Conceptual Framework for Analyzing the Fit between Organizational Strategy and Culture

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Abstract
Aim of the current article is to present a conceptual framework for analyzing strategy-culture fit and to exemplify its application for a strategic orientation towards agility. The framework is based on the notion that the implementation of strategic change programs is frequently detached from cultural analysis and change, which has led to disappointing organizational performance. This issue is approached by the developed conceptual framework in the following two ways: (1) it provides organizations with an integrative system perspective on strategy and culture, and (2) it helps revealing conflicting core values before implementing strategic change programs. The application of the conceptual framework has been illustrated for the paradigm of agile manufacturing. General implications for practice include the need for analyzing organizational culture before implementing strategic change programs and stronger involvement of human resource functions within organization development.

Keywords: agile manufacturing; organizational culture; ramp-up management; strategic organizational orientation

1. Introduction

In Organizational Sciences, there has been a long history of interest in the study of strategic orientation in organizations because of its potential influence on organizational performance. It is believed that organizations with certain strategic orientations outperform organizations that have other strategic orientations. However, assuming a direct relationship between strategic orientation and organizational performance is too simplistic. For instance, [1] have demonstrated that the relationship between strategic orientation and organizational performance depends on additional contextual factors like age (i.e. years since the organization has entered the business) and order of entry (i.e. entry in an organization’s main business since the last major technological change). Thus, there is little empirical evidence for the assumption that a certain type of strategic orientation is better for organizational performance per se.

Within the field of Applied Psychology, person-environment fit theories have received considerable attention from both the individual differences tradition and the organizational psychology tradition [2]. This general concept of person-environment fit can be further specified into person-job fit (individual level), person-team fit (meso level), and person-organization fit (organizational level) corresponding to the three levels of analysis within Organizational Behavior research [3]. On the organizational level, the fit is supposed to reflect the degree to which individuals and organizations share the same set of values [4]. Thus, the more congruent individual values of, for instance, job applicants with organizational values, the better is the degree of fit. The set of values that should be shared by all organizational members across potential subcultures reflects what is understood as organizational core values [5]. Similarly to evaluating the degree to which individuals and organizations share the same set of values, the fit between organizational core values and strategic orientation requires more consideration in managing organizations. If the strategy-culture fit is good, there is cultural congruence which is supposed to positively affect organizational performance. In contrast, if a new strategic
orientation is adopted and does not match the core values of an organization, organizational performance is affected negatively [6,7,8]. Within the field of Ramp-up Management, a strategic shift from focusing on stability to agility seems to be emerging [9]. In the academic literature, agility has already been considered the new manufacturing paradigm since the nineteen-nineties and is the response to an increasingly volatile market environment which requires responsive manufacturing and the ability to change [10,11,12]. According to [10], the general idea behind agile manufacturing (AM) can be summarized as "the capability of the manufacturing enterprise to quickly respond to the market requirements." (p. 183). In order to enable this strategic transition for managing production ramp-up, the fit between current organizational core values and agility should be taken into consideration.

Based on the idea of cultural congruence, the present paper adopts a contingency-based perspective and provides a framework for analyzing the fit between strategic orientation and organizational culture. The framework rests upon the following two assumptions:

I. There is no strategic orientation that is better per se.

II. The efficacy of any strategic orientation depends on fitting organizational culture.

Before the conceptual framework for analyzing organizational strategy-culture fit is presented, the following paragraphs provide a brief, non-exhaustive overview of (1) approaches to research on strategic orientation and (2) approaches to research on organizational culture. Next, the general conceptual framework is first presented and then applied exemplary to agility as strategic orientation in production ramp-up. The paper concludes by discussing implications for practice, limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Approaches to Research on Strategic Orientation

The study by [1], referred to in the introduction part of this paper, is based on a typology for strategic orientation including the three types (1) cost leadership, (2) innovative differentiation, and (3) marketing differentiation. Such typologies or taxonomies, derived either empirically or deductively, are examples for the classificatory approach in strategic orientation research.

One of the most widely known typology includes three types of strategic orientation (i.e. cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, and focus strategy) [13]. Depending on which strategy is mainly emphasized within an organization (e.g. costs, quality, innovation, agility etc.), it can be assigned to one of the three types of strategic orientation.

