



Organizational Culture and Internationalization: A Brief Literature Review

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This brief literature review introduces an area of emerging research about the impact of organizational culture on institutional strategies for internationalization. The review begins by introducing the concept of organizational culture, particularly within higher education. Five articles published between 2003 and 2012 are examined that introduce a variety of methods to understand and assess the impact of institutional organizational culture on institutional internationalization. The literature review concludes by suggesting areas for further research.

Introduction

Internationalization, at the national, sector and institutional levels, is defined by Knight (2003) as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2). Hudzik's (2011) definition of *comprehensive internationalization* expands on Knight's (2004) definition by identifying how internationalization impacts all aspects of post-secondary institutions. Comprehensive internationalization "...shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire education enterprise. It is essential that is be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty,

students and all academic and support units" (Hudzik, 2011, p. 6). Hudzik (2011) concluded that comprehensive internationalization is "an institutional imperative" that "impacts all of campus life" (p. 6).

Internationalization is an increasingly high priority on the agenda of post-secondary institutions in response to both internal and external stakeholder pressures and expectations (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2007; Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2012). Internally, universities seek to create global citizens, build international partnerships and increase enrolments (AUCC, 2007). Externally, the Canadian federal and provincial governments are interested in post-secondary education helping to create a knowledgeable workforce and respond to national and provincial labour market needs (AUCC, 2007; DFAIT, 2012). In response to the rapid growth and increasing importance of internationalization, researchers began to assess organizational aspects of post-secondary institutions as a means to understand which institutional factors fostered or inhibited internationalization. Organizational culture is one such factor (Agnew & VanBalkom, 2009).

The least understood aspect of organizational change in higher education is the impact of organizational

culture (Tierney, 1988). Successful organizational change occurs when it is intentional, planned and reflective of an institution's culture (Kotter, 1996; McCaffery, 2010). Institutional leadership is often well versed in addressing operational and structural changes, yet the ability to create sustainable change is dependent upon the ability to integrate change into the organizational "way of doing things," referring to the organization's culture (Schein, 2010). Bartell (2003) observed that an institution's organizational culture may foster or inhibit internationalization. Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) identified organizational culture as a key indicator of successful organizational change, noting that institutional leaders desiring to create and implement effective internationalization strategies need to understand their institution's organizational culture.

Organizational Culture in Higher Education

Schein (2010), Tierney (1988) and Sporn (1996) are experts in organizational culture theory and are frequently cited in the relatively recent research about organizational culture and internationalization (Bartell, 2003; Agnew & VanBalkom, 2009). Schein has written numerous works on organizational culture, his most recent monograph (2010) is cited in this review. Tierney (1988) is credited with being one of the first to apply the concepts of organizational culture from business literature to research in higher education. Sporn (1996) developed a typology of four types of university culture that can be applied to understanding how a specific institution's culture responds to change.

Schein (2010) defined organizational culture as "a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is, and ought to be, that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and to some degree their overt behavior" (p. 11). Tierney (1988) described organizational culture as "webs of significance" (p. 4) that occur in an organizational setting. Sporn (1996) identified universities as being "complex social organizations with distinctive cultures" (p. 41).

Tierney (1988) stated that organizational culture is a force that is derived from "from the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the organization's workings" (p. 3). Organizational culture reflects shared beliefs about "how things are done around here" (p. 3) as manifested through language, symbols, rituals, values, beliefs and behaviour (Tierney, 1988). Schein (2010) identified "artifacts", "espoused beliefs and values", and "basic underlying assumptions" (p. 24) as the three key levels of organizational culture.

Artifacts include "visible and feelable structures and processes" (Schein, 2010, p. 24). Espoused beliefs and values articulate the goals, values, aspirations, ideologies and rationalizations of the culture (Schein, 2010). Underlying assumptions are the "unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values" (Schein, 2010, p. 24). Schein (2010) observed that ultimately, for a leader to successfully engage organizational members in change, she or he must be able to understand the organizational culture.

