CULTURE AS SOCIAL CONTROL:
CORPORATIONS, CULTS, AND COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

The notion of "organizational culture" has attracted a broad base of scholarly interest. While many researchers study culture using an ethnographic approach, we examine it from a functional perspective, viewing culture within groups and organizations as a *social control system* based on shared norms and values. From a psychological perspective, we show how a shared normative order or culture can influence members' focus of attention, shape interpretations of events, and guide attitudes and behavior. Specifically, we explore the psychological mechanisms used to develop social control systems and demonstrate how similar these approaches are across a variety of strong culture settings, ranging from conventional organizations to more extreme examples of cults and religious sects.

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INTRODUCTION

Few concepts of the past decade have so captured the attention of scholars and practitioners as that of *organizational culture.* There has been an outpouring of scholarly books (e.g., Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985; Hofstede, 1991; Martin, 1992; Ott, 1989; Schein, 1985; Schneider, 1990; Trice & Beyer, 1993), popular books (e.g., Davis, 1984; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993; Kotter & Heskett, 1992), special issues of academic journals (e.g., *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983), articles in both academic and business journals (e.g., Harrison & Carroll, 1991; Schwartz & Davis, 1981) and continual references to the importance of corporate culture in the business press (e.g., Donkin, 1994; Hays, 1994). The topic has been addressed by psychologists (Schneider, 1987), sociologists (e.g., Swidler, 1986), organizational theorists (e.g., Harrison & Carroll, 1991), strategy researchers (e.g., Barney, 1986), management consultants (Pascale, 1990), anthropologists (Brannen, 1992; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984), and even economists are now addressing the subject (e.g., Cremer, 1993; Kreps, 1986; Lazear, 1994). What accounts for this broad-based interest?

The most rational reason for studying culture is the presumed relationship between organizational culture and performance. Saffold (1988, p. 546) notes that part of this interest arises "Because its managerial implications can be readily developed, easily communicated, and illustrated by vivid anecdotes." But, the evidence linking so-called "strong culture" to increased organizational performance is mixed (e.g., Denison, 1990; Gordon & DiTomaso, 1992; Siehl & Martin, 1990). Some recent research suggests that the culture-performance link exists. For example, Kotter and Heskett (1992) hypothesized that strong culture firms would perform better over the long term. They argued that the presence of a strong culture, which they define in terms of the values and norms shared among members of the organization, should be associated with higher goal alignment among organizational members, promote an unusual level of motivation among employees, and provide needed controls without the stifling effects of a bureaucracy. Using a sample of over 200 large public U.S. firms, they surveyed managers to assess the strength of culture in their organizations. They then related culture strength during a recent 10-year period to the firms' economic performance over that same period. They found strong associations between firm culture strength and performance, but only when the strong culture was also strategically appropriate and characterized by norms that permitted the culture to change. They concluded that "even contextually or strategically appropriate cultures will not promote excellent performance over long periods unless they contain norms and values that help firms adapt to a changing environment" (p. 142).[1]

Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) noted that culture may be a more important determinant of performance in certain types of subunits and organizations and

less critical in others. Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) provide evidence that different functional units may require different types of cultures. For example, those units that rely heavily on innovation, such as R&D, perform better when their cultures emphasize norms and values that promote creativity and implementation, while other units, like manufacturing, may perform better with cultural norms that emphasize efficiency and speed.

The culture-performance link can be ambiguous, in part, because of the lack of agreement about the definition of the construct of organizational or corporate culture. Some argue that it is simply a resurrection of the earlier notion of organizational climate (Reichers & Schneider, 1990). Questions have been raised about the appropriate level of analysis for the construct; for instance, whether it makes sense to talk about culture at the group, the organization, or industry level (e.g., Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Dansereau & Alutto, 1990; Gordon, 1991; Sackmann, 1992). Others define culture as what an organization *is* while still others argue that it is what an organization *has* (Schein, 1985; Smircich, 1983). Some researchers emphasize its anthropological roots, and argue that culture can be studied and understood only through qualitative ethnomethodological approaches (e.g., Louis, 1985). They believe that culture is an unconscious learned response by a group and encompasses norms, values, rituals, and climate. In this spirit, Trice and Beyer (1993) focus on the taken-for-granted beliefs manifested in symbols, language, and stories. Martin (1992) holds that culture is, by nature, subjective and cannot be described in terms of empirical facts.

Other organizational researchers conceptualize culture in terms of the observable norms and values that characterize a group or organization. They typically stress quantitative measurement schemes and examine behavior rather than phenomenological meaning (e.g., Rousseau, 1990; Thompson & Luthans, 1990). This definition allows for psychometric measurement of attitudes and behavior, either from self-reports or from observers (e.g., Enz, 1988; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991).

These differences are more than semantic or methodological. They underlie the basic disagreements and confusion that currently characterize the study of culture. Fundamental questions about what organizational culture is, why it is important, and how to investigate it remain unresolved. As Pettigrew notes (1990), the problem with culture is that it is not just a concept but a family of concepts; not just a variable but a frame of reference for viewing organizations. Like a Rorschach, culture means different things to different people. From an anthropological perspective, Powys concludes that "Culture is what's left over after you forgot what it was that you were originally trying to learn" (1974, p. 5). In the face of this argument and confusion, it is not surprising that, in spite of, or perhaps because of its popularity, the notion of organizational culture has generated more heat than light.

While we acknowledge that differences of opinion exist in defining the construct, we also believe that some of this arcane debate misses a critical function of culture within organizations. Our objective in this paper is to shed light on the importance of organizational as a *social control system* operating within groups and organizations. Culture as a social control system is based on shared norms and values that set expectations about appropriate attitudes and behavior for members of the group. In our view, culture can be thought of as the normative order, operating through informational and social influence, that guides and constrains the behavior of people in collectives. Consistent with other researchers (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Rousseau, 1990), we define culture as *a system of shared values (that define what is important) and norms that define appropriate attitudes and behaviors for organizational members (how to feel and behave).*

Culture as a social control mechanism can determine organization members' commitment or intensity of feelings regardless of whether they belong to cults such as the Moonies, religions like the Mormons, or strong culture organizations such as the United States Marine Corps, New United Motors Manufacturing Inc. (NUMMI), or Hewlett-Packard. We take an explicitly psychological view to illustrate how such a system can influence organizational members' focus of attention, behavior, and commitment and, ultimately, the attainment of organizational goals, whether these are in the service of profit, innovation, quality, personal fulfillment, or religious salvation (e.g., Appel, 1983; Foster, 1986; McGaw, 1979: Ofshe, 1992; Weiner, 1988).

We first distinguish culture as *social control* from *formal control.* We also suggest that social control may be a more powerful form of control in modern organizations than traditional formal controls (see the second and third sections). In the fourth section, we explore the social psychological underpinnings of culture. In the fifth section, we illustrate how the psychological mechanisms used to develop social control are similar across a variety of organizations, ranging from the extreme examples of cults and religious sects to more conventional organizations characterized as strong culture firms. Finally, we discuss the boundaries of organizational culture; that is, when culture as social control may be inappropriately applied, as in cases when organizations cause people to harm themselves or others, or ineffective in generating desired behaviors. Both the process of gaining member commitment and the content of the values members commit to may lead, under certain conditions, to high levels of performance through enhanced coordination and motivation to uphold strategically appropriate values and norms. But, under other circumstances these same processes can lead to reduced adaptation, exploitation, and in extreme cases, harmful or unethical behavior.

FORMAL CONTROL IN ORGANIZATIONS

The earliest students of organizations were fundamentally concerned with the issue of control (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Etzioni, 1964; Parsons, 1960). Since these early times, writing on management and organization has focused on ways to control collective activities through the use of formal mechanisms such as supervision, plans, standard operating procedures, structures, budgets, and compensation systems.

Given the wide, and often imprecise usage of the concept of *control,* it is important for us to be clear about our perspective before differentiating formal and social control. Consistent with a more psychological perspective, we focus here on how people *experience* control in organizational settings. In our view: *Control comes from the knowledge that someone who matters to us is paying close attention to what we are doing and will tell us if our behavior is appropriate or inappropriate.* From this perspective, effective control systems, whether they are financial planning systems, budgets, or performance appraisal programs, work when those being monitored are aware that others who matter to them, such as a boss or members of a department, know how and what they are doing. In other words, when one's boss, or members of a department with which one is interdependent has the ability to deliver or withhold valued sanctions for compliance or noncompliance, a control system can be said to exist (e.g., Dornbusch & Scott, 1975).

Typically, formal control systems monitor performance outcomes or behavior, or both (e.g., Ouchi, 1979). The assumptions underlying the presumed effectiveness of formal control are that: (1) calibrating extrinsic rewards (e.g., compensation, benefits) is possible and such rewards are sufficient and timely enough to direct job-relevant behavior; and (2) subordinates perceive organizational authority, or top down influence, as legitimate and worthy of compliance. But, as we discuss below, the effectiveness of formal control systems may be compromised by a variety of sociological and psychological forces.

1. *Calibrating extrinsic rewards is possible, and such rewards are sufficient to direct job-relevant behavior*: Calibrating formal reward systems so that they effectively capture the range and intensity of desired behaviors or performance levels is challenging (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975). It may be difficult to initially identify the desired behaviors due to ambiguous jobs and uncertain future events. For instance, if the job requires initiative and flexibility, how does one specify in advance what behaviors will be required (Staw & Boettger, 1990)? Further, what constitutes high quality or good value in one time period may change as competitors improve, new technology is implemented, or consumer tastes change (e.g., Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990). Continually updating the reward system may not be feasible under conditions of frequent change.

