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TITLE

PATTERNS OF STABILITY AND CHANGE ORIENTATIONS IN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE: A CASE STUDY

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'A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The University of Auckland, 2004'

ABSTRACT

There is a fundamental need of all organisations to exhibit both stability and change behaviours in order to survive in the long term, particularly when operating in competitive environments. This duality may seem paradoxical and contradictory, but these interactions are necessary for sustainable organisational continuity. Stability and change should be considered in concert rather than focussing on change at the expense of stability. It is proposed that cultural manifestations can develop over time that directly or indirectly reflect organisational concerns with stability and change, and can be investigated as two key cultural dimensions.

The aim of this study was to discover how and why organisational members associated their culture with the dimensions of stability and change. Interpretations of these associations provide support for the two dimensions being viewed as separate, but also being complementary and interdependent in nature. This differs from previous perspectives in the literature that portray the dimensions as being on a single dimension.

This in-depth study was conducted in a single New Zealand business organisation. It shows how cultural orientations towards stability and change can be discerned as patterns. Associations by organisational members of cultural manifestations with the dimensions of stability and change was explored utilising a triangulation research design incorporating Concept Mapping and Pattern Matching, semi-structured interviews and observations as research methods. Pattern Matching is a technique that has not been previously employed in cultural research and the findings suggest the technique can be a useful tool in cultural analysis.

The study showed that members found culture, and in particular its associations with stability and change, a somewhat challenging concept to articulate. This study also supports the need for the dimensions of stability and change to be viewed as being dynamic and interconnected. Nonetheless, a proposed typology was developed based on the premise that these dimensions are conceptually separate. It shows promise for better understanding the influence of culture on patterns of stability and change within organisations.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO – Chief Executive Officer
CVF – Competing values framework
HR – Human resources
HRM- Human resources management
MDS – Multi dimensional scaling
OCI – Organisational Culture Inventory
PIS – Participant information sheet
USA – United States of America