into the history of the Norwegian people as unspoken social rules. Some of these maxims read as follows:

- You must not think that you are anything special
- You must not think that you are any better than us
- You must not think that you are any smarter than us
- You must not think you know any more than us
- You must not laugh at us
- You must not think that you can teach us anything

(Sandemose 1972:57)

These are only some of the maxims from *Janteloven*, but most Norwegians recognize themselves and their behavior in these maxims. This form of social norm of conformity and equality goes hand in hand with a strong consensus culture in social and work environments. People generally discuss and clarify issues in group situations before they pursue them. Individual effort and success is vitally important, but it must generally progress with group consensus and approval.

¹⁰ Large parts of Norway remains rural and organized according to small communities. However, the bulk of the population and the dominant macro-culture is situated around urban areas such as Oslo and Bergen.

Aggressive status building, favoritism, and opportunism among individuals in an organizational settings or in social life is thus discouraged through social pressure. This is an expression of the egalitarian nature of Norwegian culture and an associated resistance to hierarchical social structures. Hierarchies are tolerated as long as everyone is treated according to equal principles and retain rights of self-determination.

Summary of Norwegian Culture

Dominant characteristics of Norwegian culture include the organizational mode of association, strong values of egalitarianism and solidarity, the maxims of Janteloven, and a strong focus on individual work effort. I will conclude this chapter by comparing these and other characteristics with those of Vietnamese culture in a cultural topology model.

Macro-cultural Comparison in Terms of Cultural Topologies

I have thus far explained some of the foundations of Vietnamese and Norwegian macro- cultures through short descriptions of historical constructions of meaning, values, and social organization. An additional analysis of the two cultures in terms of Hofstede's value typology (1980), discussed in Chapter Three, sheds additional light on this cultural comparison by: showing how the cultural characteristics can be described in terms of value dimensions; and demonstrating the limitations of this typology in describing people, culture and work organization. I will emphasize that these topologies should not be used to produce black and white answers related to values or individuals. Rather they could be used to a limited extent to reveal the complexity of these while demonstrating the inherent problems of attaching two-dimensional values on individuals. As an example, one could say that both Vietnamese and Norwegian cultures are in many ways collective, but the meaning of collectivity is significantly different in the two cultures. There are certainly also

cases of individualistic behavior in both cultures. I therefore find it most fruitful to discuss cultural topologies in terms of different shades and degrees of relevance and as situation-dependent.

I also return to Hofstede's model in this chapter because it is the most widely known model used to analyze cultural differences in business settings. It thus provides an important reference point for those with some exposure to the issues related to cross-cultural organizational analysis. In the concluding thesis chapter, I will expand on Hofstede's model by extracting and adding additional value dimensions from my research effort. The purpose of doing this is to provide the reader with a comprehensive and rich foundation of concepts for conducting comparative cultural analysis in the Vietnamese context.

Individuality versus Collectivism

Vietnamese culture can in one sense be seen as highly collective because individuals are embedded in a network of relations and obligations which are not of a voluntary nature. They are socialized into a social structure marked by permanence in which individual desires and needs mean less than family and reciprocal obligations. Yet in another sense, when acting outside of this relational network such as in a foreign setting with strangers, the Vietnamese individual may be perceived as acting in a non-collective manner. This happens because strangers are outside of their differential mode of association and social reality. In such situations, opportunistic behavior toward strangers is common as a means of obtaining resources for maintaining and developing critical relations. Some would perceive this opportunism as individualistic behavior, while others would argue that it is motivated by collective values. The question of whether a Vietnamese person acts in a collective manner must thus be viewed in terms of the social context and the differential mode of association.

Dominant macro-culture in Norway is characterized by collective and individualistic values mixed together. The values described in *Janteloven* maintain systems of collective solidarity where equality and consensus seeking in decision making processes are important. Achievements and success are viewed in terms of individual skills and talent, although how people chose to publicly display this is subject to social scrutiny. Individual versus collective values must thus be seen in terms of the organizational mode of association and *Janteloven* in Norwegian culture.

Inquiries into individualistic and collectivistic values are critical in terms of understanding relational patterns, management techniques, social needs, domination strategies, etc. But as I have shown, it is difficult to ascribe one or the other value dimension to people of different cultures within examining the meanings and motivating factors behind these values. This suggests that an interpretive rather than a deterministic approach for examining these values should be pursued. It is not useful to know that a person has certain collective values if one does not understand what this entails and which meanings are connected with these values.

Power Distance

Vietnamese social structures and relations are based on a high degree of power distance; social hierarchies are a part of Vietnamese history, social organization, and culture. Power distance is embedded in the Vietnamese language and it is reflected in casual as well as formal communications. A high power distance is reinforced through filial piety and the patrilineal family metaphor. A consequence of these value systems is the commonality of patriarchs and at different levels in Vietnamese society whose actions rarely are questioned. This is reflected authoritarian in leadership and management styles of many Vietnamese businesses and institutions; high internal and external power distances

in these organizations are a source of social security and stability. Almost unconditional faith and loyalty is placed on the authority figure. Although communist and Western influences have attempted to discourage patrilineal forms of organization, they have not successfully removed these from Vietnamese culture. The Communist party has in fact benefited from ideas about traditional forms Vietnamese rule by raising itself above the criticism of the people as powerful rulers did in the past.

Norwegian culture is characterized as having a low power distance between people. Social solidarity and egalitarian values, supported by a history of political socialism, encourage non-hierarchical organizational structures and personal relations. There is also little fear of questioning institutions of power or organizational authorities because universal morals, rules, and laws protect people's rights to do so. The motivation and drive to challenge and reflect on society and to constantly improve it through change is imbedded in the Norwegian cultural and political heritage. Power distance is present in relationships between parents and children as in any culture, but this distance is relatively low compared to most cultures. Economic separation from parents and self-determination are common at an early age for both sexes because most teenagers take advantage of university and trade school funding schemes among other things. This works to increase independence at an early age and reduce the power distance to parents. The only significant example of a permanent high power distance in Norwegian society is in relation to royalty, and this relationship primarily has its foundation in national symbolism rather than the exercise of power.

Differences in power distance will impact how people relate to each other in the multicultural organizational setting in terms of reporting relations, work style, decision making and so on. Power distance is also noticeable cross-culturally; foreigners in Vietnam are automatically attributed a high level of relational power. It is therefore difficult for strangers to establish informal and casual relations with many Vietnamese people. Power distance is therefore an important factor to consider in the organizational setting.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainties and risks are avoided in the Vietnamese family to uphold the ideal of family harmony, face, and filial piety as much as possible. Uncertainty increases the threat of losing face and experiencing relational stress, and is thus avoided. Unnecessary communication is, as an example, avoided for this reason. A high degree of uncertainty avoidance can be attributed to the Vietnamese world view in terms of the family metaphor, which is based upon permanent relations and stability. However, when Vietnamese move out from the center of their differential mode of association, away from important relational connections; then higher degrees of risk are often assumed. In other words, risks are generally not taken in relation to family issues, but risks may often be assumed in relation to strangers or remote business partners because it is far less damaging to lose face in relation to strangers than family. The massive smuggling problem in Vietnam has, for example, not subsided despite high risks in terms of very strict forms of official punishment (see Schwartz 1995:48). And yet there are very few Vietnamese who dare to break out of their patterns of family obligations (arguably, most don't want to). In fact, taking risks that benefit the family and neighborhood is considered a means of building face. The degree to which Vietnamese take risks must therefore be viewed in the context of its positive or negative impacts on relational networks.

Norwegians also adopt different degrees of uncertainty avoidance depending on context, but the culture operates with a tendency toward risk taking and uncertainty. Risks are more easily taken because a relatively high degree of anonymity and mobility reduce the downside impacts of risk taking. Because work and private lives are separated in more structured and functional manner in Norwegian culture, greater risks can more easily be taken with regards to one social sphere without severe repercussions for the other (although a systems perspective will show that spill-over effects from one sphere to another may occur). Moreover, the welfare state functions as a safety net for those who should fail in risk taking. In terms of relations, there is also a much greater element of uncertainty in Norwegian culture; people meet and work with strangers all the time and

require only minimal social elements of stability. Elements of social stability are primarily found in the nuclear family. And even the nuclear family is not stable as I illustrated in my discussion of high divorce rates in Norway.

Differences in uncertainty avoidance influence how people approach conflict, risk, work and challenges in the organizational settings. It also effects how people approach each other socially and build relations. Examining reactions to these may therefore reveal useful information about team dynamics, work patterns, and work preferences. People with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance are less likely to go beyond their job descriptions or to on make on-the-spot decisions without conferring with superiors. Those who have a low degree of uncertainty avoidance can be expected to stretch limits, try new and daring things, and be less concerned about the consequences of their actions. Both extremes how positive and negative effects depending on the situation or desired results. But as with the other value dimensions, it is necessary to understand the fundamental meanings that drive differences in uncertainty avoidance.

'Live to Work' Versus 'Work to Live'

The masculinity versus femininity topology requires a short explanation because its meaning is not obvious. The choice of these two terms for this value dimension is perhaps not appropriate because I can not see any meaningful correlation between them and gender issues. According to Hofstede, masculine cultures are typically characterized as those where people live to work (Hofstede 1980) . Whereas, in feminine cultures people tend to work to live. I will suggest that 'live to work' or 'work to live' constitute more descriptive and theoretically appropriate terms than 'masculine' and 'feminine'. The distinction between 'work to live' and 'live to work' is important in relation to how people prioritize their lives in terms of work and private time. Vietnamese culture is a 'work to live' culture in that work is not viewed as a central element of the culture or an end in

itself, relations, obligations and survival are more important. Despite the stereotype of Vietnamese as being hard workers, they commonly do not see work as the central purpose or meaning of their lives. The family is most important.

Norwegian culture is also in many ways a 'work to live' culture because people in Norwegian society place a high value on free time, quality of life, and social activities. Employment and labor legislation furthermore guarantee extensive benefits and opportunities to maintain interests outside of work. For instance, one year of maternal leave at full pay is guaranteed by law, and similar but more limited rights for paternal leave are also guaranteed. But there are also growing 'live to work' currents in Norwegian society, particularly in urban centers such as Oslo and Trondheim. People increasingly spend their time at work and consider their work setting as their primary social and economic bases. However, the 'live to work' value in Norwegian culture remains relatively weak compared to cultures such as American culture.

Cultural differences in terms of 'work to live' and 'live to work' effect how people balance their personal and work lives. Although both Vietnamese and Norwegian cultures are dominated by 'work to live' values toward work, the underlying meanings driving this are different. Vietnamese people in general cannot afford the luxury of long vacations and maternal leaves. In Vietnamese culture, one can expect that family life is difficult to separate from work in social terms. Although people work hard, they do this to live and to build status for their families. In contrast, Norwegians 'work to live' in the sense that they spend their spare time traveling, relaxing, reading, and maintaining nuclear family affairs. This dimension of 'work to live' is typically separated from economic activities and focused on enjoyment and personal rejuvenation. These contrasts between Norwegian and Vietnamese cultures demonstrate the importance of inquiring into contextual factors such as socio-economic conditions and cultural factors such as social organization in every setting.