Besides this classificatory approach, there are, according to [14], two further approaches for organizing strategic orientation: (1) the narrative approach and (2) the comparative approach. The narrative approach is based on a verbal description of strategy within a specific organization and has therefore only limited use for theory testing. The comparative approach rests upon a dimensional perspective and defines organizational strategy within each organization according to a set of dimensions on which they can be compared. An influential and widely cited comparative approach has been presented by [15] who identified the following six dimensions for comparing strategy across organizations: (1) aggressiveness, (2) analysis, (3) defensiveness, (4) futurity, (5) proactiveness, and (6) riskiness. Brief definitions of the dimensions are presented in Table 1.

Based on this approach, [14] have shown that there is a positive relationship between organizational performance and emphasizing the three dimensions analysis, defensiveness, and futurity. According to the authors, these dimensions reflect conservatism while the remaining three dimensions (i.e. aggressiveness, proactiveness, and riskiness) are associated with entrepreneurialism. Since a comparative approach is considered by the authors of the present paper as most suitable for studying strategic orientation in relation to organizational culture, the here presented framework for analyzing organizational strategy-culture fit is also based on the set of dimensions proposed by [15].

Table 1. The six dimensions of strategic orientation proposed by [15].

| Dimension    | Definition                                                                 |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aggressiveness| Rapid exploitation and development of resources with a clear sales orientation. |
| Analysis     | Organization’s approach to problem solving and knowledge building capacity.   |
| Defensiveness| Focus on existing domains and expertise instead of new product/ market developments. |
| Futurity     | Long-term orientation instead of short-term planning and decision making.     |
| Proactiveness| Organization’s proactive pursuit of new products and new markets.            |
| Riskiness    | Intuitive resource allocation instead of analytical decision making.         |

2.2. Approaches to Research on Organizational Culture

The construct of organizational culture has received increased interest during the nineteen-eighties when it was considered explanatory for the superior performance of specific organizations. Especially the works by Peters and Waterman in 1982 and Ouchi in 1981 are well-known examples for such an ’one best culture’ approach [16]. However, representatives of this approach neglect that organizations face different challenges which are not adequately addressed by universal principles. Thus, assuming a direct relationship between certain cultural types and organizational performance is – again – too simplistic.

More promising for understanding the relationship between organizational culture and performance are contingency-based...
approaches, in which the appropriateness of specific types of organizational culture is assumed to depend on contextual circumstances. Within this line of theories, there are essentially two types of approaches for representing and measuring organizational culture: (1) the typological approach, and (2) the dimensional approach [17]. The ideas behind these approaches are congruent with the classificatory and comparative approach identified in the strategic orientation literature, respectively. A well-known representative of the typological approach is, for instance, the Competing Values Framework (CVF) by [18].

[19] have developed a framework that is representative for the dimensional approach. In total they identified eight general dimensions of organizational culture based on a qualitative content analysis of the extant literature. The identified dimensions are (1) the basis of truth and rationality in the organization, (2) the nature of time and time horizon, (3) motivation, (4) stability versus change/innovation/personal growth, (5) orientation toward work, task, and coworkers, (6) isolation versus collaboration/cooperation, (7) control, coordination, and responsibility, and (8) orientation and focus – internal and/or external. Based on these eight general dimensions of organizational culture, [19] developed a model of TQM values and beliefs (see Appendix A).

This approach appears to be also applicable to agile manufacturing values. Therefore, the eight general dimensions of organizational culture proposed by [19] serve as a theoretical basis for deducing values with regard to agile production ramp-up. These are presented in the following subchapter. However, the third dimension motivation has been excluded because it seems to be on a different conceptual level than the other dimensions which are more clearly related to the construct of organizational culture. Also, the first and second dimensions have been reformulated in order to increase consistency in the wording across dimensions.

Certainly, there are other dimensional approaches like for instance the dimensions of organizational culture proposed by [20] who is, however, especially known for his research regarding national culture dimensions. Also the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) by [21] is representative for the dimensional approach. Compared to the approach of general cultural dimensions provided by [19], some of the cultural dimensions proposed by other approaches appear to be more specific. Nevertheless, the different approaches and their dimensions also overlap to a considerable degree.