Tierney (1988) and Sporn (1996) noted that universities are complex and contain multiple variations of organizational culture — such as individual, disciplinary and institutional levels. Tierney (1988), like Schein (2010) believed that the lack of understanding of organizational culture exhibited by leaders in higher education was inhibiting their ability to lead their institutions to effectively address the challenges facing higher education. Tierney (1988) thought that by studying organizational culture, higher education administrators could enhance their daily decision making. In order to study an institution's organizational culture Tierney (1988) created an assessment instrument that he called "A Framework of Organizational Culture" (p. 8).

Tierney's (1988) framework for understanding organizational culture used six concepts: *environment*, *mission*, *socialization*, *information*, *strategy* and *leadership*. For each of the six concepts, Tierney (1988) introduced a series of questions that administrators could ask to help obtain relevant information that would contribute to an overall organizational culture assessment. Within the framework, several questions are linked to each concept. For example, linked to the concept *environment* is the question "How does the organization define its environment?"; linked to the concept of *mission* is the question "Is it used as a basis for decisions?"; linked to the concept of *strategy* is the question "What is the penalty for bad decisions?"; and linked to the concept of *leadership* is the question "What does the organization expect from its leaders?" (Tierney, 1988, p. 8). This article concluded with a case study using the organizational culture framework to analyze and assess the organizational culture of a university.

Sporn (1996) described the organizational culture of universities as complex and comprised of five unique characteristics: ambivalent goals; different constituencies; problematic standards; autonomy and freedoms; and environmental vulnerability. Sporn (1996) introduced a typology to be used as a model to position universities with respect to the *strength* and *orientation* of the institutional culture. *Strength* indicated the level of congruence between cultural values, structural

arrangements and strategic plans. A strong culture had high congruence; a weak culture lacked congruence and had multiple contradictory cultures. *Orientation* referred to whether the focus of values, attitudes, beliefs and behavior of institutional members was directed at activities primarily external to the organization or primarily internal. Sporn (1996) found that externally oriented cultures were able to adapt to changes in the external environment whereas internally oriented cultures did not pay attention to the external environment and did not perceive a need to change. Sporn's (1996) typology is illustrated in a model with four quadrants: weak-internal; weak-external; strong-internal; strong-external. Sporn (1996) found that strong externally oriented organizational cultures were more adaptable to environmental changes, and more responsive to management leadership than weak internally focussed organizational cultures.

Tierney (1988), Schein (2010) and Sporn (1996) each identified key components for understanding organizational culture. Tierney (1988) and Sporn (1996) created tools that could be used to assess and understand the organizational culture within individual post-secondary institutions. The emerging research on organizational culture and internationalization frequently cites the work of these three researchers.

Internationalization and Organizational Culture

This paper examines five articles that demonstrate a variety of typologies, frameworks and models that may be applied to increase institutional member/ leadership knowledge and understanding about how an institution's organizational culture impacts internationalization.

Bartell (2003) built on Tierney's (1988) and Sporn's (1996) research on organizational culture and post-secondary education to create a framework for understanding the process of internationalization within universities. Stier (2004) proposed three divergent ideologies for understanding attitudes and assumptions about internationalization held by members of different stakeholder groups within universities. Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) examined cultural readiness for internationalization and introduced an assessment model. Burnett and Huisman (2010) used international student recruitment to examine how university culture influences institutional responses to internationalization. Agnew (2012) used Stier's (2004) ideologies to examine, "...the interplay between university culture and ideology in supporting and impeding internationalisation" (p. 473).

Institutions that had organizational cultures that were strong and externally oriented were the most successful at adapting to effective changes for internationalization.

Bartell (2003) identified a variety of understandings about internationalization, ranging across a continuum from minimalist and static to complex and all encompassing. Bartell (2003) observed that this level of variability existed not only between different universities but also within a single institution, adding to the complexity of understanding organizational culture. Bartell (2003) attributed this variation to several factors including "structure, strategy, field of study and university culture" (p. 50). Bartell (2003) identified common characteristics of university culture as "goals...are fuzzy... internal stakeholders are numerous and varied...conflict is inherent in values and belief systems between the professors...and administrators... the environment is...complex, rapidly changing and demanding" (p. 52-53). Stier (2004) posited that a difference in the ideological underpinnings held by administrators and faculty about the rationale for internationalization increased organizational conflict and demonstrated the complexity of beliefs held by different stakeholders. Bartell (2003) suggested that it is this internal complexity that underscores the importance for institutional leaders to understand their organizational culture to be able to effectively implement internationalization goals and strategies.