Beyond Value Topologies

The preceding value analysis of macro-cultures shows that persons and cultures and people cannot easily be fit into neat little conceptual boxes or scales. The discussion reveals how culture is ambiguous and dynamic and how values must be interpreted in terms of persons, cultural meanings, and context. An application of Hofstede's value topology makes it possible to some identity potential areas of cultural conflict, confusion, or synergy when people of different cultural backgrounds work together in organizational settings. But as previously emphasized, the model should be used in context of an integrated framework and it should be used as an interpretive tool. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will show how one can move further beyond this model by developing additional value dimensions relevant to the Vietnamese setting.

This completes the comparison and analysis of macro-culture, socialization, and context as background information for the case studies in the next chapter. I have laid a foundation for a more detailed level of analysis with the completion of this chapter. The next level of analysis is the micro-setting; the organizational setting and the actors here.

Introduction

The integrated framework and the background analysis in the preceding chapters gain more substance when demonstrated through case study accounts and interpretations. By presenting three case studies in this chapter, I hope to illuminate how interaction between cultural frames, concepts of self and socialization, contexts, and management techniques result in various dynamics between people, culture, and work organization. The case studies show through interpretation of human interaction how cultural stability and change complement and oppose each other. They show how people actively interpret, negotiate, resist, and adapt to socio-cultural environments. The materials from previous chapters are systematically, yet flexibly applied in the interpretation of the case materials to identify situationally relevant findings around people, culture, and work.

In the first case study, the view-points of multiple people in the office of a Norwegian oil company are described and reflected upon to identify differing assumptions, misunderstandings, and miscommunications. In the second case, I describe through the eyes of two employees how contextual and cultural factors can result in various power dynamics in a foreign business compound. In the third case, I explore the social networking experiences of a Norwegian and his Vietnamese colleague in a shipping company. I use pseudo names for the persons described to protect their anonymity.

Case One : A Kaleidoscope of Meanings in an Oil Company Office

Introduction

The first research setting I visited in Vietnam was in a Norwegian company office located a few hundred yards from the center of Saigon (I will refer to this as the ‘company’). The staff and organizational members in this setting consisted of one Norwegian engineer, Tore, and eight Vietnamese counter-parts with educational levels ranging from high-school to a Ph.D. in Economics (I will refer to each of them by name as necessary). All of these persons had several years of work experience behind them, primarily in technical fields. Tore was the only one with international work experience. He had previously worked in Bangkok for the same company, but this was his first visit to Vietnam. Most of the employees were males in their thirties or forties, except a secretarial assistant who was in her mid-twenties.

The company had established itself in Vietnam one year previous to my visit. Its business objective was to establish a market position in the rapidly growing off-shore oil business in South Vietnam. The company had already established offices in several Asian countries successfully, and could thus be considered an international company. Tore had been placed in charge of the Vietnamese office, three months after it had opened. The current staff had been selected prior to his arrival by company representatives in Bangkok. Tore’s responsibility was to develop the company’s representative office both internally and externally. He said, “this is the first time I am in a foreign country with the objective of putting together a new operation from scratch. My highest priority right now is to develop a competent staff and to implement company standards here. Otherwise, we can forget about achieving our business goals.” Tore wanted to ensure that his Vietnamese counter-parts shared his and the company’s ideas of how business should be conducted. This case study describes aspects of his efforts toward this end.

My own involvement in this company setting as a researcher was limited to 3 visits, but it was interesting in the sense that I was able to gather perspectives from different employees about some critical events. I conducted lengthy interviews with Tore and three of the Vietnamese staff whom I will refer to as Nam, Hoan, and Nguyen. I furthermore had opportunities to observe these persons in their work activities.

Different Perspectives in the Organization

Every morning at 8 am, Ngac pulled into the driveway of a four story expatriate apartment complex not far from downtown Saigon in a brand new black Volvo. This was the diplomatic section of town with many old French colonial houses lining the lush green streets. Every morning Ngac had to check in with the security booth at the driveway gate and wait in the car for Tore to show up. Ngac was Tore's personal chauffeur and errand man. He was in his mid-twenties and eager to do a good job. Although the Volvo belonged to the company, Ngac was visibly proud to be driving it. He was keenly aware that there are not many cars in Vietnam, and certainly very few Volvo luxury cars. This particular Monday morning, I came out of the building with my wife and Tore to catch a ride to the company office.

Tore had made it a habit to always ask Ngac how he was doing and if there was anything new going on. This was part of his effort to show a genuine interest in the affairs of his employees and learn from them. Ngac told us about how he had solved an unforeseen problem associated with the processing of residential permits for myself and my wife¹¹. Tore's reaction was positive and to the point, "I am very impressed. You did the right thing. If you keep this up you will be running the business soon." Ngac replied,

¹¹ He had arranged my and my wife's residential permits. Visitors in Vietnam must at all times report where they are staying and for how long. Obtaining a permit was complicated in this case because we stayed in a private residence within a restricted area.

“It was very difficult for Erik and Marianne to go to the permit office because they speak very little English there.” I thanked him for his assistance, as was appropriate.

This episode was one of several which demonstrated Tore’s relatively dominating personality and super-positive approach to people. He had a positive-reinforcement approach to people and judged people by their achievements. He continuously tried to install the same qualities in his associates. He required a significant amount of social space because he tended to be much more of a talker, teacher or source of opinions than other people in the office. His physical characteristics reinforced his dominating presence; he stood two heads above all his colleagues and one head above myself. His personality matched the company’s core values that focused on professionalism, results, initiative, customer service, and aggressive selling. He said:

We do sales and that means that we have to motivate people to be detail-oriented, problem solvers, and assertive with our customers. That is not easy because very few people in Vietnam have experience in industrial sales...I have to go through everything from basic sales to business concepts training with these people to get this office up to speed. They are the hardest workers I have ever met, but they need to have more fun and they need to take more initiatives...My philosophy is to work hard and to enjoy it. My job is to make sure that those who do good work are rewarded and those who do less than good work get support, help or whatever it takes...But the most difficult thing is ‘to get people to take the ball and run with it’. They are not used to it.

The company was physically located in new and modern building that matched the company’s ambitions and values in terms of professionalism. The office was arranged in a booth layout by Tore’s predecessor to maximize personal space and minimize interruptions. The main office room was split into nine large work booths, with seven foot mobile walls separating the desks. I was left with the impression that the office had been set up quickly and never completely moved into and personalized by people; it was white and sterile. Few personal possessions, pictures, or other things commonly used to create a work environment could be seen. Tore’s office was located down a hallway leading away from the main office room. His office was large. It housed a long meeting table with a

dozen chairs and Tore's desk and file cabinets. Tore had decorated this room with a few company posters because it was used for meeting activities.

Tore considered Monday morning meetings particularly important as a means of building a good working environment and 'common ground' among employees. He called these meetings 'Monday morning wake up meetings'. I was fortunate enough to observe one of these meetings.

One Monday morning, I took a seat in the corner of the meeting room to observe a regular office meeting. In the background, large shaded windows provided a beautiful view of Saigon's busy streets, yet the sounds of all the scooters and an occasional car could not be heard through the thick windows. A Vietnamese tea¹² pot and the small drinking cups that go with it was placed on the table by the secretary. The six persons present organized their papers and chatted in Vietnamese while waiting for the meeting to start.

I felt almost uncomfortably informal in relation to the others present. The Vietnamese employees all wore formal dark suits. These suits, as most other suits in Vietnam, were tailored suits with cuts that western business people would consider outdated. Most importantly, however, they were affordable at \$20 to 40 a suit. While wearing a suit looked uncomfortably hot, formal business attires are quickly gaining popularity in Vietnamese urban centers as they already have in many other Asian countries. Business suits symbolize socio-economic success and progress in a country where suits hardly could have been seen, acquired or afforded five years ago. At a different occasion, Tore told me that his counterparts generally dressed more formally than himself. The dress code in his home country, Norway, is generally more informal than in many Asian business settings.

¹² Drinking tea is considered an essential ritual of friendship and very common in Vietnam in connection with social gatherings such as business meetings.

Tore started off the meeting with a quick review of the company's market and financial progress for the past week. After that he turned to Hoan, gestured for him to stand up, and said:

Hoan did an excellent job on the....project last month. As you know, the supplier on the project under shipped us and Hoan took the initiative to reconnect us with a new supplier. We delivered the parts on time thanks to his initiative. I have said it before and will say it again; as long as you know what you are doing, fix any problems right there on the spot...Keep in mind Hoan's example because there have been many vendor failures and we will have opportunities to fix them before they turn into expensive affairs. We also have to make sure we get the weekly legal updates from the commerce office; the property laws changed again last week. I put a summary in your boxes. Thank you Hoan, keep it up.

Hoan, a Vietnamese man in his fifties and the oldest employee present, listened to the speech at times smiling and at other times expressionless. He nodded slightly in response to Tore's praise, but did not say anything.

In the aftermath, Tore said he performed his praise of Hoan in an informal yet public manner with two primary intentions in mind: first, he wanted to reinforce assertive behavior and empowerment in the organization; second, he sought to improve Hoan's motivation because it appeared to Tore that Hoan was becoming increasingly withdrawn and seemed to be distancing himself from Tore.¹³ Tore said he was bothered by the fact that sometimes he thought he had communicated a task clearly to Hoan, and yet later he would discover that the task had never been completed nor would he hear anymore about it from Hoan. He perceived this as a paradox because Hoan was generally a hard worker. He suspected that cultural differences or some form of miscommunication had something to do with these miscommunications, but also felt that Hoan had to learn to work within the rules of the organization. He therefore decided that positive reinforcement as well as directed requests for updates would help.

¹³ Tore's approach to both of these issues would seem appropriate according to Western participative management and empowerment theory (see Morgan 1986). As the Hawthorne studies indicated, giving a

Tore based many of his personnel development efforts on a positive reinforcement philosophy. He implemented employee of the month plaques. He announced positive employee performances in meetings. And he encouraged employees to be 'doers'. Was Tore's management and personal style congruent with the expectations and preferences of his employees? Did they achieve their intended effect?

It was in later conversation with Nam that I discovered that there existed different perspectives on organizational events and management styles among the employees. Nam was a *Viet Kieu*; he had lived twelve years in France. He was instrumental in exposing views that other native Vietnamese were not willing to talk candidly about. When the issue of conflicting views among organizational members came up, Nam commented:

I know Mr. Toee has a great challenge because there is a generation gap in this company. Young people in Vietnam have different ideas from older people because they have learned to change... Tore is trying to be a firm, but nice boss. That is good. But there are things about Vietnamese people that I don't think he has time to think about. He is always too busy to notice many of the things going on in the office... There is a saying in Vietnamese custom: people never walk too far into a raging river because they could lose their footing and get swept away by the current. Many times, Mr. Toee [Tore] make older people like Hoan and Nguyen feel embarrassed because they get a lot of attention, praise, and instruction. He tries to push them to do things they don't like. In the end they never do these things and they do not tell him because they will lose face if they don't understand, or make mistakes... They are afraid of losing their footing and getting swept away, and therefore there are certain things they do not like to do.

Hoan used to work in the government companies. People never get much attention in those places; people do what the government tells them and people always try to be invisible... People will not get into trouble if they are invisible.