2.3. Organizational Core Values behind Agile Manufacturing

In a literature study by [10], 20 criteria were identified for distinguishing between traditional and agile manufacturing environments (see Appendix B). These proposed criteria and the recommended techniques were used to infer how the respective general dimensions of organizational culture should manifest in agile production ramp-up. Table 2 provides an overview of the deduced values.

Table 2. Overview of agile manufacturing values.

| Organizational culture dimensions | Agile manufacturing values |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Data-driven versus intuition     | Decision making should rely mainly on intuition combined with available factual information. |
| Short-term versus long-term orientation | Responsiveness to changed circumstances requires stronger short-term orientation. |
| Stability versus change/innovation/personal growth | Agility requires inherently a tendency for change and innovation. |
| Orientation to work, task, and coworkers | The main purpose of the organization is to be highly responsive to changed demands and customer requirements. This is achieved through self-managed teams and employee involvement. |
| Isolation versus collaboration/cooperation | Cooperation and collaboration (internal and external) are essential for rapid information sharing and the implementation of changes. |
| Low versus strong hierarchy      | A low hierarchy is more favorable for fast decision making and high employee work engagement. |
| Orientation and focus – internal and/or external | The organization should be driven by rapidly testing whether customer expectations are met and exceeded. |

The next paragraph exemplifies the application of the proposed framework for organizations that consider the strategic shift from stable to agile Ramp-up Management.

3. Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Strategy-Culture Fit

The conceptual framework for analyzing strategy-culture fit consists of essentially two elements and four steps. Figure 1 shows a graphical representation of the framework including the two main elements strategic orientation (SO) conceptualized through the six dimensions suggested by [15] and seven of the eight general dimensions of organizational culture (CD) as defined by [19].

![Figure 1. Graphical representation of the conceptual model for analyzing strategy-culture-fit.](image-url)
In order to analyze strategy-culture fit based on this framework, the following four steps are proposed:

I. development of a target profile according to the six dimensions of strategic orientation;

II. identification of current organizational core values according to the seven general dimensions of organizational culture;

III. comparison between the target profile of strategic orientation and current organizational core values;

IV. evaluation of the degree of fit between target profile of strategic orientation and current organizational core values.

The next paragraph exemplifies the application of the proposed framework for organizations which consider a strategic shift from traditional to agile Ramp-up Management.

4. Application of the Framework on Agile Production Ramp-up

4.1. Target Profile of Strategic Orientation

Based on the six dimensions of strategic orientation proposed by [15], the following strategic target profile is recommended for organizations adopting agile production ramp-up:

- **Aggressiveness**: due to the objective of being able to rapidly respond to changes in market requirements, this dimension should be highly pronounced. (†)
- **Analysis**: due to a strong focus on innovation and customer involvement while being very responsive at the same time, this dimension should be only medium pronounced. (++)
- **Defensiveness**: due to the inherent short-term focus behind the principles of agility, this dimension should be less marked. (++)
- **Futurity**: due to the inherent short-term focus behind the principles of agility, this dimension should be less marked as well. (++)
- **Proactiveness**: due to the strong focus on change and flexibility in agile manufacturing, this dimension should be highly pronounced. (†)
- **Riskiness**: due to the requirement of providing fast responses to possible changes in the market environment, this dimension should be highly pronounced as well. (†)

This profile is in accordance with the entrepreneurial profile proposed by [15] and serves as a starting point for evaluating the fit of current organizational culture with a strategic orientation towards agility. However, it must be emphasized that, besides these management-related conditions, the required technology and physical structures for implementing agility in production ramp-up have to be provided as well [10].

4.2. Hypothetical Scenario of Prevailing Core Values

In order to evaluate the fit between the strategic target profile and required organizational core values, the current state of these core values has to be determined. For this, it is recommended to choose a reasonable unit of analysis like departments or project teams, in order to identify specific areas for action.