In addition, uncertainty arises from task complexity. Complex tasks require predictions about whether a set of interdependent tasks will be completed according to plan. But individuals have trouble avoiding the conjunctive and disjunctive events bias (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974); that is, they overestimate the probability of completing conjunctive tasks (tasks or events that must occur in conjunction with one another), and underestimate the probability of completing disjunctive tasks (tasks or events that occur independently). These biases often explain a variety of complex organizational problems including timing problems in projects that require multistage planning (Bazerman, 1994).

Identifying and rewarding the most significant aspects of a job may be further obscured because more tangible tasks (e.g., production output) are often measured and sanctioned, due to ease of observation, while the less readily assessed tasks are often ignored. For example, Scott (1969) found that social workers were evaluated on the basis of the number and timeliness of their visits to clients and the correctness of their calculation of budgets rather than on the quality of their therapeutic casework service. Clearly, numerous examples exist (e.g., Kerr, 1975) that demonstrate the tendency to value a particular outcome but reward a different behavior—which may preclude the fulfillment of an organization's objectives.

Formal control systems typically rely on direct supervision to monitor performance. Yet, direct supervision is one of the most expensive methods by which information on work activities can be acquired due to the large time expenditures required by evaluators (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975). Further, direct observation of some aspects of performance may not even be possible in some jobs, for example, among many of the professions (e.g., Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). The personal scrutiny required to directly observe others may be difficult for evaluators to manage given the potential negative effects on those being supervised (e.g., Harackiewicz & Larson, 1986).

In addition, even if such rewards could be calibrated, it is not clear that people are as motivated by extrinsic rewards, as they are by feedback that highlights the intrinsic value of a tasks. Research has shown that relying solely on extrinsic rewards can reduce performance due to the oversufficient justification effect (e.g., Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). This is especially true for performance on tasks which individuals engage in volitionally and from which they derive intrinsic satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation has been conceptualized as the need for a sense of competence and personal determination, derived from individuals' motivation to be the originators of their own behaviors rather than pawns to external forces (Deci & Ryan, 1980). If people believe that tasks are performed exclusively "for the money," they may attribute their behavior to external causes. As a result, the behavior becomes instrumentally linked to the reward and tends not to be performed in the absence of subsequent extrinsic rewards. Research shows that there are important benefits to enhancing intrinsic interest in tasks, especially for

enhancing creativity (Cordova & Lepper, 1991), and that creativity declines when it is extrinsically rewarded (Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986). Further, material rewards tend to build up members' self-oriented interests as the basis for conforming to organizational values, rather than convincing them that these values are worthy of internalization in their own right (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Sandelands, Glynn, & Larson, 1991).

2. *Subordinates perceive organizational authority, or top down influence, as legitimate and worthy of compliance.* Historically, most theorizing about control has implicitly been based on the Weberian assumption that legitimate authority is widely accepted; that is, people in organizations will obey orders from their superiors (e.g., Halaby, 1986). While broadly true, psychological theories of reactance (e.g., Brehm, 1972) show that people have a strong desire to maintain their freedom of action. When confronted with influence attempts from others, especially when such appeals take the form of arbitrary orders or commands, individuals experience strong reactance and actually shift their attitudes and behaviors in a direction opposite to those being advocated or demanded (e.g., Worchel & Brehm, 1971). Ironically, so strong is the desire to maintain personal control, and so objectionable are salient attempts to influence others, that individuals sometimes choose to adopt a position they do not really support, or behave in uncharacteristic (e.g., rebellious) ways to avoid accepting the one being urged on them (e.g., Karpf, 1978). People may also act in ways to maintain or restore personal control, for instance through violating or circumventing official rules (e.g., Greenberger & Strasser, 1991).

Formal control systems may exacerbate reactance effects by evaluating supervisors on the basis of their subordinates' performance. Research shows that such judgments increase supervisors' tendencies to provide performance feedback to subordinates in a controlling manner (Harackiewicz & Larson, 1986), potentially increasing feelings of control loss among subordinates. Reactance can be aroused even in the absence of actual influence attempts from others (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). For example, Heller, Pallak, and Picek (1973) found that the mere knowledge that a confederate in their experiment intended to exert control over subjects was sufficient to arouse strong feelings of reactance, whether the influence attempt occurred or not. Therefore, paradoxically, managers who have the most influence over subordinates may take steps to reduce members' a priori suspicions about possible influence attempts.

Formal control systems tend to signal that work is bad, because if it were good (fun, enjoyable, or developmental), explicit rewards and rules would be unnecessary, and employees would spontaneously behave and perform appropriately (Bordin, 1979). Psychological research has shown that the mere labeling of a task as work causes people to choose to spend less time performing the task, and report experiencing less enjoyment while they are engaged in the

task. But, if the exact same task is called a leisure pastime, people choose to spend more time and are happier while engaged in the task (e.g., Sandelands, 1988; Tang & Baumeister, 1984). Thus organizations walk a fine line between legitimate authority use and the potential for reactance or loss of intrinsic motivation if a member's "zone of acceptance" (Simon, 1976, p. 12) is violated.

In sum, the dominant approaches organizations use to control and motivate employees are formal inducements based on measuring behaviors and outputs relevant to the job. This type of control influences members' behavior as long as members accept the legitimacy of the formal rules and procedures designed to detect deviations in their output. But, as tasks become more unpredictable and uncertain and the need for flexibility and adaptability increases, formal control systems can become less effective and more costly (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1995). This creates a dilemma: As uncertainty and the need for change increase, traditional control systems become less useful and the specter of loss of control rises. A number of authors note that these trends are increasing and argue for more flexible work arrangements and less formal systems of control (Nemeth & Staw, 1989).

We devote the next section to discussing how, given the inadequacies of formal control discussed above, organizations address the fundamental challenge of persuading their members to contribute to critical objectives. To do this we discuss alternative forms of social control, such as intensive socialization, the use of superordinate goals, and participatory regimes (e.g., Kanter, 1972; Van Maanen, 1991). We show that both the process of socially controlling employees, as well as the content of the norms and values to which members attend to determine whether social control leads to effective organizational performance or, in extreme cases, deviance.

SOCIAL CONTROL IN ORGANIZATIONS

Recall that control comes from the knowledge that someone who matters to us is paying close attention to what we are doing and will tell us when we are behaving appropriately or inappropriately. This notion of control is anchored both in a formal system such as rules, procedures, and organizational hierarchies, but also in personal relationships. Thus, while the principle applies to formal control, it also applies to the notion of *social control*; that is, to the extent that we care about others and have some agreement about what constitutes appropriate behavior, then whenever we are in their presence, we are also potentially under their control. Just as we may comply with a budgeting system less our compensation be affected (formal control), we may also comply with the opinions of our colleagues so that they will think well of us (social control).

In this sense, social control targets values, attitudes, and behaviors that may be relevant to desirable organizational outcomes, such as service, safety, and respect for others. But, of course, social control can also increase undesirable outcomes if the norms and values to which members attend to are not strategically appropriate, or if internalization is so complete that members are unable to even think of alternative ways of doing things. Either way, rather than being based on legitimate or formal authority, social control is based informational and normative influence (e.g., Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

While formal control mechanisms are usually codified in the form of rules and procedures, social control emerges in the form of values and norms and is regulated through peer influence and the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This is an important distinction because, as will be discussed, the reliance on the opinions of valued others implies that social control may be far more extensive and less expensive than formal systems (Van Maanen, 1991). The paradox is that strong social control systems often result in positive feelings of solidarity and a greater sense of autonomy among people, rather than the psychological reactance described earlier. Because the internalization of some organizational values such as helping others and contributing to society can result in a perception of intrinsic value (that is, something that the person believes in rather than something imposed externally and subject to extrinsic justification), it may be accompanied by more positive attitudes and freely chosen behaviors. Below we define norms and values and discuss their role in the social control process. We delay an evaluation of the tradeoffs of using social control until the end of this paper.

Defining Organizational Norms and Values

As suggested earlier, we view culture as a form of social control that operates when members of a group or organization share expectations about values, or what is important, and how these values are to be manifest in norms, that is, in words and actions. Norms and values are closely related, and the distinction between them is one of emphasis. Norms refer to the expected behaviors sanctioned by the system and thus have a specific "ought" or "must" quality, while values provide rationales for these normative requirements (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). For a value to become an organizational norm it must have a number of qualities: it must have an explicit formulation, it should refer specifically to identifiable behaviors, and its formulation should be systematically linked to behaviors so that it can be enforced (Weiner, 1988).

A second important distinction is that individual norms and values may differ from organizational norms and values. For group norms and values to exist, there must be beliefs about appropriate and required behavior for group members as group members; that is, there must be a commonality of such beliefs such that while not every member of the group must hold the same

idea, a majority of active members are in agreement. There should also be an awareness by individuals that there is group support for a given belief (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985). Thus, organization norms and values are a group product, and may or may not be identical to the privately held values of an individual organization member.

A final distinction is between societal and more organizationally relevant values (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993). Etzioni (1964) distinguishes between societal values and values which are directly relevant to organizational issues. Societal values, while important, are far more distal and vary across entire societies (e.g., Hofstede, 1991). Organizational values, while potentially equivalent in content, are more bounded in that they are, typically, more relevant to the operations or the stated purpose of organizations.

Organization Culture as Normative Order

If we define organizational values as the beliefs shared by organizational members and norms as the expectations about appropriate attitudes and behaviors derived from these organization values, organizational culture can be viewed as *a system of shared values defining what is important, and norms, defining appropriate attitudes and behaviors, that guide members' attitudes and behaviors.* Jackson (1966) suggests two important dimensions of norms. He argues that norms, whatever their content, can vary: (1) in terms of their intensity, or the approval or disapproval evoked by appropriate or inappropriate behavior; and (2) in the amount of agreement or consensus with which a particular norm is held. A "strong culture" can be said to exist when their are a set of norms and values that are widely shared and strongly held throughout the organization (O'Reilly, 1989).

