



## Cultural Comparison of ODL with Conventional Education in Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT :

Culture is considered to be a significant factor behind a sustainable competitive advantage, leading towards organizational growth. According to previous studies strong relationship exists between organizational culture and its performance and success. Therefore, in order to enhance the performance of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode, specific culture should be identified. Specific organizational culture can be defined by the nature of tasks performed and the procedures adopted by the organization. Routine operations demonstrate the deeply rooted values of a particular culture. Some studies reveal the resemblance in cultures of different organizations. Specifically, organizations operating within the same industry experience more cultural similarity. Considering these attributes of organizational culture, this study will explore the particular culture of ODL mode of education, defined by the organizational activities and procedures by interviewing individuals associated with ODL. Moreover, this study will identify the similarities existing between the conventional and ODL education systems, as they are operating within the same industry i-e Education. The consequences of this study will assist in enhancing the capacity building of its employees by promoting the appropriate culture. This alignment between the organizational culture and objectives will ultimately enhance the human productivity.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Conventional Learning System, Culture, Organizational Culture, Culture Types

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of culture while making critical decisions (Nahavandi & R.Malekzadeh, 1999), facilitating smooth downsizing (Cameron & Quinn, 2011), improving employee productivity and controlling turnover rates (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Therefore, to ensure smooth functioning culture should need to be aligned with the desired status. For instance if the institution has decided to pursue in the field of research, it will not fulfill it unless or until its prevailing culture supports the explorations besides the

routine functioning. (Deal & Kennedy, 1983) Culture is composed of the deeply rooted values embodied in the organizational actions.

Hence, organizational achievements are highly dependent on the prevailing culture. This study explores the culture currently prevailing in the Open & Distance Learning (ODL) and conventional learning modes.

The other major concern of this study is to develop cultural comparison of ODL and conventional learning modes to identify the similarities and differences. Previous researches (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Choudhary, 2013) provide evidence of cultural similarity among the organization

operating in the same industry.

This study focuses on this cultural aspect to inquire the empirical validation on ODL and conventional learning systems operating in the education industry. A clear comparison can be better established if the respondents are aware of the both modes and analyze institutional operations in both the perspectives; ODL and conventional learning. This study initiates an opportunity to examine the two main modes of education system of our country in terms of their culture, relatively an abstract and subjective area directly influencing the human part of the organization.

## 2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND:

The aim of this study is to compare the cultures of ODL and conventional learning systems. This comparison is followed by the identification of the two cultures. Therefore, the major aspect of the study is the culture, which is discussed here in the light of existing literature.

### 2.1 DEFINITION OF CULTURE:

Concept of culture is originated from different fields of sciences like psychology, sociology and anthropology (Schein, 1990). O'Reilly et al. (1991) defined culture as "... a set of cognitions shared by members of a social unit..." (p, 491). Assumptions and values defining the norms to direct human behavior in the society are the constituents of these cognitions (Nahavandi & R.Malekzadeh, 1999). Rousseau (1990) also reinforced this composition of culture in terms of assumptions, norms and behavioral patterns of the people.

### 2.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE:

With respect to organizations, culture is defined in terms of employees' behavior and attitudes shaped by the basic values and belief systems of a particular organization (Martin, 1985). This notion is further elaborated by Deal and Kennedy (1983) in terms of routine behaviors displayed in the organization directed by the organizational

assumptions. Stacey (1996) described the formation of such assumptions and beliefs resulting from the employees' interaction while performing organizational tasks. Furthermore, the concept of "implicit rules" is also added to the concept of organizational culture, which describes the unexplained but clearly understood rules dictating the employees' actions. Mutually acceptable values, norms, principles and rules are adopted by the organizational people and form organization's specific culture (Rousseau, 1990). Employees adjust their behaviors and actions according to these cultural guidelines and this learned code of conduct is further transferred from one employee to another (Barnouw, 1979). (Schein, 1990) Culture is learnt by individuals as they experience specific cognitions, emotions and behaviors. Norms and values which are considered valid and obligatory to be adopted in an organization become a part of culture (Holbeche, 2006). Concluding the above discussion, it can be inferred that specific culture depicts organizational exposure to critical incidents and only those assumptions are added to the culture which contribute to goal attainment.