Nam pointed out a desire among his colleagues to not lose face by engaging in unfamiliar or attention-getting activities. Am's comments furthermore revealed the collective nature of Vietnamese culture transplanted in the organizational setting; Vietnamese persons may prefer to have an identity as part of a mass or group of employees rather than individual accountability. Tore's attempts to focus on individual success was somewhat in conflict with these values. Yet Tore had the advantage of his position and socio-political status as an outsider which gave him special political privileges in terms of determining the dominant corporate values.

Nam elaborated about the winds of change in Vietnam:

Vietnam will change. Things usually don't happen very fast in Vietnam because everything is slow and old. Old people have to step down soon. Many young people want to change things. People want to make money, buy a house, and buy cars. Mr. Toee is helping us learn business and to make money...Mr. Toee is good because he is making everyone think for themselves and he can make things happen. He wants every person to make money, but the old people are not interested in taking any chances or trying new things. They don't want to change their old ways, and accuse us of being corrupted by American culture.

Nam's statements illustrated the generation gap emerging in Vietnam with an emerging market economy. Perhaps his comments also reflected a certain enthusiasm about Tore as role model or a respect for Tore as a boss. My impression was that Nam's taste of France and European consumer markets and cultures had increased his desire for elevated living standards, consumerism, and pop culture. There are also many among the older generation who have seized economic opportunities that have welcomed more liberalism with *Doi Moi*. Yet there are also many who have resisted the dramatic changes and questioned the wisdom of the changes going on in Vietnamese society today. But even in the case of Nam, my observations and his own statements indicated that he did not wish to bring up or interfere with these different perspectives about new and old. He considered them as realities which no one really could change; it was just a matter of waiting.

Despite Nam's articulated high regard for Tore's attempt to create an assertive organizational culture based on Western values, Nam was bound by the Vietnamese language and customs to practice filial piety in relation to his senior peers. He said, "I have to follow Vietnamese customs when Mr. Toee leaves the office or when I meet with customers. Customs are very important in Vietnam. But Mr. Toee does not care if I follow customs." Nam was operating in different and ambivalent cultural environments. This seems to be becoming an increasingly common phenomena in Vietnamese society as more and more people strive to educate themselves and achieve economic success. Diversity in culture and knowledge grows with this process, as do cross-cultural encounters. Nam talked about changing from old to new, but he could not tear himself completely away from norms guiding behavior. For instance, he indicated that openly questioning the actions of his seniors by starting conflicts with them was a very unfortunate thing to do. His form of address in relation to Tore, "Mr. Toee", furthermore reflected a kind of formality appropriate for addressing seniors within the traditional Vietnamese social hierarchy. This was counter to Tore's intention because he felt he knew people well enough to be addressed informally by his first name. As a counter-point to his previous statements Nam said, "You will have problems Vietnam if you do not know Vietnamese customs because you will offend people."

Nam strove toward Western concepts of independence, financial success, and pop culture, yet he knew that he could not fully realize this ambition within the Vietnamese context. In his statements and forms of address, he demonstrated respect and power distance toward his seniors as would be expected in the practice of filial piety and hierarchical relations.

Hoan gave me yet another perspective different from Tore and Nam's. My interview with Hoan was challenging because I had problems establishing what I considered as a good interviewing relationship. I was unable to obtain a lot the information I had hoped to get from Hoan. We ran into our own cross-cultural difficulties in the interview, an

experience that provided me with a learning process different than I first had expected. In retrospect it is not unlikely that he was practicing uncertainty avoidance by avoiding a conversations around sensitive issues with a person with unknown motives and intentions. In addition, I also had an informal friendship with Tore that may have discouraged Hoan from discussing sensitive issues openly. He may have been concerned that sensitive information would get back to Tore and result in uncertain consequences.

Hoan did not reveal any displeasure or concerns in relation to the Monday morning meeting nor in relation to in relation to Tore's leadership style. He said, "the meeting is extremely critical for our business because we share information about every project. It is possible for our company to lose money if we do not make sure that we are in control of our sales and technical activities all the time. We get good information every week and do our jobs better." Hoan painted an incredibly positive picture of the organization; I could not pick out a single negative element from his statements. He always referred to himself in the company setting in terms of a collective group. He avoided responding directly to questions relating to his own progress in the company, the conflict issues, the existence of differing values, and face relations, issues Nam had talked about. This could be interpreted in several different ways: (1) Hoan was protecting his company from criticism; (2) he was protecting Tore, his superior, from criticism; (3) he did not truly have an opinion about these issues; or (4) he was purposely avoiding them because he felt they were inappropriate or uncomfortable issues to talk directly about with a researcher. These patterns generally fit the differential mode of association whereby the interest of differential relations and face issues are withdrawn from the scrutiny of strangers. If Hoan had revealed sensitive information about his own opinions to a stranger such as myself, this could have resulted in uncertain outcomes and damaged his role as an accepted member in and beyond the company. From a cultural perspective, he had no reason or motivation for volunteering the information I wanted.

I thus experienced my own cross-cultural dynamic with Hoan as I tried to obtain information from him that he considered inappropriate to share with me. Based on Hoan's

answers to various questions I discovered a pattern whereby Hoan answered future-directed questions with present-tense answers. In some cases he seemed to disqualify questions as irrelevant by giving objective or non-personal answers. The frustrations I experienced in this processes were significantly fueled by my Western biases and expectations. I was expecting Hoan to give personal answers and insights as people socialized in Western cultures frequently would do. For people socialized in a Western culture, such as Tore and to a certain degree Nam, a willingness to discuss personal issues is more dependent on individual judgment and preference than collective considerations. Norwegians' socialization in a organizational mode of association also makes it culturally acceptable to discuss personal issues with strangers. I was basing my line of inquiry on these kinds of assumptions within a differential culture, and as should be expected, with mixed success. Hoan was not socialized in a Western culture and my inquiries were probably counter-productive in building more familiarity or trust between us. I realized that no matter what research strategy I adopted, cultural differences would prevent me from getting the information I wanted in this situation. Eventually, I shifted my interview strategy by focusing on more general issues that perhaps would help me to learn about more general Vietnamese perceptions about work.

I asked Hoan if he thought leaders in Vietnam practiced the same leadership style as those from other countries. He said, "leaders must know their people well and must make sure they work hard and are satisfied. The Vietnamese people have had many good leaders...we do what they say because we know what they say is important. Vietnamese people are very effective because they follow their leaders." On one hand, Hoan's statement supported a view of Vietnamese culture as hierarchical. Yet on the other hand, Tore had previously told me that Hoan was not completing all his assigned tasks, nor following them up. Why was he not acting consistently with his articulated work philosophies? My impression was that Hoan liked Tore; perhaps there was something else that fueled this contradiction.

My conversation with Hoan also touched on issues of competition and cooperation in the company. He said that the company had to compete with other companies to establish a market. But his prescription for the office setting was one focusing on high productivity, loyalty and cooperation. Hoan said, “everyone must know their place in the office. This office is like the traffic in the street, it is often chaotic, but it never stops because everyone must know their place, how to avoid hitting other people, and where they are going.” His statement was descriptive because somehow traffic in Saigon rarely stops despite chaos and low safety standards. Visitors in Vietnam often find the traffic frightening because they have not been socialized into the “culture” of Vietnamese traffic patterns. Hoan used a traffic accident as an example of what could happen if people did not follow the unspoken traffic rules in Vietnam. His story is a good metaphor for culture. Hoan’s comments emphasized a preference for predictable or controlled roles and conditions in the office environment, despite occasional chaos. He thought competition and conflict seemed more acceptable beyond this setting. Hoan’s preference for conflict avoidance was similar to Nam’s, although their perspectives on stability versus change were in opposition.

Discussion

There were different perspectives existing alongside what appeared at first sight to be a homogeneous and harmonious corporate culture in the company. Tore said he was remotely aware that there were some cultural differences being played out in the organization, but he chose to go full steam ahead with his own and the company’s prescriptions for work rules, personnel development, and business values. Hoan and some of the others played roles that satisfactorily met Tore’s expectations, although there were signals particularly from Hoan and also from others that indicated miscommunication and differing work style preferences. Meanwhile, Nam was navigating somewhere in the middle of these social dynamics. He conformed to various Vietnamese customs and rules, at least when interacting with other Vietnamese. But he also desired many of the benefits

of a Western lifestyle. There was thus a kaleidoscope of meanings, assumptions, and needs floating around and some times bouncing against each other in the office. Some of these were covert and thus difficult to discern while others were talked about in the open.

I mapped a number of cultural frames and cultural configurations in the organization in the form of corporate culture, part-cultures, and organizations as a meetings place of cultures. Among these configurations were: (1) the generation gap seemed to illuminate transfusions of Western values in Nam's socialization while the senior associates had a stronger commitment to traditional Vietnamese values such as of hierarchy, the differential mode of association, and face; (2) several individuals' work and intellectual histories had influenced the secondary socialization of persons. For instance, Nam was influenced by his experience with government bureaucracies and factories while Tore was influenced by his company's values; (3) Tore attempted to create a corporate culture which reflected his own and the company's values; and (4) Vietnamese and Norwegian cultures met in the setting. This mapping revealed frames of the organization as a corporate culture and as a meeting place of cultures. There was also a strong ambiguity caused by the complex interaction between cultural frames and their complex histories and ties outside the organizational setting. This mapping and its complex distribution in the organizational setting, showed that the organizational members were not a homogenous cultural group, and that their private and public "realities" were based on different socialization experiences.

Tore attempted to impose his and the company's "reality" and meanings of organizational life on the other staff. He was convinced that he was doing the others a favor by transferring his knowledge and experience of how things work in business. To a certain degree one can argue that he was doing them such a favor, but it was conducted on his terms. In doing so, he reinforced a cultural power dynamic that created a distance between himself and the others that in turn was causing him some frustration. For instance, his inflexibility in terms of company practices and tendency to discuss personal issues bluntly sometimes appeared to intimidate other organizational members. A power

dynamic was created when he initiated situations on his terms in which he was comfortable while others were not. He was free to impose upon others his ideas and solutions. However, he was not free to determine what people thought about these ideas nor how they reacted to them. He wanted to achieve relationships with low power distances and individualistic assertiveness, but experienced that he was working in opposition with strong values developed through life-long socialization experiences in Vietnamese culture and a resulting trust gap. Various members aligned themselves differently to Tore's influence because their socialization experiences and resulting concepts of self motivated different reactions to his leadership style. Nam was flexible and open to changes, although he was not prepared to accept the social consequences of such changes. Perhaps he was acting according to a "front-stage" behavior mode? Hoan was perhaps less enthusiastic about the process of change.

I learned from the research experience that it is difficult to develop an understanding of other people's sense of self, particularly over short periods of time. My discussions with different persons and related observations in the company helped me to at least begin to discern different concepts of self. Tore saw himself and the organizational environment in terms of equal opportunity and success for those who did a consistently good job, as is common in Norway. He wanted to trust everyone equally and felt that everyone should be able to operate effectively in accordance with proven professional values and corporate culture. Tore expected an individualistic and assertive sense of self operating according to an organizational mode of association among his employees.

Hoan on the other hand, played a "front-stage" role in the organizational setting to simulate values and behavior that initially seemed quite different than would be expected from a person socialized in a differential mode of association. Aspects of this behavior is best explained as a reaction to Tore's intended and unintended uses of power, and as a strategy to save and maintain face. Although Hoan created a social impression of himself in relation to others that was somewhat in accord with Tore's stated expectations, by for instance adopting an assertive personal style at times, he did not seem prepared to follow

this process through if it resulted in significant conflicts with his own primary values and preferences. By not pursuing tasks he saw as potentially threatening he avoided potential conflicts. Front-stage behavior was not initiated through the interpersonal dynamics in this particular case alone, however. Front stage behavior is a common part of the differential mode of association in Vietnam and is used for status building and maintaining face in many different social situations.