It is important to note that the operative norms that characterize a group or organization may not necessarily be those espoused by senior management or articulated in the company mission or vision. Repetition by top management of what is important, or the printing of company values on parchment, does not mean that members of the organization accept these as important. With sufficient publicity, espoused values and appropriate behavior may become widely known but not necessarily practiced—a common occurrence when senior management has been talking about a topic, such as quality or customer service, but the values are not internalized by members (e.g., Pascale, 1990). Similarly, norms may exist in one part of the organization but not be widely shared in other parts. For example, the marketing department may value meeting customer's needs through new products while the manufacturing department values stable product designs and long production runs. Variations of this sort may result in strong subcultures (e.g., Sackmann, 1992). However, we use the term "strong culture" to refer to organizational norms that are widely shared and strongly held across the units that comprise an organization. Under

these circumstances, it makes sense to talk about an *organizational* culture and to consider its implications as a control system.

The critical feature of these norms and values is that they provide the basis for social control within organizations. When members agree and care about common values, violations of norms that represent these values may be sanctioned by any member, regardless of his or her formal authority or position in the hierarchy. Thus the power of organizational culture—to increase commitment among members—may lie in the power of social control. To the extent that norms emerge in all groups (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991), it is also true that social control systems operate in all organizations. The question is whether these norms are intensely held, whether they enhance commitment or not, and whether they are aligned with environmental demands, that is, whether they enhance organizational performance and permit adaptation to changing circumstances.

We argue below that social control targets a broader range of behaviors, such as contact with nonorganizational members (e.g., Ofshe, 1992; Van Maanen, 1991) than formal control. The punishment for failing to adhere to norms may be exclusion, which becomes more painful for individuals as member affiliations become more multifaceted and intense. Even if an individual should have questions about the wisdom of a given norm, it becomes very difficult to alter because noncompliance may result in sanctions from one's friends. Such questioning is often interpreted as a lack confidence in the group's abilities (e.g., Janis & Mann, 1977) and is considered disloyal.

In this manner, behavior is adapted to and controlled by the situation. As Ofshe points out in discussing how cults manage people (1992, p. 213), "Eliciting the desired verbal and interactive behavior sets up conditions likely to stimulate the development of attitudes consistent with and that function to rationalize new behavior in which the individual is engaging." Over time, behavioral conformance may lead even those with doubts about underlying norms or values to accept the underlying premise of the value; that is, demonstrated behavior may lead to changed belief (Cialdini, 1993; Schlenker, 1982). Even in the face of doubts about the norm or value, individuals are likely to behave in accordance with the desires of their friends. This is a fundamental dilemma of culture as social control; if members accept existing norms and values without question, and the norms and values are or become strategically inappropriate (e.g., emphasize cost over quality when customers care more about quality), then a strong culture can actually become associated with *poor performance.*

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL CONTROL: CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL REALITIES

In this section we develop a framework for understanding both why culture has powerful effects on members' willingness to comply with organizational

objectives and the specific mechanisms used to develop and manage demonstrated behaviors through social control. Specifically, we discuss the social psychological factors that enhance member agreement about norms and the intensity with which norms are adhered to. In other words, we address the question of where social control comes from.

Cialdini et al. (1991) have demonstrated that getting people to attend to injunctive norms, or ways people ought to behave, can have a dramatic effect in promoting norm-consistent behavior. If there are important expectations within organizations about attitudes and behaviors that are critical for the attainment of organizational objectives, such as innovation, speed, customer service, quality, adaptability, or safety, then it follows that promoting compliance with these norms will likely be associated with increased performance, as long as the strategic or technological context does not change dramatically. It is clearly the case that if norms exist among group members that run counter to the behaviors needed for effective performance, achieving the organization's objectives will be more difficult. In this regard, the combination of identifying strategically relevant values and norms, as opposed to irrelevant values and norms, *and* promoting agreement, as opposed to chronic conflict among organizational members is critical to creating a strong culture that positively affects organizational performance. If the norms and values chosen are inappropriate but members agree and care about them, the firm could be driven quickly to poor performance. In contrast, if the norms and values chosen are appropriate, but members do not care about them, the norms and values will fail to be implemented behaviorally. Finally, if members care too much about any set of values, their investment in these may prevent them from perceiving a need to shift these values and norms to stay aligned with environmental demands. In the next section, we focus on social control as a mechanism for increasing member commitment. Gaining commitment to the desired set of norms becomes a pivotal managerial task.

Managing Behavior in Organizations: Gaining Member Agreement and Intensity

To ensure that organizational objectives matter to members, an organization might attempt to hire people who are highly motivated and have personalities and interests that already coincide with the organizations'. This rather intuitive reasoning has driven an enormous body of organizational research looking for need and trait-based correlates of performance (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Maslow, 1943; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982; Pinder, 1977) and attempting to match individuals to situations (e.g., Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1990). Although research shows that some general characteristics such as conscientiousness, intelligence and ambition contribute to individual performance (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1994), the modest correlation between

most personality traits or needs and performance may reflect the notion that such characteristics help get people to agree with organizational objectives, but fail to ensure the intensity characteristic of social control. Intensity, or unwavering commitment to norms and values is a factor that ensures peer enforcement of norms.

One reason why this person-centered mentality persists in organizations (and among researchers) is because of the construal process individuals go through in order to understand the relationship between social situations and behavior, and the relationship between behavior and outcomes. The well-known fundamental attribution error describes our tendency to attribute another person's behavior to his or her own dispositional qualities, rather than to situational factors (e.g., Ross, 1977). Instead of acknowledging that situational forces such as social norms can drive behavior, especially under some combinations of personality and situations (e.g., Wright & Mischel, 1987), we generally believe that other individuals freely choose the behaviors they display. Further, these behaviors are viewed as representative of the actor's stable qualities or personality characteristics. The closely related actor-observer bias (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1972) is based in part on the inaccessibility, or lack of availability, for observers of relevant situational constraints causing the displayed behaviors.

Given that motivation and personality do not fully predict performance, how do organizations get members to agree with and care intensely about objectives? We argue that they attempt to do so by increasing members' openness to organizational influence, which may include both unfreezing their prior beliefs (e.g., Van Maanen, 1976) and influencing subsequent beliefs and behaviors through shared expectations of valued others. In essence, organizations create a strong situation[2] characterized by norms that are difficult to violate without being sanctioned. Some argue that all organizations have the capacity to become strong situations (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989), and if this potential is realized, intensity about shared expectations driven by a desire for approval from valued others may further diminish the influence of individual differences on behavior (e.g., Monson, Hesley, & Chernick, 1982).

A variety of psychological mechanisms may be used to clarify expectations and create similar construal of the situation or organizational norms. Some are used to teach people about the norms, and thus to promote agreement. For example, particular information is made more salient than other information (Pfeffer, 1981). Given the ubiquity of ambiguity in organizations (e.g., Cohen & March, 1974), events and causal relationships are often forcefully interpreted by organizational leaders calling attention to the important norms. Further, when people are unsure of themselves and their own judgment, or when the situation is unclear or ambiguous, they are most likely to look to and consider the actions of others as appropriate (Tesser, Campbell, & Mickler, 1983).

Such uncertainty arises from a variety of situational characteristics. Probably the period at which the organizational situation is most ambiguous is when members first join (Louis, 1990; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Newcomers are most likely to seek information, given their lack of cues upon entering the firms, and are most open to normative and informational influence (e.g., Morrison, 1993a). Even with relevant past work experience, they may be quite anxious to learn how things are done in this organization in order to establish a secure position in their new setting. Newcomers are not just looking for task related and normative information (Morrison, 1993b), they are also most likely to agree with it when they first join an organization in order to fit in (e.g., Chatman, 1991).

Like agreement, a number of forces combine to create high levels of intensity about organizational norms and values. Indeed, few organizations train recruiters to select candidates systematically on the basis of ability or predicted performance (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). Rather, recruiters tend to attend to candidates' personality and values rather than their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Jackson, Peacock, & Holden, 1982). Further, people are generally good at discriminating between in-group members (e.g., those who share a set of values) and out-group members, and are attracted to those seen as similar (Moreland, 1985; Wenegrat, 1989). Recruiting procedures, such as interviews, are likely to result in the hiring of someone similar to existing members rather than, necessarily, the best possible performer (e.g., Rothstein & Jackson, 1981). This tendency to hire similar others is augmented by the tendency for job candidates to be more likely to apply to firms that they believe hold similar values to their own (Schneider, 1987; Tom, 1971). Thus, strong culture organizations may be trading-off top level job performance for increased homogeneity and value congruence among recruits.

When people perceive others as similar, they are likely to view them as members of the same group (in-group). Past research has shown that people are significantly more likely to cooperate with those they consider to be part of their in-group (e.g., Brewer, 1979). Social categorization also enhances member's identification with the organization. To the extent that members identify with an organization, they are more likely to support the institution embodying this identity, behaviorally adhere to its values and norms, and ultimately internalize the norms and values (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Value internalization represents the strongest form of commitment or attachment and implies that members will not hesitate to go above and beyond the call of duty on the organization's behalf (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

In sum, we argue that behavior in organizations may be partially determined by individual differences, but is also powerfully shaped by the content and process of developing strong norms and values. Organizations can often be characterized as strong situations, developed through informational salience and focus, similarity and liking, and self-categorization and identification processes.