### 2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES DEPICTING CULTURE:

Schein (1992) has presented a model in which culture is explained at three levels; underlying assumptions, espoused values and artifacts. Underlying assumptions are deeply rooted aspect of culture, espoused values are claimed to be adopted by the organizational members (Schein, 1992) and artifacts are the apparent organizational processes, systems and structures. 'Cultural web' proposed by Johnson (1992) explicate culture in terms of stories, symbols, power structures, organizational structures, control systems and ritual & routines. Mission statements, organizational goals, goal attainment strategies, performance measuring systems, problem handling & resolving approaches, organizational hierarchies, practiced jargons, horizontal & vertical employee networks and performance appraisal methodologies are

the attributes through which organization's specific culture becomes visible (Schein, 1983). Therefore, all these organizational aspects have given immense consideration while taking respondents' feedback about their institute's culture. Although, beliefs and deeply held assumptions are not explicit, but every member is mostly aware of them and few of them can even describe these values (Nahavandi & R. Malekzadeh, 1999). Thus, this study manages to explore the particular organizational culture prevailing in the institutes operating in ODL and conventional learning mode through the related faculty. Education industry significantly depends on the discovery, flow and dissemination of knowledge. (Weippert & Kajewski; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). Therefore, it is mandatory for the institutes to foster learning culture and unobstructed knowledge sharing. Previous studies (Fullan, 1996; Erickson, 2009) emphasized the importance of culture in the transformation of the institutes. And change can be initiated where culture can be revealed through this study.

### 2.4. CULTURE TYPES :

Different cultural dimensions have been mentioned in previous studies; some of them overlap each other, while few are addition to the existing dimensions.

Hall (1977), categorized culture as high-context and low-context, depending on the communication style. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Values Orientation Theory (as cited in Hills, 2002) classify culture in six different dimensions on the basis of respective environment, time orientation, perception about human nature, human actions, interpersonal relationships and use of space as private or public. Trompenaar's dimensions (as cited in Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1999) proposes seven different types of culture; Universalism VS Particularism, Individualism VS Collectivism, Neutral VS Emotional, Specific VS Diffuse, Achievement VS Ascription, Perception & Use of time, and Perceptions of physical environment. Culture is segregated in five different types

labelling power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity and long-term orientation (Hofstede, 1993). Handy (1993) presented culture in four different types named as power culture, role culture, task culture and person culture. Handy's suggested culture types significantly indicate the organizational culture as compare to the other mentioned models. Hence, in this study Handy's proposed model is opted to identify the cultures of the two learning modes.

Explanation of culture types of this model is as follows:

#### A. POWER CULTURE:

Culture dominated by a strong individual or a group with highly centralized decisions is known as power culture. It is similar to a spider's web in which the expanded strings are joined together at the center. Dominant aspects of this culture are centralized decisions, low formalization, concealed rules and restricted access to resources and information. This power concentration may result into nepotism, favoritism and organizational injustice. It is appropriate in small sized organizations where things have to be done quickly rather than following lengthy procedures or hierarchies.

#### B. ROLE CULTURE:

This culture is mostly found in large bureaucratic organizations with well defined rules, procedures and practices, operating in a relatively stable environment. The dominant features of this culture are the well crafted rules, SOPs, inflexibility, routine pattern and change avoidance. People are encouraged to show compliance, while any step towards innovation is one's own initiative therefore not desired and appreciated. Individuals are recognized through their roles and positions only. Attached autonomy is supreme over individual competence. This culture is effective in stable environments where economies of scale are desired against innovation.

In this organizational culture task is given significant importance. Rules and procedures can be modified in order to accomplish the particular task. Individuals with relevant set of skills and expertise are considered worthy for the task culture. Changes can be easily introduced and adopted in such cultures. As task completion is a major concern, this culture foster team efforts over individual contributions. In the dynamic market environments requiring constant improvements and changes, this culture is considered valuable.