Nam's sense of self shifted depending on the social context and situation. This shifting occurred depending on whether he was interacting with foreigners or Vietnamese persons, and who these people were. His socialization experiences and values indicated a concept of self that could operate within Western and Vietnamese cultural contexts. However, his social reality was imbedded in the Vietnamese social context when I met him, and he operated primarily on values I associated with high power distance, collectivity, and uncertainty avoidance.

The management techniques applied by Tore in the company were, according to him, intended to foster goal-oriented, assertive, individually motivated behavior among organizational members. His approach was built on participative management strategies, compensation structures rewarding individual performance, empowerment methods encouraging autonomy and assertiveness, and open information exchange. These methods were transferred from the Western cultural context into the Vietnamese context with uncertain results as my discussion of cultural differences has indicated.

I also made an observation in relation the technique used to organize the work environment. The office was organized according to values of privacy and individualistic work styles. This is a common form of organization in sales-oriented organizations, however, further consideration could have been invested to analyze its appropriateness in the Vietnamese context. A more open space solution would have been more in accord with the social and collective norms commonly found in the Vietnamese work setting.

These different techniques and their results were arguably not adapted to the local cultural context. Some employees considered the outcomes and promises of these techniques attractive because they offered opportunities for economic and social status. Other employees felt uncomfortable about these arrangements. The techniques were used by Tore intentionally or unintentionally as instruments of power to organize and control work in the company. A number of points could be criticized in relation to management techniques: they were based on Western values; they were implemented by Tore without careful consideration of how practices could be adapted to the local context; and there was little consideration of the possibility that the techniques themselves could be the cause of social tensions in the company. Tore's approach to egalitarianism was in other words ambivalent: he wanted to invite people to participate in work related activities, yet he also did not compromise in terms of corporate culture and work values. This created a power dynamic that worked in his favor, or perhaps to everyone's disfavor in terms of work relations.

I only had a limited opportunity to observe the consequences of the implantation of Western culture and ideas in this company, but various research data demonstrated cultural differences and social tensions. Tore said "You ask them to do something; then they do something completely different. When you expect them to do something when you don't ask them; they do nothing. The idea of empowerment has been turned on its head." Nam asserted that:

Europeans work very hard, and sometimes they are very busy and do not take the time to look at many sides of a problem. Vietnamese people often like to do things their own way. They do not like strangers to tell them what to do. Vietnamese have a lot to learn; but sometimes Europeans think we know nothing. When people get mad in Vietnam they do something different than they are asked or do nothing...or maybe they only think about how they can put more money into their own pocket no matter what.

Nam thought it was possible that various forms of passive resistance were going on in relation to Tore's ideas of work and management techniques. Hoan's occasional behavior seemed to indicate this. Nam mentioned two types of tasks that often were avoided:

selling activities directed toward Western expatriates, particularly Western women; and situations where Tore's imposed guidelines or conditions that people did not agree with. Tore argued that both of these were necessarily a part of the experience of working in a company. Sometimes employees would show their displeasure by resisting in an activity not related to the source of conflict. This had happened once when Tore once had lost his temper in a discussion with an employee. The same employee started to show up almost exactly 10 minutes late for every Monday meeting several weeks after this episode, much to Tore's irritation.

Continuous inquiries into critical events and conflicts, cultural differences, and perceptual gaps relating to work and personal relations, could have had a positive effect on work relations and management styles in the company. Such inquiries would also have uncovered the forms and shapes of power in relation to people and culture in the business setting. An awareness of common Vietnamese expectations in terms of firm leadership, detailed directions, predictable tasks, and collective accountability sheds light on some of the cultural dynamics that took place in the company setting.

Case Two: Cross-cultural Relations in a Foreign Business Compound

This case study relates descriptions and reflections of conversations I had with two employees at a Norwegian oil company office in one of Saigon's suburbs. The conversations touched on several issues relating to the interaction among context, work organization, and power among other things in and around organizations. I wish to emphasize through the accounts in this case how practical aspects of establishing and operating a foreign business in Vietnam impacts cross-cultural relations.

The Foreign Business Compound

I met one of the Norwegian employees from this particular company on a tour of the famous Chu Chi Tunnels¹⁴ outside Saigon two days prior to my interviews in the company setting. He and his wife joined me and my wife on a tour through dense jungle and narrow tunnels. We had a good time and they introduced me to a popular Vietnamese beverage, the Cobra Tonic¹⁵, that was available at a specialty store nearby Chu Chi. I had previously contacted the company he worked for to arrange interviews with people there and this accidental meeting allowed me to make final arrangements for a full day visit.

I took a taxi to this company location because it was located in a foreign business zone thirty minutes by car from downtown Saigon. After my taxi backed up nearly a half mile along a highway to reach the correct exit, I finally arrived at what I thought were the company gates. They were not. I discovered that I had arrived at a restricted compound area set aside for foreign business offices. Guards at the gate stopped the taxi, but waved us through once they saw that a foreigner was sitting in it. I suspected that a Vietnamese person sitting in a similar taxi would not have gained entrance quite so easily. Nevertheless, after driving along several streets inside the compound and passing large mansion-like buildings and gardens, the taxi driver pulled into the driveway of a large French colonial style building. The receptionist called my contact who arrived two minutes later. He had set up five interview sessions for me. I will primarily refer to two of these interviews. They were with Dack and Magnus.

Dack had a large office housing bookshelves filled with folders, a desk with a PC, and a window at the end of the room with a view of the gardens outside. Dack was an engineer by trade and had taken his education as a part of an exchange program with an East German university in the mid-eighties. He was responsible for coordinating parts of

¹⁴ The Chu Chi Tunnels is an elaborate multi-level system of underground tunnels that was lived in by the Viet Cong and their families during the Vietnam War (see Jamieson 1993).

an oil exploration effort going on in the ocean areas outside the town, Vung Tau. Given the amount of paper work on his desk he seemed like a busy person. He said, “we have just received a permit to start sampling a new ocean block [ocean area]. I am working on ordering new equipment and hiring five new people...Harald [my contact] told me about your interest in learning about Vietnamese people. What do you want to discuss?” I explained my area of interest and we ended up spending two hours discussing various issues related to this thesis.

Dack said he liked the mix of foreigners and Vietnamese employees in the building. There were currently 35 employees working in this location of which 24 were Vietnamese. He said he thought work relations were generally as good as could be expected in any organization. We talked about some of the differences in how Norwegian expatriates and local Vietnamese employees live and work in Vietnam. Dack said:

This is a business zone created by the government to protect foreigners in Vietnam. I can work here between 7.30 and 17.30. If I leave after 17.30 the guards will give me trouble, and they will not let me inside the zone in the evening even if I have to get something important in my office. But I think this is a good thing because it is not safe to let everyone into this area. There are thieves and people who have no business here.

Dack was referring to a government policy in Vietnam that “protects” foreigners living there on a long-term basis. These protective measures are apparently partly motivated by a strong desire at high political levels to protect foreigners against harm and thus avoid scaring away business people and tourists. The policy is also partly motivated by the government’s attempt to restrict the scope of social interaction between residents and foreigners. Political and religious discourse is regulated by the government; foreigners’ opinions about free speech and politics can lead to arrests of both locals and even visitors if they are shared with Vietnamese citizens. Similar restrictions regulate tourism in Vietnam; they state that tourists cannot live in a private Vietnamese residence.

¹⁵ Bottles of strong liquor with a cobra curled up inside the bottle are known as cobra tonic. The drink is said to increase people’s stamina and improve sexual performance. The longer the snake is stored in the bottle the more potent the drink is said to become.

The other person I interviewed at length, Magnus, had a very different perspective on this situation. Magnus was a laid back, tall Norwegian in his late twenties. His perspective on work relations was influenced by his Norwegian values, but he was also concerned about Vietnamese views on issues because he was married to a Vietnamese woman. He and his wife lived in a small house just outside the foreign business compound. He had been exposed extensively to Vietnamese urban and rural lifestyles through his wife's family and empathized more than most expatriates with Vietnamese society and people. Magnus said:

The security measures around this area are irritating because my wife cannot visit me inside the zone because she is Vietnamese. Only Vietnamese people who have jobs or specific duties here can get inside. In the evenings there are aerobics courses, social events, and tennis here, but I cannot take my wife without a special permit. I could apply for permits, but they take several days to process.

Magnus thought every person associated with the company, including family members, should be treated equally according to certain universal ground rules. He believed all family members should have access to the offices and that Vietnamese counterparts should have after-hours access. Magnus' views reflected egalitarian values. Dack, however, accepted the current arrangement and was perhaps more tolerant to the differential treatment as a result of the high power distances in Vietnamese culture.

Throughout the majority of interviews I conducted, including this one, these polarized perceptions of differential treatment seemed to hold between people from the two cultures. However, the cross-cultural context created contradictions around the Norwegian concept of egalitarianism. Norwegians are used to a relatively higher standard of living than Vietnamese people, and this was amplified in the cross-cultural context. Norwegian expatriates enjoyed company cars, expat salary premiums, frequent restaurant visits, and high quality residences paid for by their company. I did not encounter a single Norwegian who purposely gave up these goods to eliminate economic gaps between themselves and Vietnamese people. Arguably, many of these goods and services mitigated

the stresses of living in a foreign country and culture. It is also more expensive for a foreigner to live in Vietnam because they are charged “tourist premiums” and because they lack the material support of family networks. It dawned on me, however, that the cultural value of egalitarianism was a double edged sword in the cross-cultural context. Norwegians wanted egalitarian work relations, yet the symbolic and economic aspects of their lifestyles in Vietnam were sending signals of vast differences.

Such differences automatically trigger power distances in many cultures, including the Vietnamese context. A paradox around egalitarian values in the cross-cultural context will therefore exist whenever people from economically rich countries work with people from comparatively poor countries. Salary differentials are only the visible tip of the iceberg. Many other material differences and symbolic differences inevitably develop. This problem cannot be easily solved and is not necessary a fault of people involved. People’s socialization and acquired tastes create different needs and expectations, as do the structural and historical characteristics of the context they are placed within.

My conversations with Dack and Magnus revealed that the Norwegian expatriates and their families both lived and worked inside the compound areas. Magnus perceived this as a situation where colonies of foreigners were created that had a strong inward focus and that inevitably tended to exclude local residents. Although social events and facilities were available to all employees and their families, it was nearly impossible for Vietnamese employees and their families to take advantage of these. Dack commented:

The one thing I want to do is to play golf....The golf course is over there [we stepped over to the window where Dack pointed in the direction of a golf course located inside the compound]. It is small, but not many people in Vietnam can play golf. I want learn... It is easy for those inside the zone. They can play after work every day if they want to...I have to take a holiday if I want to play.