These processes, in turn, may lead members to behave in normatively consistent ways. Then, because individuals seek to justify their own actions to themselves and others whose judgments they care about, they are likely to cognitively reconstruct their values so that they are consistent with their behavior (e.g., Chatman, Bell, & Staw, 1986). A model of performance predicated on individual differences implies that managers spend time becoming experts in selection processes, because personality and cognitive ability do not change easily, or in personality or clinical psychology so that they can understand the unique motivational forces that affect their employees. In contrast, we suggest that a great deal of organizational behavior is influenced by managing informational and normative influence and promoting social control. This implies that influential managers spend time modifying situations and creating conditions that facilitate the desired behaviors. Below we present some of the mechanisms managers may use to leverage culture.

Mechanisms for "Managing" Culture

An individual's values are derived, in part, from stable dispositions (e.g., Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986) and, in part, from social contexts. Clearly people use their own experience and preferences to guide numerous important decisions such as what career to choose (Holland, 1976), what organization to join (Chatman, 1991), who they find interpersonally attractive (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), or how hard to work (Caldwell, Chatman, & O'Reilly, 1990). But, it is often the case that much of what people accept as "true" or "important" in organizations comes from a consensus of others, particularly others who are in some way important. To know what is important individuals often must rely upon what their peers or group members are doing or telling us is important (e.g., approval or disapproval), and clear signals from management (e.g., what is rewarded and punished). Situations may be even more powerful when individuals have little social support (e.g., when they are new to an organization or away from family and friends), have ambiguous information about the situation (e.g., in a new assignment), are facing problems beyond their control (e.g., a job that has substantial task interdependence with others over whom they have no authority), when previous views have been shown to be ineffective or incorrect (e.g., when performance is declining or the situation is changing), or when experiences undermine self-confidence (e.g., during socialization or when a task is beyond their capabilities) (Kelly, 1967).

These circumstances, a common part of organizational life, can cause individuals to be particularly responsive to existing norms and values. When individuals want to fit in—are subject to formal reward systems and hierarchical authority—the power of the situation may be substantial (e.g., Zucker, 1977). Thus, social learning in organizations is more pronounced the more individuals

care about other members, the less familiar individuals are with the setting, or the more old ways of behaving are not working.

Drawing upon the psychological processes we have discussed, four mechanisms are commonly used by strong culture organizations to generate commitment and manage through social control: (1) systems of participation that promote choice and lead people to feel committed; (2) management actions that set goals, focus attention, and help people interpret events in ways that emphasize their intrinsic importance; (3) consistent information from valued others signalling what is and is not important; and (4) comprehensive reward systems that are seen as fair and emphasize recognition, approval, and individual and collective contributions. The power of informational and normative influence is enhanced by consistency and reduced contradictions.

Participation

The literature demonstrating the power of participation to produce commitment is substantial (e.g., Cialdini, 1993; Janis & Mann, 1977). Behavior engaged in without obvious extrinsic justification often results in large and surprising changes in attitudes and subsequent behavior (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Comer and Laird (1975), for example, used a process of incremental commitment to induce subjects in an experiment to voluntarily eat an earthworm. Similar processes have been employed to increase bone marrow donors (Schwartz, 1970), conserve energy (Pallak, Cook, & Sullivan, 1980), or to secure religious converts (Lang & Lang, 1961). Specifically, Salancik (1977) proposes four characteristics that can accentuate the effects of participation: (1) volitionality or choice, (2) publicity or visibility, (3) explicitness, and (4) irrevocability. Each of these can increase the feeling of personal responsibility and lead to positive sentiments about the choice. Organizations often use these by designing systems that promote participation and choice by members, a common feature of high commitment work practices (e.g., Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Walton, 1985).

Management as Symbolic Action

A second mechanism for developing and managing through social control comes from management in the form of signals about what is important and the intrinsic significance of the work. Pfeffer (1981) describes the influence of language, symbols, and consistency of executive action as a means for cuing organizational members about what is important. He notes that formal power may have large substantive effects on organizational activities, but the attitudinal effect on individuals may be uncertain unless an attempt is made to help employees interpret events in motivationally enhancing ways. Thus, managers may act as signal generators sending messages about what is important through

their own behavior, often in mundane ways such as consistently asking certain questions or following up on desired activities. Although particular symbols by themselves are not likely to be effective, when they reflect an important and widely shared value they may shape interpretations and enhance the intrinsic importance attached to specific attitudes and behaviors (Collins & Porras, 1994). In this sense, managers who influence others' interpretation of events and see the intrinsic value of their efforts shape the social control system.

Information from Others

Clear, consistent messages from coworkers also shape an individuals beliefs and behaviors. A large body of social psychological research provides dramatic examples of the power of informational influence (e.g., Latane & Darley, 1968). For instance, Rushton and Campbell (1977) found that face-to-face requests for blood donations were successful 25% of the time. When requests were made in the presence of a model who complied, the rate more than doubled to 67%. Organizations capitalize on the impact of others' behaviors on us in a number of ways. Some emphasize equality among members by reducing distinctions between management and workers (e.g., no special perks such as parking spaces, common titles, open office space, informality, etc.). Others emphasize close relations among members through social activities and family involvement. The very pace of work sometimes acts to isolate workers from others who are not also at the company.

Comprehensive Reward Systems

A final important lever for shaping culture involves the comprehensive use of rewards and recognition for exemplary compliance with the core norms and values. Biggart (1989), for example, describes how direct sales organizations use continual recognition and reinforcement to motivate employees. These may take the form of small gifts, recognition from peers, or even awarding vacations and automobiles. But, as discussed in the second section, tangible rewards must be carefully allocated because they may reduce intrinsic interest and motivation, especially when intrinsic interest is initially high (Harackiewicz & Larson, 1986). For example, providing people with verbal reinforcement and positive feedback, compared with external rewards, increases their intrinsic motivation in tasks (e.g., Deci, 1971). Providing people with small rewards may be more effective in shaping behavior than offering large rewards, especially when the rewards are framed in terms of "appreciation" rather than "control" (Steele, 1988).

These four mechanisms (participation, management as symbolic action, information from others, and informal reward and recognition systems) are the primary levers organizations use to develop culture as a social control system. Each capitalizes on the importance of strong informational and normative

influence as a potential determinant of attitudes and behavior. Each acts to provide organizational members with consistent signals about which attitudes and behaviors are important, either from one's own previous behavior or from information provided by valued others. Due to the strong attributional bias and ethics, Western philosophy, or societal norms valuing individualism, the power of these forces to shape behavior is seldom appreciated. Individuals prefer disposition-based predictions, even when confronted with contrary evidence (Pietromonaco & Nisbett, 1982). Ironically, this bias may actually enhance the power of social control systems because observers are less aware of their operation. We present concrete examples below of how these four mechanisms provide the foundation for social control in organizations. Surprisingly these mechanisms are used in organizations as disparate as cults and strong culture corporations.

SOCIAL CONTROL IN ORGANIZATIONS: STRONG CULTURE FIRMS, RELIGIOUS GROUPS, SELF-AWARENESS GROUPS, AND CULTS

The previous section described the psychology of strong situations and individuals' tendencies to underestimate their power. In this section, we review how social control operates in organizations ranging from strong culture corporations to religious organizations and cults. Whether it is a strong culture company such as Hewlett-Packard, a Japanese transplant like New United Motors Manufacturing Inc., or fringe religious groups, the psychological mechanisms used to recruit, socialize, and control members are remarkably similar. In each case, social control is employed to provide members with direction, purpose, and perspective. Of course, cults and cult-like organizations typically exert more control over people and have different intentions than strong culture firms. In cults, leaders want members to internalize their beliefs so that members become loyal deployable agents who will act on the cult's behalf, even if it means violating laws or sacrificing one's friends and family. Strong culture firms typically have less control and a different intent; leaders hope that members will become committed by taking pride in their affiliation with the firm (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). But the mechanisms for recruitment and commitment and the psychological processes that underlie these are strikingly similar. Cults and strong culture firms use participation as a means for generating commitment, symbolic action to convey a sense of purpose, consistent information to shape interpretations, and extensive reward and recognition systems to shape behavior (O'Reilly, 1989). In this sense, the underlying psychology of social control is fundamentally the same across these types of organizations. We draw this comparison to show how culture is used as a social control system for both positive and negative ends, and how culture

in corporations is developed and managed. The message is not that organizations should be run as cults, but rather that social control can, under some circumstances, be a powerful and productive way to motivate and coordinate collective action.

Social Control in Strong Culture Organizations

Although perceived as more socially acceptable, strong culture organizations often use "cult-like" techniques to generate commitment and social control. To develop the strategically appropriate normative order, three general steps are taken by almost all strong culture organizations: (1) *promoting commitment through participation* by designing processes such as rigorous selection and orientation processes and job designs that require multiple steps; (2) *managing the informational context* through management signalling, often symbolically, that certain goals, attitudes, and behavior are important, minimizing mixed or inconsistent messages to help members develop shared interpretations of events, and continuous emphasis with multiple opportunities for reinforcement; and (3) *developing comprehensive reward systems* that are aligned with the culture and that provide rapid feedback, an emphasis on appropriate attitudes and behavior, and continuous recognition. The focus of these activities is to ensure strong, unambiguous support for the norms and values that define the social control system. The power of the system, as outlined previously, results from the identification and internalization of these norms and values by the members of the organization such that each is willing to live by the values and sanction others for violating the values. When this occurs, the control afforded is extensive and internalized rather that periodic and exogenous.