**D. PERSON CULTURE:**

This culture supports individual talent, knowledge and expertise by attaching prestige and status. Experts are given the authority based on their competence; they

are convinced rather than commanded, negotiated and not directed. Professionals are cohesively bound through mutual trust and are less formal in interpersonal dealings. Decisions can only be taken through mutual consensus; there is no concept of centralized decision making and extensive formalization. This culture encourages change, innovation and experimentation. The individual's well being is of supreme importance even at the stake of organization's objectives. Therefore, people culture is not suitable for profit oriented organizations. Associations of experts and professionals may experience this type of culture. This culture may prevail partially in the organizations but rare to found as dominant culture, as most of the organizations work for some returns.

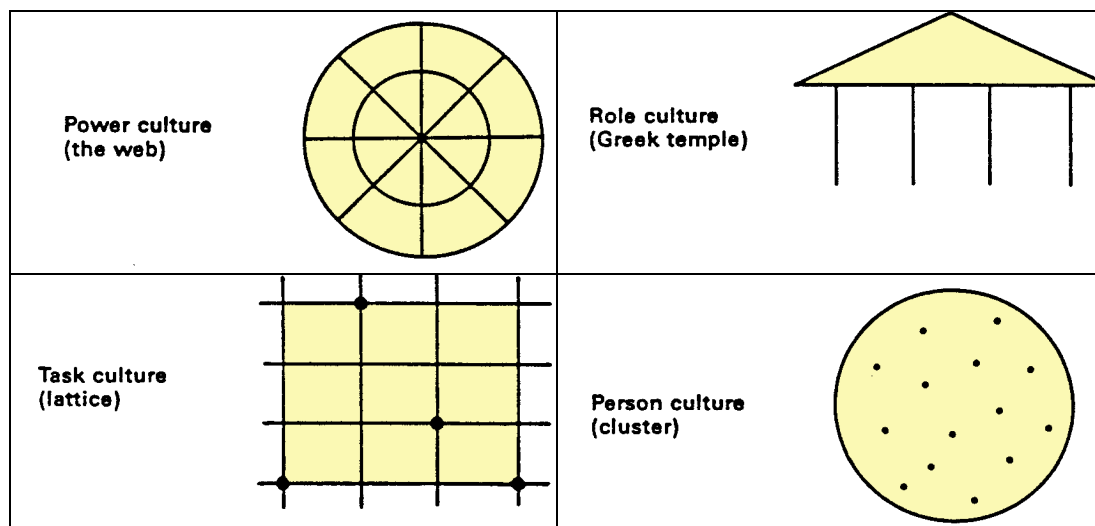


Figure 1: Organizational Culture Model by Charles Handy

**3. METHODOLOGY :**

Target population of this study included the teachers serving the ODL and Conventional learning systems. In order to identify the organizational culture of the two educational modes, the respective faculty is selected through purposive sampling. In order to develop a cultural comparison, faculty members having experience of ODL and conventional teaching have been selected. Therefore, it was ensured that faculty members have

served the ODL and conventional teaching institutes before selecting them as respondents. In this study interview technique is used to explore the cultures of the two educational modes; ODL and conventional learning. The relevant primary data is collected by interviewing the faculty members through semi-structured interviews. According to Willig (2001) "... abstract concepts or general opinions..." (p.24) can be measured effectively through semi-structured interviews. Schein (1990) strongly preferred the interview technique over

quantitative measures to determine individuals' feelings and emotions. Semi-structured interview facilitates the respondents to explain their view point while keeping the discussion in the specific direction (Willig, 2001).

Considering these endorsements, semi-structure interview is evaluated as an appropriate research technique to assess the culture. For in-depth and repeated analysis most of the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent. Interviews were of 45 to 75 minutes duration. To ensure the reliability of the interview questions, shared responses were repeated by the researcher before noting the comments.