Dack did not criticize the segregated living and social arrangements beyond mentioning occasional inconveniences, but he referred to the people living inside the compound as “those inside the zone” several times. He had apparently established a

symbolic segregation in his mind. Magnus said in his interview that most Norwegians and expatriates did not think consciously about this symbolic effect. My own observation was that the segregated living and differential access to services were caused by structural and contextual elements that in turn vested expatriates and their families with symbolic and material power in relation to Vietnamese people. This symbolic power increased their power distance in relation to Vietnamese people. Meetings and social interaction occurred at the convenience of Norwegians because they were free to come and go when they wanted to.

Another effect of the compound's structural characteristics, was a social isolation of some employees and spouses inside the compounds. Magnus said that some Norwegians at times did not leave the area for weeks. Food and basic necessities were all available inside the compound. I got the distinct feeling that it was possible to live inside of this area with a satellite dish and international newspaper delivered in the mail without being the least conscious of what was going on in the rest of Vietnam. Cooper and Cooper have shown that this form of isolation and withdrawal from social exposure increases the chances of experiencing culture shock and developing negative attitudes toward particular cultures (Cooper and Cooper 1982:198). Magnus said:

Many of the people working here brought their families with them because they plan to stay here longer than one year. It is fortunate that there are many social activities for everyone, particularly for family members who are not in active work...But I also know several people who are unhappy here and who struggle in their relationships. Some people do not have anything in common. Others sit so much indoors with air-conditioning that they think it is too hot to go outside. I don't know how anyone can stay indoors day after day. And there are few or no shopping centers, movie theaters, or cultural arrangements that a person would want to take advantage of during the days. That's why some stay indoors and become very lonely....My wife is on the other side, she lives in Vietnamese society with her family and many friends, but she wishes she could meet the families here more often.

An additional barrier that was mentioned by Dack was that of using technology as a work tool. Many Norwegians had extensive experience with the use of computers,

software, and state-of-the-art industrial technology. Vietnamese companies had until recently used comparatively outdated technologies. Dack illustrated the differences:

The first time I used *CAD* [Computer Aided Design] was last year. It is a new and better technology for us and it is good for Vietnam. Now many people are learning to use PCs in Vietnam. The Vietnamese people in this company take computer classes in the evenings and work hard to learn new technologies. I study English 3 days every week and study CAD 3 days every week.

Dack's comments in general illustrated a significant gap in knowledge and skills between Vietnamese and Norwegian employees. Norwegians generally had high-level computer skills, while Vietnamese employees studied up to 7 evenings a week to acquire basic computer skills. In addition, many Vietnamese employees studied English several evenings a week. Interestingly enough, I only encountered two Norwegians on my entire visit to Vietnam who were taking Vietnamese classes and actively trying to learn the Vietnamese language. I observed far more effort on the part of Vietnamese people to adopt to their work situation and co-workers than among Norwegians. Dack was a good example of how hard Vietnamese employees work and Magnus was the exception among Norwegians because he was married into a Vietnamese family. Norwegians exercised social power in relation to Vietnamese because of skill gaps and because Vietnamese people were the ones who had to adapt, not the foreign visitors. Vietnamese employees had to work much harder than Norwegians for less resources and less benefits.

Despite these differences Dack focused on positive aspects of his experience of working with Norwegian counterparts:

When people from the English and French offices visit they work a lot of overtime and never have time to talk. People here almost never work overtime...we take a 20 minute coffee break together before we begin work in the morning... Meetings are relaxed and informal...I like to work here because we take things easy.

Dack was referring to externalizations and customs related to the primary value of “working to live” in the work behavior of his Norwegian counterparts. I discovered that in most cases Norwegian persons valued and protected their spare time in Vietnam, even though social isolation also was a problem. They also tended to avoid large amount of stress. A tightly integrated expatriate community helped many organize and enjoy their free time through social activities. Tennis was particularly popular. Externalizations of the “working to live” value among Norwegians was mentioned by several Vietnamese people I spoke with, and it seemed to be appreciated by Vietnamese counterparts. For instance, one person told me that his new Norwegian boss was flexible about allowing employees to take time off for important obligations outside work. Dack also told me that the company had shorter work days in the summer. Although I did not survey other foreign companies on a comparative basis, my own knowledge of companies in Vietnam and Asia supports the finding that these practices were more flexible than was common and that they reflect a “working to live” value. The popularity of these practices among Vietnamese employees can be explained partly by a similar core value in Vietnamese culture where a significant amount of time is spent with family and significant others.

Discussion

This case study illustrated how various asymmetrical power relationships can emerge from contextual factors and differences in cultural values. The case showed that different forms of social power asymmetries can emerge from covert sources that are not apparent to the people placed in the setting. I was not in a position to observe the exact outcomes or consequences of my findings on work relations. However, a first important step is to establish awareness of them.

This case illustrated some of the differences between Vietnamese and Norwegian cultures and associated concepts of self. Differences in power distance were reflected in

how readily Dack and Magnus accepted differential treatment. Magnus' confrontational attitude toward unequal treatment indicated an individualistic, low power distance, and low uncertainty avoidance concept of self in relation to others and his surroundings. Dack avoided confrontational discourse and critiques. His comments indicated a higher degree of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. The case also showed an orientation in Vietnamese culture, with Dack as an example, toward pursuing status building and networking activities such as playing golf. Magnus was concerned about how he should balance his family life in relation to his work situation. Both orientations indicated a "work to live" value where social activities and their intersection with work were given a high priority.

Context was a significant factor in this case study. Public policy, structural characteristics of the setting, technology, and socio-economic differences were some among a number of contextual issues that influenced people, culture, and work organization in and around the office. Inquiries into context factors in this case showed how covert and ambiguous the relationship between cause and effect can be. Factors such as knowledge may be taken for granted in one setting, but when they are transferred into another setting they take on a different role and meaning. In this setting, knowledge became a source of power, as did differences in living arrangements and standards. The government concept behind the foreign business compound created an excluding power dynamic where freedom in choice and movement were unequal. Power asymmetries such as these can have significant material and symbolic effects on work relations, and their driving forces, be they contextual or not, are important to recognize and understand.

In terms of management methods, the participants referred to egalitarian and "work to live" strategies to organize work. This case illustrated how a strategy that might be egalitarian in one culture, may lose at least part of its intended effect when it is implemented in a different context. It also showed how intervening factors such as socio-economic differences can create contradictions that may nullify the intended purpose of such methods. For instance, although Norwegians preferred an egalitarian work

environment, they did not lead lives that supported this value orientation. Obvious differences emerged because their social life was practically imbedded in and around the work setting. Socio-economic terms and conditions created around the work setting therefore had a significant symbolic effect.

Work relations were described as positive in this setting despite asymmetries, differences and intervening contextual factors. There were a number of reasons for this apparent success: (1) recognition among members that some of the influences were beyond the company's sphere of influence; (2) the existence of cultural similarities such as "work to live" values and a tendency toward inclusive and consensus work styles in the office; and (3) a display of mutual respect. However, this relational harmony was confined to the work setting where many differences could be mitigated temporarily through a superficial corporate culture. According to the persons I interviewed this was not completely satisfying because they all had strong social bonds that transcended the work setting. Future efforts at developing work relations could therefore intensify the focus on factors such as context that transcend the organizational setting.

Case three: Vietnamese-Norwegian Networking and Negotiations

The Setting

The third case study was set in and around a Norwegian shipping company's representative office in Vietnam. The office was established in 1991 and had been managed since its conception by Olav, a Norwegian. Olav had completed his education in economics only a couple of years before coming to Vietnam to establish and maintain a service program with local shipping and harbor companies. Kiet was Olav's Vietnamese counterpart in the office. His thick American accent gave away his history as a *Viet Kieu*

from America. Kiet traveled to Vietnam to find work and to meet relatives in 1990 after *Doi Moi* had been initiated. Olav hired Kiet primarily because of his bilingual ability and foreign experience and they had worked closely together nearly four years when I spoke with them. They had become experienced Vietnamese negotiators and service providers through a “Step-by-step trial and error process,” as Kiet referred to it. The early entry of the company into Vietnam had established it as one of the oldest foreign companies in its market.

I first met Olav and Kiet at their office in downtown Saigon. We spent a couple of hours together discussing the challenges of doing business in Vietnam in an open reception area furnished with dark hand carved Vietnamese chairs and tables. Cold cokes were served by Olav. I soon discovered that the office was unusually hot despite the existence of a humming fan in the ceiling. Unlike most other foreign offices in Vietnam, this office did not have air-conditioning. Nor was it upgraded to the more modern standards of offices currently being built in Saigon; its dark and simple interior was “ghost” of the budget interior styles commonly used during the communist era. In our conversations, Olav caught my interest when he told me that he felt he had been too long in Vietnam, had accomplished too little, and was tired of living in Vietnam. He was frustrated by what he perceived as difficult operating conditions and unreliable people. He had recently made a decision to leave Vietnam soon as a result of these difficulties. The interviews with Olav and Kiet proved useful in illustrating many of the negative stereotypes and views of Vietnamese society that frequently are developed among foreigners with negative experiences.

Olav was a short man in his late twenties. He was informally dressed in slacks and a shirt that was unbuttoned at the top. His blond hair and blue eyes were a striking contrast to the dark complexion of Kiet sitting next to him. Kiet was also dressed in informal business attire, and I sensed that this dress code was the office norm. Olav was eager to describe his personal experiences in Vietnam in great detail. He openly admitted he was frustrated about working in Saigon. He said:

When I first came here I had a hard time finding out how things work or how to get things done. I learned that this quickly changes when you start networking with key people in town who can help you get things done...The funny thing is that now that I have been here four years it seems I am returning to where I started; I'm having a hard time getting things done or getting other people to do things for me. And I know why; people know that I will be leaving soon. They know that there will not be any more money forthcoming from me so now they have stopped caring. Time after time I am reminded of how Vietnamese are only interested in money...There is a lot of back-stabbing in business here. I have left things up to Kiet now because he still has good relations with many important people.

Olav had completed a cycle in Vietnamese culture as a foreigner. He had started out as a stranger in Vietnamese society, a vulnerable social position in Vietnamese culture. In time and with considerable effort, he successfully established a position and identity in various important business and social networks because he was perceived as a source of money and as more of a permanent resident than most foreigners. When he started to approach the end of his stay in Vietnam, however, he was no longer perceived as a future source of money because local people knew he was planning to leave Vietnam. Olav added, "you think you have reached an understanding with someone and that you are at friendly terms with them, but suddenly, they drop the bomb on you [he meant that they trick you] and never show their face again."

From a Vietnamese perspective, Olav's departure meant that he could not be entirely trusted because social mobility is perceived as a means of escaping social and economic accountability. Olav was a risk element from a differential mode of association perspective. This mainly concerned friendships in business dealings. In retrospect, Olav said he regretted telling anyone he was leaving.

Kiet nodded in agreement with Olav and said:

It is hard to do business in Vietnam because people are always trying to make more money. They will do almost anything to get it. Some people are very greedy because they are poor and want to become rich. And some are rich and

want to become richer. They think foreigners and foreign companies always have a lot of money, and will try to get it...But many times they don't make good plans and get into trouble. If they find out that you do not have money, you never see them again...In one of our business proposals to a Vietnamese company we offered to create twenty new jobs for Vietnamese people. They were not interested because there was no investment money involved. The politicians did not bother to authorize the project because no money was going into their pockets. We tried to create new jobs, but the politicians and people rejected them!