Japanese organizations, for example, rely heavily on social control developed through elaborate recruitment and socialization procedures, an emphasis on cohorts and work groups, consensual decision making based on participation, a unique company philosophy, and strong evaluation of attitudes and behaviors rather than simple performance (e.g., Brannen, 1993; Clark, 1979). While there may be aspects to Japanese history and society that encourage the use of social control, Abegglen and Stalk (1985, p. 15) observe that the achievement of the Japanese "results not from special diligence, loyalty or other special characteristics of individual Japanese. Rather it results from a total system of employment and governance that combines to produce exceptional results... It is a system whose elements can be introduced into any management system given adequate understanding, conviction and effort." The proof of this can be seen in the success of Japanese manufacturing organizations in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States. With appropriate modifications to reflect local cultural norms, these systems, relying on strong cultures that highlight the values of quality, continuous improvement, customer service, and productivity, have been remarkably robust (e.g., Perrucci, 1994; Womak et al., 1990).

New United Motors Manufacturing Inc. (NUMMI), the joint venture between General Motors and Toyota Manufacturing in Fremont, California illustrates these points (Adler, 1994). In 1983 General Motors closed their Fremont Assembly plant. It was one of the worst operations in the GM system with an average daily absenteeism rate of over 18%, exceedingly poor quality, and labor-management relations that resulted in roughly 5,000 grievances per contract. In 1983 Toyota agreed to reopen the plant. Toyota would manufacture cars and GM would handle marketing, distribution, and sales. NUMMI invited back the old GM workers and hired over 85% of those who applied; they agreed to the same UAW representation, and chose not to use the latest technology in their manufacturing process. Studies have shown that NUMMI has some of the lowest absenteeism and highest productivity and quality in the world (Krafcik, 1986). How can this happen? The obvious answers such as a different workforce or new technology do not apply. The answer may lie in the management of the workforce and through the use of culture as a social control system (Pfeffer, 1994). First, the recruitment process required applicants to go through a 3-day assessment program on their own time. The emphasis of this program was on participant's ability to work as a part of a team with clear signals about what norms and values were important. The purpose here was in setting the right expectations as much as it was actually selecting people. After selection, team members (never referred to as "assembly line workers") were continually trained and socialized about the importance of attendance, hard work, and continuous improvement. Semi-autonomous teams are used extensively, including doing the industrial engineering. Training was conducted by other team members and senior managers, signalling that these were important. Rewards and recognition were explicitly designed to enhance teamwork and quality. For example, each team was provided with a budget to support team social functions. The one constraint is that to use these funds *all* team members had to participate, enhancing interdependence and thus social control within the plant. Elaborate private offices or managerial perks that emphasized distinctions rather than similarities among members were avoided. All employees dressed alike. In the Japanese tradition, office design emphasizes open spaces ensuring that people could always observe their colleagues. The goal was to demonstrate that U.S. workers could produce a quality automobile as good or better as the Japanese, and thereby act as a role model for U.S. automobile manufacturers. The emphasis was on the intrinsic worth of their efforts more than profitability.

The three themes of systems of participation, management of the informational context, and comprehensive reward and recognition systems are characteristic of the social control systems in almost all strong culture firms. At Southwest Airlines, Hewlett-Packard, Nordstrom, and other firms the recruitment process involves multiple steps, requiring applicants to escalate their investment in the firm. At Tandem Computer and Cypress Semiconductor, for

instance, there is a deliberate attempt *not* to discuss salary before hiring. Instead, candidates are asked to commit to join the firm (i.e., accept the job offer) before discussing the specifics of their salary, a tactic which emphasizes the intrinsic rather than instrumental aspects of belonging. At Southwest, the hiring process, and often the firing process, is based explicitly on whether the individual has the "right attitude." Procedures enable insiders to discern whether candidates fit the culture of the organization, for example Southwest pilots hire other pilots. Similarly, at Worthington Industries, team members vote on whether a probationary employee will be offered a permanent position. From the recruits' perspective, the process is one of incremental and public commitment to subscribe to an explicit set of norms, often conditional on the explicit approval of his or her direct coworkers. (Of course, this process also increases the interdependence among members by making them accountable for new recruits' success in the organization.) Further, some companies that are undergoing major cultural transformations such as British Airways, AT&T, Boeing, ABB and General Electric, use a similar process of re-recruitment and re-socialization to the new norms and values. For example, employees often where people must reapply for their old jobs, publicly sign agreements, and undergo intensive resocialization.[3]

Once an individual has joined a strong culture firm, he or she is continuously socialized to understand the appropriate attitudes and behaviors. For example, all Southwest Airlines employees are brought to corporate headquarters in Dallas for a training session, called a "celebration." At firms like Disney, Arthur Andersen, and Procter and Gamble, these experiences may be highly structured while at other companies like Nordstrom and some investment banks, they may involve total immersion in a group of others who embody the culture, including long hours, off the job socializing, heroic stories, and group celebrations. Collins and Porras (1994, p. 132) report a P&G employee as saying, "P&Gers are expected to socialize primarily with other P&Gers, belong to the same clubs, attend similar churches, and live in the same neighborhoods." Strong signals are continually sent from higher management emphasizing the important norms and values of the company. At Southwest where productivity and teamwork are important, the pilots hold 3 a.m. cook-outs on the flight line to thank the mechanics. They also help flight attendants clean the aircraft during stops (Labich, 1994). At Disney, there is a strong norm that *everyone* is expected to pick up litter, including senior officers. At firms like Federal Express, Mary Kay, and Wal-Mart, constant reinforcement in the form of pictures, stories, parties and celebrations are held to tighten social ties and further illustrate the "correct" attitudes and behavior. Jobs are designed to emphasize teams and peer pressure in almost all such organizations. Stock ownership and profit sharing, requiring members to literally buy-in to the firm, are often found in these firms (Pfeffer, 1994).

Table 1. Designing Social Control Systems

1. "Vision" or purpose which provides intrinsic meaning to work.
2. Select people whose values are similar to the organization's or whose situation is likely to make them willing to change past beliefs and accept new ones (e.g., people without previous experience in the industry).
3. Use multiple recruiting steps requiring escalating commitment on the part of the recruit (e.g., require multiple visits and interviews).
4. Focus on core values that have intrinsic value to the recruit. Be clear and honest about the norms and values of the organization (e.g., explicit descriptions of attitudes and behaviors). Emphasize the affective ties among members and importance of fit.
5. Facilitate a "deselection" process emphasizing "choice." Note that the organization is not for everyone; only certain people can join.
6. Provide extensive exposure to the core values through training, role models, senior management, and participation. These emphasize the specific attitudes and behaviors expected by members. Minimize conflicting signals.
7. Promote strong cohort bonds and social ties among people (e.g., parties, celebrations, and "fun"). Emphasize teamwork and directed autonomy.
8. Offer visible, vivid, and consistent top management support. Management are explicit role models of attitudes and behavior. Set clear, difficult goals. Emphasize the intrinsic importance of the work, not the monetary rewards.
9. Provide frequent reinforcement of the attitudes and behaviors that reflect the core values, especially through recognition, celebration and group approval (e.g., design systems that promote recognition).

What is important to note about these activities is the way in which they draw upon the underlying psychological processes we have described in order to develop strong social control systems. Collins and Porras (1994) note that all organizations have cultures. But the cult-like characteristics serve to ensure the presence of the core ideology and differentiate strong culture firms from their less successful competitors. The common themes linking cults, religious organizations, and strong culture firms are shown in Table 1. These include an emphasis on the intrinsic importance of the effort, participation and incremental commitment, a reliance on clear norms and values, the development of affective ties among members, and continual reinforcement of behavior aligned with the norms and values.

Social Control in Religious Organizations, Self-Help Organizations, and Cults

The previous section described the use of social control in work organizations. In this section we review how the same approach and underlying psychological processes operate in religious organizations, self-help organizations, and cults. Heirich (1977) found that the most powerful predictor of religious conversion was social influence. Long and Hadden (1983, p. 2), compare brainwashing and religious conversion and conclude that, "There are very real differences in

content and in emphasis between religious conversion and other forms of socialization, but *the basic process and variables are the same*" (emphasis in the original). Stark (1971, p. 165) reviews the old proposition that there is a positive association between psychopathology and religious commitment and concludes "that the proposition is not simply false, but the opposite of the truth." In cults, leaders want members to internalize their beliefs so that members become loyal, deployable agents who will act on the cult's behalf, even if it means breaking the laws or dying. Strong culture firms have less control and a different intent than these other types of organizations; leaders hope that members will become committed by taking pride in their affiliation with the firm (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). But the mechanisms for recruitment and commitment are strikingly similar. Religious organizations, self-help organizations, cults and strong culture firms use participation as a means for generating commitment, symbolic action to convey a sense of purpose, consistent information to shape interpretations, and extensive reward and recognition systems to shape behavior (O'Reilly, 1989). Thus we argue that the underlying psychology of social control is fundamentally the same across these types of organizations. Again, the tendency to account for the fervor of some religious organizations or cults through individual attributes misses the power of social control.

Religious Organizations

Consider the following religion: A century ago it was a small, persecuted religious cult whose leaders were hunted by the U.S. government. Now it is the fastest growing church among the major denominations in the United States, averaging a 6% growth rate per year and with over 75 million members worldwide (Lindsey, 1986). Church membership doubled every 15 years between World War II and 1970, and tripled between 1970 and 1985. It has an estimated $8 billion is assets and an annual revenue of $2 billion, including ownership of insurance companies, radio and television stations, publishing houses, agribusinesses, and real estate (Heinerman & Shupe, 1986).

This religion, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Mormons, emphasizes the most American of values: striving, self-reliant, strong families, stable marriages, and close knit families. How has this church managed to grow, prosper and maintain its hold on its members? Aside from its theology, the Mormons use strong social control systems for recruiting new members and managing the flock. Lindsey (1986, p. 34) indicates that, "Any member who violates church directives on doctrine, morality or life style, who challenges the word of the hierarchy, who declines to pay 10 percent of his income to the church, or otherwise fails to pass muster in the eyes of his local lay bishop, faces serious ecclesiastical consequences." This can also include serious interpersonal and economic consequences as well, with those out of favor being deprived of friends and business relationships. Criticism is not appreciated and

obedience is expected. Harold Lee (1972), a church leader, stated that each member should "Keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it."