Smith and Osborn (2003) suggested no defined sample size for qualitative research. Rather the sample size is dependent on the richness of the collected data and the limitations of the study. Similar argument is presented by Britten (1995) in which author defined the sample size on the basis of the interview depth and duration. However, the proposed size is less than 50-60 interviews. Bertaux (1981) suggested minimum size of 15 interviews, while Kuzel (1992) gave limit of 12-20 interviews to capture variation in the data. Keeping these research trends 20 semi-structured interviews have been conducted from the respondents selected through purposive sampling to get the insight of the institutional cultures.

#### 4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY :

##### 4.1. CULTURE IN CONVENTIONAL LEARNING SYSTEM:

The investigations were conducted in large, government, semi-government, IT (information technology) based and private institutions. An effort was made to include all the possible domains of conventional teaching. Data was collected from the faculty members with experience of both conventional teaching and ODL. Initially effort has been made to identify particular culture of the two modes of education.

In Conventional system the **ROLE** culture is identified as prominent in most of

the interviews. The next recognized is the **POWER** culture; one case highlighted the existence of **TASK** culture. In few of the cases more than a single culture is significantly recognized. Role culture again labeled as the second most prominent prevailing cultures in the investigated institutes followed by People, Task and Power cultures. People culture is ranked at the third place by the respondents. In addition to this it is found that Role culture is prominent in government, semi-government large sized institutes. While in private, moderate and small sized institutes the Power culture is prominent.

##### DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM:

Two leading institutes of ODL in Pakistan were selected to identify the organizational culture. One is using a traditional postal communication means to approach students, while the other is entirely based on electronic correspondence system. The difference in operations reveals the cultural difference within ODL.

In the ODL system the **ROLE culture** is again identified as a prominent culture. Within ODL sole domination of role culture exists in the university operating on postal correspondence means. While university using online system is found to experiencing **ROLE & POWER** both cultures in their course specific domains. Department dedicated to students' projects, research work and internship matters identified **ROLE & TASK** culture as a dominant one. This shows that course content and related aspects are relatively rigid while flexibility is shown when student enters in a practical phase of their education. Combining the cultures of both domains **ROLE** culture is referred as a dominant prevailing culture followed by **TASK and POWER** cultures.

##### 4.3. CULTURAL COMPARISON:

According to this study culture similarity exists as ODL and conventional learning system both are experiencing **ROLE** culture. The other dominant cultures are **TASK and POWER**.

## 5. Conclusion:

Cultural comparison highlights the existence of similar culture in Open & Distance Learning and conventional learning systems despite of their different mechanism.

Role culture prevails because institutes are operating in a bureaucratic manner with extensive rules, policies and guidelines. Task culture is dominant because most of the institutes are considering the market trends while offering new courses and programs and moving towards expansion.

Most of the interviewees showed their dissatisfaction with the faculty evaluation criteria and the reward policy, and indicated the presence of biasness, favoritism and injustice. Therefore, indicated the existence of power culture. Moreover, centralized decision making strengthened the impact of power and role cultures in both the learning modes.

Considering the attributes of culture types, this can be inferred that the prevailing culture is hindering the institutional efforts towards research. Role culture is effective to maintain discipline but may restrict the individuals' competence. Adding rules related to educational research may enforce people to move towards innovative improvements within the role culture. But this cannot be implemented effectively unless or until the evaluation criteria is made transparent.

Teachers of Open & Distance Learning and conventional system are working in a different manner and having different job descriptions, therefore it is injustice to evaluate them on same criteria given by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. This difference should also be considered during the recruitment procedures.

It is note worthy that faculty is mostly satisfied with the provided physical resources but lengthy procedures and prevailing biasness disturbing the effective utilization of these facilities.

It is concluded that institute operating either in Open & Distance Learning or conventional learning system are

experiencing the power culture which is affecting negatively. Institutes need to shift their cultures from rigid to the flexible ones and ensure that the drafted rules and policies should facilitate innovative developments rather than create hindrances. Moreover, it is needed to promote support culture among faculty rather than individual differences so that efforts can be synergized towards growth. Furthermore, the finding of this study provides an indication for future researches to expand the scope from faculty to students' cultural experience and its impact on students' conduct.

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