What Kiet and Olav described as economic opportunism can be explained in terms of the differential mode of association; strangers may have a tendency to be exploited because they do not have a permanent place within the social reality of Vietnamese persons. It is common in Vietnam to use the resources or influence gained from this exploitation in business dealings to build status and face in differential networks around more permanent relations. This behavior is not necessarily perceived as exploitation per se in Vietnam though; it is often viewed as a valid effort to fulfill social obligations, build face, and to elevate the status of the family. Officially, the government has condemned such practices, but unofficially they go on everywhere, also among government officials. Kiet said:

There is a saying I want to tell you...*con voi, coui cho* [up on the elephant, down at the bottom with the dogs]. People believe that when they are rich they are riding on the elephant. But after a family is rich for some time, it will always become poor for some time and it must live with the dogs. It is not good to be poor, people have been poor in Vietnam for a long time and are tired of it. That is why people always try to make more money; they think the time has come to make a lot of money.

Olav felt that certain moral standards should be adhered to in business wherever one goes in the world. He expected people "to walk their talk", that is, to do as they say. Olav demonstrated what many of the other interviewees I also talked to were concerned about, they frequently feel that people in Vietnam are unpredictable and not entirely truthful with them. These negative stereotypes can be explained in terms of different cultural conceptions of what "truth" entails and means. "Truth" is a more "flexible" and situationally determined concept in Vietnam compared to Norway where there is a strong

tendency to equate truth with objective facts that remain the same across contexts. For instance, in conversations Vietnamese people may leave out information that holds the potential of starting a conflict or that could result in the loss of face for oneself or a significant other such as a boss or family member. Norwegians have a tendency to perceive this “editing” of information as immoral because they feel that it is wrong to withhold important or material facts. They furthermore expect issues to be confronted through disclosure, not avoided. And finally, they generally welcome some degree of conflict because it is perceived as a healthy process for avoiding complacency. These expectations reflect values that are typical of the Western heritage: the search for truth; rational inquiry; focus on progress through change and conflict (see Brøgger 1993). Although Vietnamese society is also going through rapid changes, people still value stability and values associated with face relations. These differences in frames of reference and meaning demonstrate how easy it is to miscommunicate and misunderstand other people in relatively simple business dealings.

Kiet was experiencing somewhat similar frustrations, despite his Vietnamese heritage. He said.

Negotiations are tricky in Vietnam. One day your customer smiles at you, has lunch with you, and tells you that you are the one they want to do business with. The next day they do the same thing over again with someone else. They make a decision one day, but change their mind the next... When I ask them if a certain cargo is ready, they often answer answer ‘*chua*’[not yet]. It is easy for them to answer *chua*, but it’s frustrating for us because we are often unable to get firm commitments and that’s why we can never take anything for granted...They have a hard time making commitments, take a long time to reach decisions...It’s hard for us to assess our position because people are experts at back-stabbing us when we least expect it. They squeeze you to see if you have some soft points. If they find them;they’ll squeeze as hard as they can. If you can hide your soft spots; they will have more respect, but that is difficult to do.

Although Kiet was at least partly socialized in Vietnamese culture, he obviously saw many issues in Vietnam through the lens of an outsider. Kiet seemed pessimistic in many ways about current business conditions. This pessimism may have resulted from

comparisons he made with more structured legal conditions in the U.S. and perhaps a secondary socialization effect from working with Olav.

Olav admitted that he had developed into a self-declared pessimist about doing business in Vietnam. He said:

Looking back I know I made one big mistake. I thought I communicated on the same level as our counterparts because we had the similar technical backgrounds. I thought I could develop good relations with Vietnamese people by sticking to good solid shipping talk. I was wrong. This worked with some people, but there are many people in this business in Vietnam who do not have a lot of experience. They didn't know what I was talking about, and seemed to care more about eating and drinking, and talking about irrelevant things. As I later discovered, you have to be very patient with people here and you have to show them a good time... We got burned on this one time when we were in the final steps of negotiating a contract. One of the finalizing meetings were being held in our office. We got straight to the point with no fancy social arrangements out of respect for the client's time. After the meeting we found out that we did not get the contract because a competitor had taken them to a lavish lunch and drinks. It's funny how these things work.

There may have been numerous contributing factors that led to the loss of the contract Olav talked about, however, it is likely that his rational Western business perspective was a major part of it. Most people socialized in Vietnam are less concerned about time than about networking, status building, and activities associated with the differential mode of association. Hall describes this difference as monochronic versus polychronic cultural orientations (see Hall 1976:150). Olav's approach to meetings would have been appreciated in Norway because it was pragmatic and economic, but it was too direct and task-oriented for the Vietnamese cultural context. Their competitor apparently understood the importance of face building and reciprocal strategies and successfully won the contract at least partly because of this cultural knowledge.

Both Olav and Kiet said they had learned from this experience. In retrospect, Kiet had recognized their mistake. He said, "I did not say anything because I was learning from Olav and he was the boss. Olav later told me he had expected me to react. We

misunderstood each other's expectations." Kiet had since then adopted a more aggressive role in identifying and managing these kinds of social arrangements. However, he said: "sometimes we are eager to complete contract arrangements and it becomes easy to overlook important details."

Olav originally hired Kiet to strategize approaches to cultural challenges such as these, yet Kiet admitted he was overwhelmed by this task at times:

I did not know that there are many problems for Viet Kieu when I returned to Vietnam. But many people don't like us because we left after the war and many of us got rich in other countries while those who stayed were poor. I understand why some people are angry; I have seen many Viet Kieu come here with all their money to show it off. Many of them hardly speak English, even if they lived in America for fifteen years. But they speak English in Vietnam to show off...When I started to work for this company I did not have good work experience in Vietnam. I did not know the culture well because I left Hue [a city in Vietnam] when I was young, and I did not know that many people do not like me because I am Viet Kieu. I had to work very hard because I was young and did not have much family to help me here. It was easier to work in Los Angeles, but now it is good here too.

Many foreign companies in Vietnam had hired *Viet Kieu* as go-betweens and negotiators because these people have extensive exposure to both Western and Vietnamese cultures. However, many of these companies and the *Viet Kieu* themselves discovered that the transition back to Vietnam was a formidable social challenge. Attitudes toward *Viet Kieu* were often sharp and bitter among Vietnamese residents because they considered *Viet Kieu* cowards. Kiet told me that many *Viet Kieu* lack important networks of family and friends that Vietnamese build over a lifetime to survive socially and economically in Vietnamese society. It is a considerable social handicap to not have such ties. Many of the *Viet Kieu* are, however, highly educated and assertive individuals and manage to establish themselves in Vietnam through hard work. Others use economic power to establish themselves, although as Olav's case illustrated, this form of socio-economic positioning is perceived as superficial and impermanent because it is based on money. There must also be ties of permanence, face building in relation to others, and

reciprocity. Kiet had managed to develop a sizable network of contacts within local companies and government institutions as a result of his hard work, family contacts, and his interest in establishing a career and family in Vietnam.

Kiet emphasized the importance of developing relations with people in key government and administrative functions:

It took us at least twice as long to do business before we established good contacts in government bureaus. People in government jobs only earn thirty dollars a month so they prioritize who they will help according to what kinds of favors people offer them or what their relationships are. When they get project or enterprise requests [from businesses] they have not heard about, they often do not bother to look at them...We had to develop contacts in many different offices and companies to make sure that our contracts would be approved on time. I discovered that Vietnamese business and government are very corrupt. Government people want to make just as much money as people in private companies so they ask business people to split the profits with them. Many people in Vietnam think this is fair, but the government does not like it...It's up to yourself to know the people who will help you get things arranged and approved.

Olav added that he thought that things would stay this way until the whole legal, political, and economic system changed. "Vietnam will not be economically successful until the political system changes and new business laws are implemented. Olav had in many ways "stamped" the Vietnamese system as hopeless and incompatible with his views of what constitutes a good business environment. True, Vietnam has been described by the media as a very difficult place to conduct business because the political and legal infrastructure to support it is weak and constantly being revised without notification (Schwartz 1995). However, Olav demonstrated how easy it is to judge people [or a people] as a result of "negative experiences" with unfamiliar political and economic infrastructure.

Structural characteristics such as much lower salaries in public than private sector, motivate certain kinds of behavior such as corruption. Corruption should therefore be seen as a response to structure on one hand, and the operation of people and culture within and

beyond this structure on the other hand. An understanding of the motivation behind corruption emerges when we uncover the vast salary asymmetries between public and private jobs within the Vietnamese socio-economic context. This understanding increases when we discover that most of the educated people in Vietnam are working in low paid government jobs while uneducated self-made business men are making many times government employee salaries (Schwartz 1995). Education and government jobs no longer hold the status they once did because status is increasingly dependent on having adequate economic resources. When we in addition place this situation within a status, face, and differential culture, a rationale for accumulating resources through alternative means is created. People often turn to nepotism and corruption, which when we think about it, are compatible with the dominant frames of reference in Vietnamese culture. Bureaucratic management techniques have been used to reduce nepotism and corruption through history in Vietnamese society and institutions. These attempts have frequently been unsuccessful though because people in Vietnam define their social reality in terms of relations, not organizations.

Olav and Kiet had learned their lessons and become more experienced negotiators. However, I left the interview feeling that both of them held many negative opinions and values that must have worked against their trade mission in Vietnam.

Discussion

My conversations with Kiet and Olav focused on many of the negative perceptions and stereotypes that foreigners hold in relation to Vietnamese people and society. They also illustrated the vast differences between business environments in Western countries and Vietnam. My own observation was that many of their negative views had been reinforced by negative experiences they had had as with government institutions and select

business dealings. Both Olav and Kiet had experiences which can be put in perspective of cultural frames, concepts of self, socialization, context, and management techniques.

The primary cultural frame that made itself present in this case was the meeting of Norwegian and Vietnamese macro-cultures. Kiet also brought with him experiences from American culture. The case illustrated how fundamental philosophical and value orientations, such as progress versus stability and search for truth versus conflict avoidance, differ in these cultures. The case also demonstrated different assumptions behind differential and organizational modes of association. This was for example demonstrated through Olav's attempt to provide task oriented service to his clients, as a person socialized in an organizational mode of association and monochronic culture would do. However, the case showed that his client may have found relational building more important in business dealings.

Olav struggled with the complexity of culture when he assumed that he could talk to Vietnamese counterparts in a "shipping language". The shipping business and profession has its own professional culture, language, and meanings, and it is easy to assume that others in the business share these. However, from a contextual standpoint, Vietnam has been closed off from the international shipping industry for nearly two decades, and significant differences in professional micro-cultures therefore exist. Education within this business in Vietnam has also been limited. Furthermore, secondary socialization within a this professional culture constitutes only a small portion of a person's cumulative socialization experiences, and large variations in competency and meanings therefore exist. Olav made large assumptions based on his own experiences, but did not consider how different socialization experiences influence systems of meaning such as language.

In terms of concepts of self, Olav and Kiet seemed to have different orientations, although I will be careful in interpreting them too much because my contact with them was short. Olav was used to orienting himself in relation to others in the organizational mode of association. He was frustrated by the effect his mobility and pragmatic approach

had on his acceptance in Vietnamese culture. Olav managed to integrate into the Vietnamese differential social networks only on a superficial and impermanent basis as a result of his economic offerings. He discovered that Vietnamese social networks can be excluding and difficult for foreigners to break into. His experience is not uncommon, and it reflects the frustration Westerners frequently encounter when they attempt to orient their sense of self in a differential culture. Olav was thus unable to shed his “cultural baggage and identity” even though he wanted to do this.