To ensure involvement, membership entails significant participation which can include home visiting and teaching assignments, regular temple attendance, welfare assignments, board meetings, service projects, ward parties, family home evenings and recruiting. For instance, Barker (1987, p. 26) notes that Mormon society, like the old Soviet system, involves "authoritarian systems with extensive programs of education and socialization to promote the values of the institution... In both cases, these values involve doctrinal tenets, ritual and symbolism, and require a high degree of participation within the system by all its members." Barker also points out that there are important differences in means and ends between the two systems, but that both ideologies use similar mechanisms to promote membership and ensure compliance.

Recruiting is particularly targeted at non-Mormons. Members are actively challenged to identify and pursue friendships for the purpose of converting them. Activities are explicitly designed around the interests of a targeted non-Mormon in order to gain his interest (Barker, 1987). The sophistication with which social influence is used is seen most clearly in the 13-step procedure provided in church literature to help Mormons recruit (Eberhard, 1974). Table 2 provides these steps, all directed toward building close interpersonal ties and using these to incrementally commit the subject. The initial focus is on those without close family ties, for instance those who are new to the neighborhood or those who have had a recent death in the family and may be seeking answers. As with the Moonies, the process emphasizes establishing an emotional bond, then involving them in a circle of friends who are Mormons. Gradually, the prospective recruit comes to feel that he or she is among a group of friends with good common values. The instructions proceed to tell the recruiter how to incrementally escalate the target's involvement until the recruit is publicly asked by their new friends to commit to the religion. In a two-year study the recruitment success rate for this procedure was estimated at 50% compared to the less than 0.1% success rate for door-to-door proselytizing (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980).

Self-Help Organizations

Some religious organizations and most cults typically exert almost total control over their members through life-absorbing involvement and isolation, for example, common residences such as dormitories or close-knit communities and extensive church activities (Ebaugh, 1977; Wilson, 1959). Self-help organizations such as Scientology, Lifespring, *est*, and other similar offshoots use the same techniques to generate commitment among members, although

Table 2. Religious Recruitment

1. Select your family. Choose people who are without strong friendship ties (e.g., new to the neighborhood) or who have had a recent death in the family.
2. Learn their names. Be cheerful. Be a good listener. Do a favor for them (e.g., lend them gardening tools).
3. Invite them to your home. Give them a reason not related to the religion.
4. Go out together. Focus on their interests. Let them choose the place or event.
5. Casually mention your religious affiliation. Avoid intensely spiritual subjects.
6. Offer them practical literature such as how to stop smoking. Use discretion.
7. Invite them for a family evening. Emphasize your solid family relationships. Avoid church questions.
8. Introduce them to other church members. For example, invite them to participate in classes. Get your children to help by asking them to invite nonmembers also.
9. Based on their interests, invite them to a church social. Avoid deep religious discussions.
10. Invite them to a church meeting. Carefully select an appropriate event. Let them know what to expect.
11. Share your personal testimony. Keep it simple. Do not include deeply spiritual experiences.
12. Ask the "golden" question; that is, would they be interested in finding out about the religion? Use their interests. Keep trying.
13. Ask them to meet with the missionaries. Set a time and place. Put them at ease. Support them in their decision.

Source: Eberhard (1974).

their control is often less complete. Nevertheless, the process of involvement often leads to reports of secular conversion experiences similar to religious experiences, except the discovery is one of self-enlightenment or "getting it" rather than discovering God (Long & Hadden, 1983). In analyzing the psychology of Alcoholics Anonymous, Galanter (1989, p.185) describes how, "Recruitment into AA occurs in a psychological context that allows communication to be closely controlled, so as to assure that the group's ideology will be sustained in the face of uncommitted drinkers. Most of those attending AA chapter meetings are deeply involved in the group ethos, and the expression of views opposed to the group's model of treatment is subtly or expressly discouraged." AA uses involvement and social control to generate intense personal commitment to the norms and values of not drinking.

Scientology, another self-awareness organization, has an estimated $400 million in foreign bank accounts and 50,000 members (Behar, 1991). They recruit wealthy and respectable members through a network of consulting groups that disguise their ties to the group. Exploiting a recruit's desire for self-awareness, the group uses an escalating commitment process to draw new members into the organization (Bainbridge & Stark, 1980). Both *est* and Lifespring are based on sales motivation courses and use similar approaches involving escalating commitment, strong normative pressure to comply, and processes to reduce critical thinking and overwhelm normal psychological defense mechanisms (Baer & Stolz, 1978; Finkelstein, Wenegrat, & Yalom, 1982). Once in the group,

members form new sets of "friends" to whom they are committed. This group acts to ensure social control of the new attitudes and behavior. Recruiting new members becomes an important part of their new roles. As Baer and Stolz (1978, p. 60) conclude, "*est* trainees rarely will complain later; they more often will boast of their exceptional bargain in personal fulfillment, and will be positive that they are now experiencing life rather than being run by others or their past. The alternative to claiming this is to admit that they were conned and didn't even have the courage to walk out in the middle. Very few people will admit to that." The actual evidence for psychological change in *est* graduates is almost nonexistent (Finkelstein et al., 1982). While the intent of these groups is to generate commitment based on the internalization of values (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), the evidence suggests that, rather than generating "enlightenment," the mechanism for generating commitment is social control based on informational and normative influence. This approach is typically successful only as long as a person remains a member of the group.

Cults

Cults elicit a certain popular fascination. They often embody the bizarre and are puzzling to try to understand. Before discussing the steps leading to cult membership, it is important to define the common characteristics of a cult. Appel (1983) suggests three defining attributes of cult membership: (1) separation and isolation from friends and family; (2) a conversion experience in which the past life is surrendered or re-interpreted; and (3) a new identity based on the new ideology. While undoubtedly accurate, these attributes could also apply to more conventional religious organizations. Religious leaders in the Catholic church, for instance, are sometimes sequestered from families and take on new names and identities (Ebaugh, 1977). Indeed, further reflection might suggest that the original members of some entrepreneurial start up companies such as Apple or Saturn also meet these characteristics (e.g., working 60-hour weeks can be as isolating as living in a commune).

Marc Galanter (1989), who has studied cults ranging from The Divine Light Mission to the Moonies, suggests a slightly different set of attributes defining a cult: (1) a shared belief system; (2) a high level of social cohesiveness; (3) strong norms defining appropriate attitudes and behaviors; and (4) the imputation of charismatic power to the group or leadership. Again, while this definition fits cults, it may also apply to strong culture organizations such as some military units, corporations with charismatic founders such as Mary Kay and Wal-Mart.

But a fundamental question remains: Why would a rational person join a group such as Jim Jones and the People's Temple in Guyana, the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in Oregon, or the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas? That is, why would an individual sacrifice his or her personal freedom, financial and material wealth, and in some cases, his or her life to be a member of a cult?

When asked "why do people join cults," many offer explanations such as low self-esteem, a high need for structure, being easily influenced, and other person-based explanations; that is, they attempt to explain this apparently irrational act by invoking some dispositional attribute. There is, however, no compelling evidence showing that those who join cults are psychologically different in any important ways from those who do not (e.g., Heirich, 1977; Lynch, 1977; Ofshe, 1992; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980). "The notion that only 'crazies' join cults is misleading. What we are really trying to assert with that assumption is that it can't happen here, it can't happen to you or me. Whether we like it or not, the facts speak otherwise" (Appel, 1983, p. 75).

Research suggests two basic reasons why people join cults. First, vulnerability to cults typically occurs when a person wants to make a difference or do something worthwhile (e.g., Lofland, 1977; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980). Appel (1983, p. 75) quotes a review of *Mein Kampf* by George Orwell who wrote, "Hitler knows that human beings don't only want comfort, safety, short working hours, hygiene, birth control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags, and loyalty parades." Further, many people desire a more collective experience in the modern-day, often alienating world (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).

Second, people are more likely to join cults when they are isolated from family and friends (not psychologically alienated but not embedded in their usual social networks). These characteristics are often found among young people, especially those living in college dormitories, foreign students, or travellers, and among retired people, or people facing a major life-change. The parallels between these and the attributes that increase vulnerability to social influence discussed above are clear (e.g., Kelly, 1967). The classic Bennington College study (Newcomb, 1943) offers a dramatic example of the political shift from conservative to active liberal among young women from upper-middle class families. This shift could be explained by the womens' experiences at Bennington, an exciting, cohesive and isolated college led by young politically liberal professors. In a classic study of cult membership, Lofland and Stark (1965) described how these same processes can explain how people enter the Moonies. These processes may also explain membership and conversion in more conventional settings. Table 3 outlines the original Lofland and Stark dimensions and applies them to membership in cults and a very conventional setting, that of a typical MBA program. Remarkably, the underlying logic applies well in both cases.