Due to the abstract, implicit, and collective phenomenon of organizational culture, there are various approaches for measuring its current state. In practice, the method of choice is mostly conducting employee surveys through questionnaires [22]. It should be noted that questionnaire items are phrased as plural forms of the personal pronouns (e.g. "In our department, we ...") in order to reflect the collective nature of organizational culture. There are also standardized instruments for providing general classifications of the prevailing organizational culture like the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument of [18]. Application of this instrument provides organizations with a rather general overview based on four predefined types of organizational culture (i.e. clan, adhoc, hierarchy, and market).

However, in accordance with [22], it is recommended to focus on specific problematic issues instead of conducting an overall more unspecific cultural analysis. This also corresponds with the approach adopted in the here presented conceptual framework. Thus, based on the proposed organizational core values behind agility in production ramp-up, it is recommended to narrow down the cultural analysis to these attributes.

With the aim of exemplary demonstrating the application of the proposed framework for analyzing strategy-culture fit, a hypothetical scenario of a cultural profile has been developed (see Figure 2). The hypothetical profile could be the result of an employee survey which intends to measure the respective core values based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always) and an aggregation of individual-level data.

The hypothetical profile shows that the organization does not rely so much on intuitive decision making and is not highly short-term oriented. The dimensions collaboration and innovation are moderately high. Employee orientation, hierarchy, and customer orientation received on average the highest ratings.

![Organizational Culture Profile](image-url)

Figure 2. Hypothetical profile of organizational core values.
4.3. Comparison of the Target Profile with Prevailing Organizational Core Values and Evaluation of the Degree of Fit

Based on the derived target profile of strategic orientation, for organizations adopting agile production ramp-up and the exemplary organizational culture profile, Table 3 shows the hypothesized relationships between the two profiles.

According to these considerations, some of the prevailing organizational core values are negatively related to the strategic orientation for agile production ramp-up. Especially the comparatively low degrees of ‘intuitive decision making’ and ‘short-term orientation’ (CD1, CD2) might constitute a risk for matching the desired strategic orientation. Also the cultural dimensions ‘change and innovation’ (CD3) and ‘hierarchy’ (CD6) should be considered as possible risk for implementing agile production ramp-up. However, these relationships and possible implications have not been empirically derived but are based on theoretical considerations and require further examination.

Table 3. Hypothesized relationships between prevailing organizational core values and the target profile of strategic orientation.

| CD1 | SO1 | SO2 | SO3 | SO4 | SO5 | SO6 |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|     | --  | +   | --  | --  | --  | --  |
| CD2 |     | --  | ++  | --  | --  | --  |
| CD3 |     | 0   | 0   | 0   | +   | +   |
| CD4 |     | o   | 0   | 0   | +   | +   |
| CD5 |     | +   | +   | o   | 0   | 0   |
| CD6 |     | +   | +   | ++  | --  | 0   |
| CD7 |     | o   | 0   | --  | ++  | 0   |

CD1 = intuitive decision making, CD2 = short-term orientation, CD3 = change and innovation, CD4 = employee orientation, CD5 = collaboration, CD6 = hierarchy, CD7 = customer orientation, SO1 = aggressiveness, SO2 = analysis, SO3 = definitiveness, SO4 = hierarchy, SO5 = proactiveness, SO6 = rationality, -- = strongly negative, - = negative, o = no relationship, + = positive, ++ = highly positive

5. Discussion

The presented framework for analyzing strategy-culture fit provides organizations a systematic approach for checking compatibility issues before implementing planned strategic change programs. This is supposed to improve the implementation process of strategic change programs like for instance agile manufacturing or TQM because cultural compatibility is assessed in advance and the result determines, whether the implementation is recommended or whether cultural changes should precede or accompany the implementation process [23]. In the exemplary hypothesized scenario, there are at least four cultural dimensions which seem to be conflictive with the planned strategic orientation.

Based on such information, managers could deduce culture-related interventions that target the respective conflictive dimensions. This approach should be positively related to the successful implementation of strategic change programs. Furthermore, the framework calls for a general integration of human resource functions into the strategic development of organizations because of their vital role in contributing to the development of organizational culture [24, 25].