Kiet told me he understood American and Vietnamese cultures well. Adapting to Vietnamese society, however, had been a hard learning and development experience for him the first years, and he had still not been able to eliminate the negative social impacts his personal history as a *Viet Kieu*. Although Kiet was able to operate more effectively within Vietnamese society than most foreigners, he struggled with barriers created by a historical context and his own history that he could not change. Despite this categorization of him based on history, Kiet seemed intent on establishing himself as a successful business and family person in Vietnam. His ability to operate in accordance with his social position in Vietnamese society, to build face for himself and others, and to demonstrate that his presence was more than transitional, will be some of the factors that will influence his acceptance in Vietnam in the future. Kiet’s struggle seems typical among many *Viet Kieu* returning to Vietnam, and the significance of it has been underestimated by foreign employers.

The context that the representative office was placed in had a significant impact on Olav and Kiet’s experiences. Large socio-economic asymmetries between public and private employment coupled with cultural features such as the focus on status building, fueled corruption, nepotism, and this trend also motivated a brain drain from the public to the private sector. The rapidly changing political situation and the poorly developed and changing legal frameworks are among other factors that indirectly impact business relations. Olav was socialized in a country where legal and political systems follow consistent rules across contexts and situations. These systems have not developed to an

international legal standard in Vietnam. Foreigners must find various ways to cope with and work within these systems. Judging foreign legal systems according to home country standards is not a valid basis for evaluation.

Careful consideration of historical context is important in explaining the underdeveloped state of the country's infrastructure, perceptions of *Viet Kieu*, and socio-economic disparities. Although these contextual factors may seem obvious, their interplay with cultural dynamics revealed how connections between culture and context can produce unfamiliar and surprising results for both foreign business people and local people.

In terms of management techniques, the interaction between structure, context, and culture proved most interesting in this case. Kiet related experiences about people working in government bureaucracies and how the bureaucratic methods and associated salary asymmetries at least partly motivated people to turn to alternative means of income. This form of behavior could be interpreted as reactions to bureaucratic structures and salary policies. The point to be observed lies not in criticizing these structures or management techniques in themselves, but in noting the resulting behavior in this particular context. Management techniques implemented in particular social settings produce particular outcomes.

This concludes the case study from the representative office. The case demonstrated how cultural and context factors impact cross-cultural business relations. It shows that in many cases, even the most stringent efforts may not result in success and acceptance across cultures. This lesson may serve as a good starting point and assumption when entering into cross-cultural settings. It also shows how easy it is to judge other cultures in terms of one's own. This tendency cannot be eliminated, but it can be mitigated. The degree of success in foreign locations most likely varies depending on an individual's ability to understand and respect local culture and customs. When foreigners cannot find a place in local people's social structures and there is no direct need for them, then efforts to

achieve acceptance may be nearly impossible. Knowing this may help in at least setting realistic expectations and establishing an understanding about the experience of working in Vietnam. It is unlikely that such knowledge will change the Vietnamese people and their behavior, and I would argue that it must be the visitors in Vietnam who must accept a large part of the burden of adapting.

Chapter Summary

The three case studies presented in this chapter described and analyzed experiences of Norwegians and Vietnamese working together in Vietnam. Analysis of their experiences in terms of the cultural frames, the self and socialization, context, and management techniques domains, revealed multiple perspectives and angles that were used to explain various cultural phenomena. These cases were used as examples of how cultural analysis can be used in and across organizational settings, but also demonstrated that it is necessary to move beyond theoretical frameworks to achieve situationally relevant interpretations. I will discuss my experience of applying theory and its link to holistic analysis in the conclusion of this thesis. The conclusion will show how case study interpretations revealed cultural knowledge which dominant management models otherwise would have missed.

Findings and Reflections

The preceding theory and case studies constitute an attempt to develop and demonstrate an approach for interpreting cross-cultural work relations. I have shown that a higher degree of holism in the analysis of people, culture, and work organization can be accomplished through the application of a interdisciplinary paradigm in contrast to the application of dominant models alone. Each theoretical perspective constitutes a “lens” through which we capture a slightly different side of the same story. Without a diversity of such lenses, each of which should have relevance, we increase the chances of not understanding persons and events around us. I started out this thesis with a quote from Agar and wish to reemphasize it again, “you cannot pick up rocks in a field without a theory” (Agar 1980:23). Theories help us focus on important elements of issues, although they can also prevent us from seeing if we adhere to them too strictly. As a result of theoretical positioning in this thesis, a number of central “rocks” were discovered in the case studies that otherwise would not have been obvious to a foreigner in Vietnam. In this chapter I present these “rocks” as findings about Vietnamese-Norwegian work relations. I also discuss what the meaning of what is Vietnamese or Norwegian is in cultural terms in context of practical uses and managing people in organizations. Finally, I conclude with questions that position the reader for further inquiries and research efforts about people, culture and work organization cross-culturally.

One of the main purposes of inquiring into the relations between people, culture, and work organization is to develop knowledge that helps us increase our understanding about relational dynamics in particular settings and in general. As I have argued in this thesis, analysis of the domains of cultural configurations, self and socialization, context, and management techniques constitutes one possible way of accomplishing this task. By

conducting contextual and case analysis in terms of these domains and beyond, I have arrived at a number of findings about work relations in the Vietnamese-Norwegian organizational setting. These findings are congruent with the findings of other authors¹⁶, although some details differ because similar studies have not been conducted in Vietnamese-Norwegian settings (see Bond 1986; Hsu 1981; Brøgger 1993; Fei 1992). The findings are as follows:

Finding 1: Vietnamese are collectively oriented while Norwegians emphasize self determination and individuality. Although Vietnamese participants spoke in terms of “I” and self in English, their actions and discourse reflected a collective orientation. The study showed how participants desired collective recognition and harmony. Consensus seeking in conversations was common and criticism uncommon. This is not to say that conflicts did not exist; they were generally covered up as much as possible to avoid build rather than lose face. The Norwegians were concerned about the individual’s rights and right to articulate and defend these. The collective elements of Norwegian culture were not reflected particularly well in the research results. This discrepancy can be partly explained as a result of the context and setting; Norwegians were not operating in a typical Norwegian reference group and were not subjected to social pressures common in Norway. Several Norwegians also became “loners” in Vietnam. The tendency toward consensus-building was still present among Norwegians in Vietnam, but cultural differences, socio-economic stratification, and differences in power distance, reduced the function of this norm in the Vietnamese setting. In practical terms, the Norwegian professional in Vietnam should consider how management techniques and work design can be organized around Vietnamese collective values. This could for example be accomplished through group incentives instead of individual incentives. The Vietnamese professional in turn, should be aware of a tendency among Norwegians to work

¹⁶ Note that these authors were primarily concerned with Chinese culture and customs. This study confirmed that there are close cultural parallels between Chinese and Vietnamese cultures, although the identify of people in the two countries differ significantly. The authors were also primarily concerned with Western culture in terms of American society. Divergences in relation to Norwegian culture were accounted for.

independently and to make their own personal decisions. For instance, Norwegians typically like to participate in making decisions that affect them.

Finding 2: Both Vietnamese and Norwegians are motivated by “work to live” values, although the meanings that drive this value are not the same. Many Vietnamese worked fifteen-hour days that included language and self-study courses. This hard work was motivated and aimed toward building status and wealth. Although Vietnamese placed valued on achievement at work, this value was motivated by a social pressure to achieve success in family and reciprocal relations. Success at work meant success for the whole family. Norwegians prioritized their families, spare time, and private lives above the activity of working. I observed, however, that a lack of social networks motivated some Norwegians to adopt lifestyles that placed work as an end in itself. This prioritization is not common in Norway, but in the Vietnamese setting this behavior can be explained as a reaction to changes in social climates and a certain degree of social alienation. The practical implication of this finding is that professionals from both cultures should maintain an awareness of organizational members’ social and personal needs. Allowing time for social activities or sports and making it possible for employees to take time off for personal activities are possible strategies that could fulfill some of the work to live needs of organizational members. In addition, the role of social activities in building business relations should also be carefully considered.

Finding 3: In business, Vietnamese focus most on relational building while Norwegians focus most on tasks and results. Comments from Vietnamese research participants and lessons learned among Norwegian participants indicated that business in Vietnam happens through human networks. Contract negotiations, public approvals, and locating key contacts, depended on knowing the right people and maintaining good relations with them. This in turn required a good understanding of Vietnamese society and culture, and in addition, a perception of social immobility. Concepts of reciprocity, favors, and face building were central in these relational networks. Norwegians on the other hand, clearly operated in an organizational mode of association. They interacted with others

based on personal necessity and convenience. They emphasized the importance of acting with according to principles of Western honesty and focusing on delivering efficient and effective products in these dealings. Many Vietnamese did not share this emphasis on productivity and timelines. The Norwegian professional must learn the practice of exchanging favors and developing reciprocal relations to build successful relations in Vietnam. Relations are often more important than results in Vietnam. Vietnamese professionals should be aware that Norwegian managers expect tangible results based upon hard facts.

Finding 4: Vietnamese value reciprocation and stability in relations while Norwegians value autonomy and privacy. The Vietnamese informants worked hard to maintain their relations through favors and reciprocity. The case studies showed that one will not succeed in Vietnam if one does not help others to succeed. Doing business and establishing trust is a collective effort in Vietnamese society that depends on relational interdependencies and permanence. Norwegians focused on individual effort and company objectives and thus saw only a limited need to engage in reciprocal relations that transcended the work setting. They did not see relational permanence as a requirement for establishing trust. They were used to traveling and a high degree of mobility. Opportunities to make key decisions in relation to work and self, and the ability to withdraw into privacy were important considerations for Norwegians. The case studies indicated that a tendency to withdraw into privacy often exaggerated political and economic differences, and also increased the effect of culture shock. Norwegians would benefit from attempting to establish a sense of stability and permanence in relations with Vietnamese, and show that they value these relations by exchanging favors. Vietnamese can, on the other hand, respect the need for privacy among Norwegians by allowing them to have a private work space to can retire to.

Finding 5: Situation-centered behavior characterizes the Vietnamese frame of reference while Norwegians see the world through universal philosophical and moral principles. Vietnamese behaved and acted toward others based on implications in terms of

face, who is involved, and their relational significance. For instance, strangers were openly exploited while important reciprocal contacts or family were not. “Front-stage” and “back-stage” behavior were every social situation is carefully analyzed in terms of social consequences is another Vietnamese behavioral strategy that supports this finding. “Front-stage” behavior also exists in Norwegian culture, but it is not as dominant. Norwegians tend to interpret and judge their world in terms of universal morals and philosophies that remain valid across contexts and relations. For instance, the case studies revealed that Norwegians felt that Vietnamese should have the same rights and responsibilities as themselves, regardless of large political, economic, and social differences between people from the two countries. Finding five therefore argues that Vietnamese adjust to their surroundings while Norwegians maintain a greater degree of behavioral and moral continuity across situations and relations. Norwegian professionals must learn to examine situational circumstances before they judge Vietnamese behavior. Knowledge about face behavior constitutes a starting point toward this end. Vietnamese should note that Norwegians expect complete disclosure of relevant information in business dealings, and this includes sensitive information.