The Process of Getting Committed to a Cult

Rather than individual personality explaining cult behavior, it is the *process* through which members are recruited and controlled that matters. The history of the Moonies in the United States illustrates this point (e.g., Barker, 1984;

Table 3. Cult Recruitment

Situational Factors	*Cults/Religions*	*MBA Students*
1. Perception of a considerable strain or frustration	1. Feeling of inadequacy, unworthiness; desire to contribute to a higher good	1. Frustration in job/career; desire for rewards and challenge
2. Awareness of a religious or ideological rhetoric and problem solving perspective	2. Knowledge of religious tracts; ability to "explain" and solve problems	2. Awareness of methodologies to solve problems (e.g., economics)
3. Self-definition as a "religious seeker"; rejection of traditional solutions to problems	3. Quest for meaning and purpose beyond conventional religious explanations	3. Desire for achievement and advancement; rejection of current career path
4. Turning point reached where the old way is no longer tolerable; contact with cult member begins	4. Invitation to join group for social purposes	4. Contact with representative of school (e.g., alumni); interest in brochures, and so on
5. Development of affective bonds with cult members	5. Intensive involvement and immersion in the group	5. Increasing involvement with students, alumni, recruiters
6. Weak or neutralized ties with old contacts; precommitment to convert	6. Escalating commitment with cult members; public identification of association	6. Acceptance to the program; public commitment; sacrifice job; move; financial commitment
7. Intensive, communal interaction with final conversion	7. Full-time involvement; separation from old friends; new identity as deployable agent	7. Heavy course load, new religious perspective (e.g., economics); new group of friends; deployable as MBA

Source: Adapted from Lofland and Stark (1965).

Bromley & Shupe, 1979). The first Moonies in the United States attempted to recruit by proselytizing; that is, they lectured and distributed tapes describing their religious beliefs. This was unsuccessful, and after several years of effort, only a few converts had been made and their motives for joining were suspect. Subsequently, the Moonies developed a recruiting process that, within several years, resulted in hundreds of converts. This process unfolds in five stages, all of which involve incremental and escalating commitment, the development of strong affective ties between the recruit and cult members, and strong informational and normative influence Lofland (1977).

1. *Picking up.* Candidates, who are away from family and friends and at a point in their lives where they want to make a difference, are identified. For instance, recruitment often takes place on college campuses or in airports where people are obviously travelling. Recruiters engage targets in friendly

conversations. Sometimes the contact involves invoking the reciprocity norm, such as giving the person a ride or a small gift (Cialdini, 1993). The subject is then invited to dinner at the local Moonie house.

2. *Hooking-up.* At dinner the subject is surrounded with smiling, talkative hosts. Specific members of the cult are assigned to each guest. The intent is to establish an emotional bond. To do this, an emphasis is placed on similarities, common values, and the use of positive reinforcement. Once established, the target is asked to join the group for the weekend at their camp in Northern California. A promise of a ride to the camp and a return on Sunday is made.

3. *Encapsulating.* Once at the facility there is a modified brainwashing process in which the target is incorporated into the group through a series of collective activities, low protein, disrupted sleep patterns, fatigue, and a diminished ability to cognitively evaluate what they are told. The intent is to logically unfold the ideology in a manner the target will accept.

4. *Loving.* The crux of the weekend is to immerse the target in a caring group of similar others such that the person has the feeling of being loved and accepted by others.

5. *Committing.* Toward the end of this experience, the target is invited to stay on for a continuing week-long workshop. Identification with the new group of friends is promoted and involvement with former family and friends is trivialized. Active screening takes place to eliminate those participants who are seen as not fitting in with the group, including those with psychological problems.

From a social control perspective, the underlying psychology is clear. First, choice and incremental commitment processes are used to promote involvement. Next, affective attachments are developed through the emphasis on similarities, common values, and the use of positive reinforcement. For those who are temporarily isolated, the prospect of a weekend with new friends is not necessarily a burden. Reciprocity, having accepted their hospitality, also may dictate an affirmative response. Once at the camp and subject to more direct pressure, especially in a fatigued state, it becomes progressively more difficult to disagree or see the logical inconsistencies in their choices. Once a potential recruit chooses to stay for the week, leaving becomes increasingly difficult. Over 29% of a group chose to stay on after the weekend experience with the Moonies, and 6% of the original sample of 104 became full-time members (Galanter, 1989). Although of modest size, this 6% represents considerable potential for recruiting subsequent members. The only aspect distinguishing between those who joined and those who did not was that the joiners were less cohesively tied to others outside the cult.

The Moonies recognize that many new converts initially do not agree intellectually with the ideology. As Lofland and Stark (1965, p. 871) note, they also fully appreciate the power of social control, defining conversion as "coming

to accept the opinions of one's friends." In studying cults from a sociobiologic perspective, Wenegrat (1989) argues that this tendency has biologic origins and has been evolutionarily adaptive such that "The tendency to agree with one's perceived group appears...to override critical faculties: (1989, p. 200). Thus, once one accepts the similarities between self and group, there may be a natural inclination to also accept the group's consensual views. Once embedded in the group, contacts with outsiders such as family and friends are cut off and strong social pressure is applied to ensure conformity to group norms. Often this involves moving to an isolated location and adopting a communal lifestyle that ensures members are always in the presence of others from the cult. This also ensures the constant enforcement of group norms.

Other cults use similar processes of social control (e.g., Balch & Taylor, 1977). Bainbridge (1978), for instance, provides a fascinating description of the development of a satanic cult. Again, the bizarre obsession with Satan did not result from individual pathology, but from the coupling of affective bonds among cult members with isolation from friends and escalating commitment to the in-group. This resulted over time in the adoption of a satanic theme, the development of symbols and rituals, and strong norms of behavior. A history of Jonestown (Mills, 1979) reveals a similar pattern. Members began spending large amounts of time together in church activities, isolating them from families and friends who were not members. Jim Jones required an escalating series of commitments that made it progressively more difficult to leave, "Soon Jim raised the required commitment to 30 percent of every member's income, and more people were required to go communal or go broke... Most of the people were...so completely controlled that they gave in" (p. 38). Jones also moved his group several times to disrupt stable social networks and ensure isolation and control.

The history of the *Sturm Abteilung* (*SA*) and the *Schutzstaffel* (*SS*) in Nazi Germany have eerie parallels in the use of social control (Sabini & Silver, 1980; Steiner, 1980). Descriptions of the origins of the SA echo the themes of isolation, a sense of making a difference, and the use of social control developed through participation, management as symbolic action, information from others, and clear reward and recognition systems (Merkl, 1980). First, the initial recruits were young men, many of whom had lost their fathers during WWI. They therefore fit the predisposing characteristics of likely cult joiners. Once convinced of the ideal of a proud Germany, they often moved into dormitories with other young men. Here they were socialized into the values and norms of the stormtroopers, provided with symbols, an identity, a charismatic leader, and continual reinforcement and recognition from their peers and superiors. Further isolation from the rest of society and an escalating commitment to an increasingly deviant course of action followed. Again, studies of these recruits and of Nazi leaders do not reveal them to be significantly different psychologically from the larger population. Rather, it appears that well-adjusted

people can sometimes find themselves caught in strong situations that determine their behavior (e.g., Milgram, 1964).

Similar processes operated at Synanon (Ofshe, 1980). Membership began with voluntary association (recruitment through a friend or acquaintance). Then isolation was increased as members moved into Synanon dormitories and commitment escalated through acts that were irrevocable or difficult to undo, such as divorce or vasectomy. These further locked participants into the group. Cults rely on intense interpersonal and psychological attachments and guilt to promote compliance. Often this involves the use of a peer group to apply pressure for compliance with group norms. In Synanon, Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, and other cults, this can take the form of marathon meetings, called at any time of day or night, in which members' defense mechanisms are overridden. Guilt, discovered through public confession or counselling, is then used to induce compliance. These lengthy sessions also produce fatigue and make cognitive processing more difficult. Cults often manipulate the totality of a person's environment and use these guilt-inducing processes to ensure compliance similar to the North Korean prisoner of war camps described by Schein (1961).

Whether in strong culture organizations religious organizations, self-help groups, or cults, social control comes from the knowledge that others who are important to us know what we are doing and will tell us when we are out of compliance. The psychological basis for this control is well understood and relies on retrospective rationality and social learning. It operates through processes of choice and participation, incremental commitment, strong informational and normative influence, the use of symbols, emotion, and reward systems, and clear norms and values. In other words, social control characterizes all of these groups.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Culture is a prevalent social control system operating in organizations. Based on the psychological mechanisms of participation, management as symbolic action, information from others, and comprehensive reward and recognition systems, managers create strong situations and shape collective action. Culture as social control can, under certain circumstances, be an effective way of meeting legitimate strategic and even socially redeeming organizational objectives. For example, these psychological processes can be used to increase blood donations (Rushton & Campbell, 1977), conserve energy (Pallak et al., 1980) or, as we have shown, promote innovation, high levels of customer service, quality, and a sense of common purpose within organizations (e.g., Collins & Porras, 1994; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). But, social control can also result in behavior characterized by deviance and personal and social exploitation. This dark side

occurs when beliefs are internalized and critical thinking is constrained to such a degree that individuals can be induced to behave in unethical or harmful ways. Manifestations of this dark side range broadly, from the formation of the *Schutzstaffel* in Nazi Germany (Merkl, 1980), or the delivery of what are believed to be fatal shocks to others (Milgram, 1964), to merely losing sight of relevant changes in the competitive environment leading to reduced organizational performance (Carroll, 1992). Thus, social control can be used to either empower or oppress individuals in groups and organizations, and to achieve constructive or pernicious social and financial ends.

We have emphasized the striking similarities between strong culture firms and organizations as extreme as cults, but it may be the *differences* between organizations and cults that potentially ensure that members are empowered rather than oppressed, and effective rather than ineffective or destructive behaviors emerge. Identifying these differences is a fruitful direction for future research. Some of the information presented in this paper provides clues about key differences between functional versus dysfunctional aspects of social control. Key differences may arise in two forms: (1) from the *content* of the norms and values organizational members are asked to identify with; and (2) from the *intensity of the social control process* to which organizational members are exposed.

On the content side, legitimate organizations may be more likely to be honest about what the group stands for and expects from its members; that is, while cults routinely disguise their real purposes, strong culture firms are typically straightforward about expected norms and values. This honesty can allow potential recruits to make informed choices about the values espoused by the organization, and reduces the chance that individuals will unwittingly join groups that either violate their values, or are judged to be unethical (Chatman, 1991).