One clear limitation of the presented framework is the lack of empirical support for the approach and hypothesized relationships. Until now, the framework is solely based on expert ratings. However, it yields a lot of potential for further research with a special focus on empirical support regarding the target profiles for certain strategic orientations and their relationships with organizational core values.

Acknowledgements

The support of the German National Science Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft DFG) through the funding of the research training group “Ramp-Up Management – Development of Decision Models for the Production Ramp Up” is gratefully acknowledged.

Appendix A. TQM Values

Table 4. Overview of eight general dimensions of organizational culture and TQM values [19, p. 855].

| Organizational culture dimensions | TQM value |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| The basis of truth and rationality in the organization | Decision making should rely on factual information and the scientific method. |
| The nature of time and time horizon | Improvement requires a long-term orientation and a strategic approach to management. |
| Motivation | Quality problems are caused by poor systems – not the employees. Employees are intrinsically motivated to do quality work if the system supports their efforts. |
| Stability versus change/innovation/personal growth | Quality improvement is continuous and never-ending. Quality can be improved with existing resources. |
| Orientation to work, task, and coworkers | The main purpose of the organization is to achieve results that its stakeholders consider important. Results are achieved through internal process improvement, prevention of defects, and customer focus. |
| Isolation versus collaboration/cooperation | Cooperation and collaboration (internal and external) are necessary for a successful organization. |
| Control, coordination, and responsibility | A shared vision and shared goals are necessary for organizational success. All employees should be involved in decision making and in supporting the shared vision. |
| Orientation and focus – internal and/or external | An organization should be customer driven. Financial results will follow. |

Appendix B. Agile Manufacturing Criteria

Table 5. Twenty criteria agile model by [10, pp. 190*].

| Criteria | Approaches/techniques recommended |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| Organizational structure | Cutting down of organizational layers, building of cross functional teams and their management |
| Devolution of authority | Education and training to enable the teams to become self-managed gradually and imbibe empowerment with no compromise on agility; clear definitions on authority |
Manufacturing set-ups | Least expensive and collapsible, throw away, reconfigurable and scalable fixtures, patterns, jigs, and dies and other production facilities
---|---
Employee’s status | Providing more and more importance to on-line training, limit off line training methods; create rewarding environment to induce interest to learn more; bring about rotation based job allotment
Employee involvement | Promote suggestion schemes; quality circle programs, etc. to tap ideas and knowledge of employees. Create provisions to enable the employees to participate in decision making processes
Nature of management | Educate the managerial personnel about the importance of the concepts of TQM towards the employees and values of life rather than mere profit. Bring about transparency in operations by sharing information; conduct frequent management employees meeting
Customer response adoption | Promote a rewarding scheme to invite customers’ reactions over the products and services offered; use tools like cause and effect diagram to record the customers’ reactions; develop an information system to communicate the right information on customer response adoption at right time at right person to execute the necessary changes
Product life cycle | Design the product which would be least priced, brought to the market within least time, lasts for comparatively less period with high maintainability and reliability
Product service duration | Provide modular design so that modules can be replaced removed and then integrated by IT; use of multimedia is highly recommended
Design improvement | Consider design as the continuous activity; undertake improvements by adopting rapid prototyping technology, concurrent engineering, CAD design for manufacturing and design of experiments
Production methodology | Production system shall enable the adoption of innovative processes and current technologies; apply the concepts of FMS; install information integrated facilities; support automatic and 100 per cent inspection
Manufacturing planning | Execute short range planning with provision for quick decision making
Cost/ accounting system | Adopt activity based costing approach without affecting the legal requirements
Automation type | Flexibility is given highest priority. Adopt electronically programmable production facilities
IT integration | The tasks that are not to be supported by paper work are removed and then integrated by IT, use of multimedia is highly recommended
Change in business and technical processes | Apply the concepts of business process reengineering; design the set-ups such as that they are tolerant to modifications and changes within the quick span of time
Time management | Effect enterprise management such that information on time schedule is communicated to teams so as to enhance quality of timely delivery; use design reuse concepts to cut down design, production, and marketing lead times
Status of quality | Design the products, processes and service in such a way that innovation is infused while attaining higher degrees of quality and thereby customers feel delighted

*Original table includes further references for each approach recommended.

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