Finding 6: Vietnamese accept power distances, authority and hierarchies while Norwegians value egalitarian ideals. Vietnamese perceived government actions as untouchable and beyond their sphere of influence. Older persons were addressed and treated with a high level of respect. Expert power or power from social positioning motivated greater respect than power emanating from forceful personalities. Raw power in terms of economic power or physical force alone did not necessarily gain respect because these forms of power lacked critical linkages to social organization and moral principles. Americans learned this lesson during the Vietnam war when the use of raw power failed. Norwegians experienced it when they attempted to impose their values and methods in the Vietnamese setting. These situations resulted in active or passive resistance and avoidance tactics. The Norwegians did not like to submit to an authority unless they had a say in its decisions, although the role and function of a large government with extensive powers of intervention was commonly more readily accepted than among American expatriates.

Norwegians believed that people should meet and function together on equal terms based on the egalitarian and democratic principles from finding five. In practical terms, Norwegians should relate to Vietnamese in terms of relative social positioning to show them proper respect and to prevent anyone from losing face. Vietnamese professionals can expect that Norwegians will not always respect or understand hierarchy or authority in Vietnam. Information sharing, education, and awareness in relation to these issues are effective approaches toward avoiding misunderstandings.

Finding 7: Vietnamese are concerned about maintaining face and building relations while Norwegians are more concerned about maintaining honesty and universal truths. As was illustrated in the case studies, Norwegians, including myself, can easily feel that Vietnamese withhold information selectively. From the Vietnamese perspective, sharing of information and emotions was a matter of face relations and subject to careful management and restraint. Relational harmony was more important than the articulation of personal emotions and honesty. Among the Norwegians there was a clear expectation that communications must be based on complete information, facts, and relevance even if revealing these result in conflict. Norwegians often felt that it is more important to defend universal “truths” and their right to articulate it rather than to avoid offending someone. Conflict in the right form was viewed as a healthy and necessary aspect of getting things done. Almost all Norwegian participants felt they had violated Vietnamese face rules one time or another through emotional outbursts or heated discussions, but the consequences were less severe for them than for Vietnamese persons. The Norwegians I spoke with were more comfortable speaking about such experiences and related feelings than their Vietnamese counterparts. Norwegians must be aware that behavioral restraint and building strategic relations are important in developing sustainable business relations in Vietnam. These rules also apply to social life in general in Vietnam. Vietnamese should learn to understand that Norwegians are not concerned about face; Norwegians seek personal opinions and do not hesitate to engage in conflicts if necessary. Developing sensitivity to these different modes of interpreting events is the main path toward overcoming these differences.

Finding 8: Both Vietnamese and Norwegians tend to avoid speaking highly of themselves, although they do this for different reasons. This finding reflects the tendency toward social conformity and unspoken rules associated with collective values in both cultures. Although Vietnamese persons were achievement oriented, they never bragged about their achievements. The Norwegians also avoided self bragging and self promotion; this is congruent with the values illustrated in Janteloven. However, individuals from the two cultures differed in how they talked about others. The Vietnamese frequently bragged about authority figures such as their boss or government. These actions were probably aimed at building face for others who were of key importance in their differential networks. Norwegians provided independent opinions and statements that cast both positive and negative reflections on colleagues and superiors. For instance, one participant emphasized positive reinforcement while he also criticized some of his employees. The implication of this finding for all professionals is that they should avoid displaying highly competitive behavior internally in the organization and also avoid management techniques that encourage such behavior.

Finding 9: Asymmetries in socio-economic conditions and knowledge create a power distance between Norwegians and Vietnamese. The case studies showed that Norwegians were accustomed to higher levels of resource consumption and living standards than their Vietnamese associates and that Norwegians found it convenient to maintain these in the Vietnamese context. Government policies in Vietnam contributed to maintaining this asymmetry. Whether an awareness of this asymmetry existed or not, an exaggerated power and socio-economic gap was established as a result of it. Gaps were externalized symbolically and materially. Similarly, a higher technology expertise among Norwegians than among Vietnamese resulted in a consistent power distance created through manifestations of expert power. The underlying sources of power distances, such as primary socialization experiences, were by their nature difficult to change. The presence of socio-economic and knowledge differences among locals and foreigners in Vietnam is not a new phenomena; they have manifested themselves in Vietnam since colonial times

under Chinese, later under French rule, and some would argue that Vietnam was also under American rule for a while. Vietnam is currently in a post-colonial period, but its people and social systems have not recovered from the traumas of colonization. There is no easy answer to how the impact of socio-economic difference and colonial history could be mitigated other than through a long and difficult process of economic development. Establishing awareness of these influences is, however, a good place to begin.

Discussion

The ten main findings were consistently true to some degree across the case studies in this thesis, but what are the implications of them in other settings in Vietnam with similar or dissimilar characteristics? Are they universal cultural truths that one generally can expect to encounter? And how can they be used in practical terms? As I previously stated, this thesis and other authors such as Hannerz and Hall indicate that there is some degree of constancy, yet also variation in culture. We are thus faced with the challenge of figuring out what is marked by constancy and what is marked by variation and furthermore which factors drive these.

The findings in this thesis are grounded in an assumption that there is a degree of constancy around cultural patterns and their form at the macro-cultural level. Hannerz summarizes the idea of this permanence and continuity: “The basic units of meaning...are not easily delimited...cultural analysis cannot occupy itself with mere collections of meanings units, somehow seen as atomized and all distinctive at the same levels. What matters more are the high-level notions and ordering devices: “themes, “focal concerns,” “galaxies,” “ key symbols” that turn the collections into structures, with some degree of constancy” (Hannerz 1992:8). Higher level ordering devices such as the differential and organizational modes of association were explored in this thesis and tied to micro-level events to link public and private cultural realms. A tendency toward macro-cultural

constancy was revealed through these inquiries across settings and people, suggesting that there was a widespread distribution of these meanings among people socialized in Vietnamese and Norwegian culture respectively. Vietnamese articulated certain meanings and values consistently, while Norwegians did the same from a different cultural perspective.

However, the research also showed that meanings and behavior seemed to vary in degree between persons and settings, particularly when the focus on inquires moved closer to the micro-level. The idea of what was culturally Norwegian or Vietnamese was often muddled or diffuse. Variation and ambiguity, inherent factors in culture and a result of lacking understanding, caused these complexities among other things. Hannerz illustrates the presence of complexity through his metaphor of rivers: “When you see a river from afar, it may look like a blue [or green, or brown] line across the landscape; something of awesome permanence. But at the same time, ‘you cannot step into the same river twice,’ for it is always moving, and only in this way does it achieve its durability. The same way with culture; even as you perceive structure, it is entirely dependent on ongoing process” (Hannerz 1992:4). Generation gaps, differences in socialization histories, and contextual influences such as market forces, all interact to create variations and deviations from what may have been expected. Constancy and variation are complementing forces that generate paradoxes, but which also lie at the core of cultural process. People, culture, and work cannot be understood without incorporating assumptions about both in the research process.

The cultural and behavior patterns among Vietnamese and Norwegian participants indicate that there is a certain degree of consistency in socialization patterns and systems of meaning. People socialized in Norway and Vietnamese cultures are likely to be influenced to some degree by the particular cultural patterns in their primary socialization. Macro-level socialization patterns therefore seem relevant across contexts and people. Yet such patterns, such as the findings in this thesis, are not blue-prints to be followed in a deterministic fashion in the quest for cultural knowledge. The research shows that inquires

must also be made into possible intervening factors and the underlying social drivers of the findings. Since these always will vary from situation to situation, an interpretive approach is required as I stated in findingten.

This theoretical stance leaves us with the question of what these results mean in terms of dominant cultural models adhered to in many contemporary organizational settings. It renders corporate culture, national culture and values, and diversity paradigms insufficient as models for understanding the relationship between people, culture, and work precisely because they are deterministic and narrow in scope. Their ideological and theoretical angles motivate us to isolate single “slices” of a larger multi-layered and entangled complex system of cultural structure and process. For instance, the corporate cultural paradigm was applied in the research to examine the implications of dominant cultural configurations in organizational settings. The national cultural and values paradigm was used to discuss differences in socialization patterns and frames of reference. The diversity paradigm was used more inadvertently to discuss various asymmetries and cases of cultural synergy in the work place. The research indicated that an understanding of these “slices” is valuable in context of the application of a wider assortment of “lenses” that help us to uncover a greater number of situationally relevant “slices” and interrelationships. The research therefore supports the idea that theoretical triangulation is necessary as a basis for holistic research, and thus goes beyond the dominant models in terms of both cultural content and process.

I attempted to achieve theoretical triangulation in this thesis by basing inquiries around a paradigm that integrates ideas of cultural configurations, concepts of self and socialization, context, and management techniques. This framework constitutes a starting point for approaching cross-cultural analysis. My experience from the research process was that this as any other paradigm, is a tool for focusing inquiries toward certain domains and in certain directions. As such, it is valuable as a starting point for defining what to look for in initial faze of field work. But I must emphasize one final generalization: as the research effort increasingly moves to the micro-level, rich enthographic data and cultural

knowledge must increasingly be constructed from situationally specific data and theories to remain valid. This in effect means that long-term research efforts can be launched from the paradigm in this thesis or from other paradigms, but if the concept of situational validity is to be served, reliance on these should diminish as the depth of inquiries increase. This means that our theories should increasingly be defined by what we sense and experience in the field the deeper we search for an understanding. This is partly explained by the increased presence of variation and ambiguity on the micro-level. I have therefore come to the conclusion that the theory and findings in this thesis are most constructive as a framework for talking about cross-cultural relations and some of the issues that come up in context of their application.

The findings and theory of this thesis have a number of practical implications and uses. They have laid out one possible “terrain” for interpreting events in organizations. They have furthermore established a foundation for thinking more about the uses and implications of using particular management techniques in multi-cultural organizations. In fact, interpretations of people, culture, and work could be used to guide the development of organizational and personnel strategies. This, however, requires the commitment of key decision makers and employees in organizations. In this particular case, such people could be either Vietnamese or Norwegian professionals.

The discussions in this thesis brought up a number of questions and challenges for future research efforts. First and foremost, the studies revealed a need to conduct long-term studies in Vietnamese-Norwegian organizational settings in Vietnam to better document how cross-cultural relations develop over a long period of time. Second, the social interaction between Norwegians and Vietnamese outside the work place has not been explored in sufficient breath or detail to date. Research in this area holds the potential of revealing more about how factors in the work place are interconnected with social life. It could also reveal more information about how Norwegians manage and cope with living in Vietnamese society. Third, because government policies and control has a strong impact on life in and around foreign businesses in Vietnam, there is a need to inquire further into

the interrelationships between the two. Fourth, there is a need to conduct a complementary study in Norway about work relations between Vietnamese and Norwegians. Such a study would be valuable in revealing cultural variations and the underlying factors driving these. Fifth, further studies of the situation and role of Viet Kieu in Vietnamese organizations and business is needed since they often play a central role as the link between foreigners and Vietnamese. And finally, a study into the applied aspects of developing management methods in cross-cultural settings in Vietnam, would constitute valuable information for Vietnamese and Norwegian colleagues who wish to nourish long-term work relations based on mutual respect and sustainable business principles.

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