A number of process issues must also be considered. In particular, formal control systems, which are often necessary and efficient, may fail to capture people's creativity and emotional commitment. Social control can engage people emotionally and provide them with direction and a sense of purpose. Whereas formal control systems tend to signal to employees that they are cogs in a machine and must conform to established rules and procedures, social control tends to convey a sense of autonomy and individual responsibility, likely precursors to creative thinking. When organizations like Nordstrom and NUMMI design jobs, they often substitute strong social control for formal control. In other organizations, retail clerks and assembly line workers are subject to strong formal controls. The difference in attitudes and performance of workers under the two regimes is often striking.

Further, people's tendency to want to join groups and to distinguish in-groups from out-groups is too strong to discount. This propensity may have sociobiologic origins, and it may be evolutionarily adaptive (Wenegrat, 1989).

To deny or ignore the power of groups to define situations is as dangerous as it is nonsensical. Instead, situations need to be constructed in ways that provide for a common identification while avoiding the total conformity demanded by cult groups. This is a critical difference between the use of social control in cults and strong culture organizations. In the former, the demand for conformity and obedience is usually total. Members are not encouraged to think or challenge the existing order and contact with outsiders is limited or controlled. In the latter, the norms and values often encourage challenge and debate. Members are asked to contribute ideas, and learning from the outside is encouraged. At Intel, for example, constructive conflict is encouraged to ensure that open, honest discussion of all issues takes place. Intel also has a norm of "competitive paranoia" which encourages its members to continually search externally for new ideas, less they be surpassed by unexpected developments. At HP, this tendency is a norm for modesty that encourages looking to other members and organizations for good ideas.

Additionally, the typical characterization of leaders differs between strong culture firms and cults. The leadership of strong culture organizations is typically more balanced in ways that prevent abuse (Pfeffer, 1981). Boards of Directors may provide some check on the tendency for leaders to claim too much power over members. Although exceptions exist, one is more likely to see an openness of process and genuine spirit of equality in strong culture firms than in cults. Cults often have elites that claim inspired or divine privilege (e.g., Chidester, 1988; Gordon, 1987; Ofshe, 1980).

Finally, members' commitment to strong culture firms is more likely to be based on identification or pride of affiliation (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), not internalization of beliefs. Once members internalize the values of any organization, such devotion may be used to legitimate actions beyond conventional societal norms, for instance deceiving others for purposes of a "greater good" (e.g., Bainbridge & Stark, 1980; Eberhard, 1974). Cults often use guilt and guilt-producing acts to ensure compliance. Any activity can be justified for the greater good of the cult, even the taking of a life. Strong culture firms often embrace strong codes of ethics and integrity that preclude illegal acts. While the potential for abuse from social control is always there, so too is the opportunity to promote a sense of common purpose and accomplishment of worthwhile or redeeming objectives.

But, while greater openness and honesty reduces the likelihood of people joining and supporting organizations with dangerous or unethical objectives, they do not ensure that the values and norms selected are ones that will contribute to the organization's strategic success. The strategic appropriateness of values and norms requires a consideration both of the content and process aspects of social control. If we apply advice from strategy researchers to the domain of organizational culture (e.g., Hamel & Prahalad, 1994), we suggest that remaining competitive requires that the strategic appropriateness of the

values and norms are evaluated continuously in light of changing environmental circumstances. That is, the dynamic capabilities or core competencies of successful organizations may rest, in part, on norms that promote organizational learning and adaptability. Hewlett-Packard, for example, has changed over the past twenty years from an instrument company with over 50 autonomous divisions, to a minicomputer company with significant interorganizational coordination, to a network server and personal computer firm. Cultural norms that encourage autonomy and constant change have permitted HP to enter and withdraw from technologies and markets. Similar norms have also helped Johnson & Johnson reshape itself as the health care market has changed. Silicon Graphics refers to themselves as an "amoeba organization" which is constantly expanding and contracting with shifts in technology and markets. The CEO is explicit in attributing this adaptability to a culture characterized by norms of creativity, risk taking, and a willingness to accept failure.

One interesting question is whether there are conditions under which firms with strong cultures characterized by norms that are no longer strategically relevant will perform *less well* than firms with no agreement or intensity about values and norms. One could argue that the challenge in the former organization is to select appropriate norms and values and re-orient members' focus on these. If successful, this firm may have the potential to outperform the firm with the ambiguous culture, due to increased coordination and motivation among members. But, resistance to change can be considerable in such strong culture firms and introduce substantial lags in the organizations' ability to respond to major environmental shifts. The can be seen in the current plight of organizations as diverse as Sears, IBM, Siemens, and Nissan.

In weak culture organizations major environmental shifts may not reduce their performance as greatly as the misaligned strong culture firm if formal coordinating mechanisms are functioning, or if randomly generated ideas fit with current environmental demands. Future research might, for example, examine comparable firms within industries which vary in terms of the agreement and intensity of values and norms. It may be the case that the stronger the organizational culture, the more extreme performance is over time—that is, strong culture firms may perform either exceptionally well or exceptionally poorly—especially when faced with environmental discontinuities (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996).

Another consideration is the extent to which adaptation can be built in to the content of norms and values. Strong cultures that embody norms of creativity, innovation, and change may be the most effective mechanisms for promoting organizational adaptability (e.g., Amabile et al., 1986; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1995). Firms like Intel, 3M, Rubbermaid, and Procter & Gamble deliberately reinforce norms that encourage employees to constantly challenge the status quo. Kotter and Heskett (1992) offer evidence that strong cultures

that have as defining norms innovation and change are associated with long-term success. Also, while the tendency is to think of conformity as homogeneity, there can be strong norms encouraging nonconformity. A lack of social control may eventually lead to the predominance of formal control systems, which, as we have shown, can create problems of their own. Thus it seems that complete heterogeneity in attitudes and beliefs is no more of a key to success than is blind conformity.

On the other hand, norms and values for creativity and innovation may not be enough to break through the potential inertia, stagnation, and habitual behavior that can emerge in strong culture firms. The dark side to strong social control is the potential to disempower people through excessive conformity which can characterize a strong normative order. Some authors have worried that these systems may stifle freedom and creativity (e.g. Martin, 1992; Nemeth & Staw, 1989). Others have noted that strong cultures may become inertial and make adaptation and change difficult (e.g., Harrison & Carroll, 1991). As we described, one of the key problems of the social control process is the progressive difficulty members may have in disagreeing or even recognizing logical inconsistencies or sub-optimalities once they have committed to adhere to the organization's values publicly and with the encouragement of valued coworkers. This can lead to arrogance and inertia that sometimes is seen in strong culture firms.

Given the higher level of ideological and social investment members make, one wonders just how far they will stray from characteristic ways of doing things (e.g., the "H-P Way") even when innovation is encouraged. That is, innovation may be encouraged in strong culture firms but stricter norms may exist to differentiate between new ideas characterized as innovative and those characterized as inappropriate due to a lack of alignment with the way things are currently done. These norms may serve to filter out all but the most incremental and non-threatening of innovations. Research may investigate differences in rates of generating innovative products and services between strong culture firms emphasizing innovation, creativity, and being unconventional, strong culture firms which focus on other values, and firms characterized by more disagreement and a lack of intensity about norms and values (implying that everyone is unconventional). For example, strong culture firms may quash potentially viable ideas viewed as inappropriate sooner in the development phase, but support innovations viewed as appropriate at a higher level than firms without strong values for innovation or non-conformity. Further, the magnitude of environmental shifts may moderate the relationship between culture strength and successful innovation. In fairly static industries or periods, strong culture firms may appear most innovative, as members are highly motivated to come up with new solutions to new challenges and opportunities. But in highly dynamic industries or periods, the strong culture firm members may be constrained in their ability to introduce highly divergent

ideas. In contrast, in firms with disagreement about values and norms, conflicting groups may be able to come up with widely diverging ideas which reduce (or fail to enhance) performance during stable periods, but may have the potential of adapting to massive environmental shifts.

Organizational researchers and managers would agree that there is merit in developing values and norms which are ethical, redeeming, and strategically appropriate, and applying social control mechanisms which fulfill people's desire to be a part of valuable causes or efforts. But, the mechanisms of social control can also be exploited causing people to become so committed that they loose sight of other ways of doing things. Regardless of whether it is a cult or a firm, more control is often perceived by those under social control as *less*, and this is the ultimate dilemma—social control potentially threatens individual freedom. The challenge for organizations is to maintain the delicate balance between making organizational membership fulfilling, and intensely controlling thoughts and actions. Research that provides greater understanding into the operation of culture as a social control system, and the circumstances in which it is empowering or disempowering, is critical (e.g., Harrison & Carroll, 1991; Lazear, 1994).

NOTES

1. Although having a strong culture and being adaptive may appear contradictory, a firm that has a strong culture consisting of norms such as creativity, trying new things, and paying attention to all constituencies, may allow it to meet changing environmental demands. Later in this paper we discuss the likelihood of and limits to this argument in terms of massive environmental shifts that may disadvantage firms with strong cultures.

2. Strong situations have been defined as those in which everyone construes the situation similarly, uniform expectancies regarding appropriate response patterns are induced, adequate incentives for the performance of that response pattern are provided, and everyone has learned the skills required to perform appropriately (Mischel, 1977).

3. While these examples illustrate the side of social control that can enhance organizational performance, the same process can also lead to the development of a culture that may no longer be strategically appropriate. This can make necessary changes in structure and process more difficult and put the organization at risk, as in the cases of Kodak, IBM, Sears, Philips, and General Motors (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996).

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