Bartell (2003) used Sporn's (1996) typology of institutional strength and orientation to assess "the adaptability of the university to the pressures to internationalize" (p. 57). Bartell (2003) found that institutions that had organizational cultures that were strong and externally oriented were the most successful at adapting to effective changes for internationalization.

Stier (2004) proposed three divergent ideologies for understanding internationalization in universities: idealism, instrumentalism and educationalism. Stier (2004) examined the "...explicit as well as implicit vision, foci, goals and strategies" (p. 85) of each ideology. The three ideologies provided a lens to view individual attitudes and assumptions about internationalization. While Stier (2004) did not discuss organizational culture per se, the three ideologies were used as a means to understand individual attitudes and assumptions, a key component identified by Schein (2010) in understanding an institution's organizational culture.

The underlying assumption of *idealism* is that “internationalization is good per se” (Stier, 2004, p. 88). Idealism supports the view that internationalization provides/creates a social good by granting students from the “poor world” (p. 89) access to knowledge, and enabling domestic students to enlarge their understanding of other cultures, values and ideas (Stier, 2004). Stier (2004) believed that this ideology is pervasive amongst faculty and more common in the social sciences and humanities than in the sciences. *Instrumentalism* supports pragmatic and economic approaches to internationalization (Stier, 2004). Stier (2004) stated that university administrators are key proponents of this ideology. Instrumentalism underlies international recruitment strategies that focus on supporting the knowledge economy (Stier, 2004). *Educationalism* “... implies a wider and deeper view of education...with a strong emphasis on the value of learning itself” (Stier, 2004, p. 91-92). The educationalist ideology views internationalization as a way to contribute to “...personal growth and self-actualization” (Stier, 2004, p. 92). Stier (2004) concluded that internationalization in universities will benefit if there is an increased familiarity between all members of the academy with each other’s divergent, “... expectations, obligations and understanding of internationalization” (p. 95). Stier (2004) suggested that these varied and contradictory conceptualizations of internationalization impact the successful implementation of internationalization strategies.

Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) combined Sporn’s (1996) typology of strength and orientation with three levels of analysis: micro (individual), meso (organizational) and macro (external stakeholders) and created the *Cultural Readiness for Internationalization* (CRI) model. The purpose of the CRI model was to provide a mechanism for planning for strategic change to further institutional internationalization. Three assumptions were embedded in the CRI model: an organization that is receptive to internationalization is likely to have a successful change process; conditions can be created to strengthen organizational culture to be receptive to change; organizational cultural readiness for internationalization will increase the sustainability of internationalization. The CRI model was structured using “...a systems level of analysis, organizational theory and is situated in a cultural framework” (Agnew & VanBalkom, 2009, p. 454).

Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) tested the CRI model at two American universities using a combination of focus groups, individual interviews and document analysis. Similar to Bartell (2003), Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) found that specific influences exist within universities that can support or undermine cultural readiness for internationalization. Agnew and VanBalkom (2009) concluded that institutional success

in internationalization increases when there is alignment and congruence between individual (micro), institutional (meso) and external (macro) values, beliefs and attitudes. Their findings supported Sporn’s (1996) findings about institutional strength (level of congruency) and orientation (external/internal).

Burnett and Huisman (2010) reported on their empirical research about the implications of organizational culture on internationalization at four Canadian universities. Burnett and Huisman (2010) applied McNay’s (1995) model of four organizational types: *enterprising*, *corporate*, *collegiate* and *bureaucratic* (McNay 1995, in Burnett & Huisman, 2010, p. 120). The substantive difference between the four organizational types was whether a university had “loose versus tight operational controls and the relative emphasis on policy and strategy” (Burnett & Huisman, 2010, p. 120). For example, *enterprising* universities had tight policy, loose operational control and an external orientation and *bureaucratic* universities had loose policy and tight operational control and emphasized regulations (Burnett & Huisman, 2010, p. 120). The four organizational cultural types are not mutually exclusive and to some degree all types coexist in a university.

When internationalization is identified as an institutional priority, it is necessary for the institution to develop a receptive organizational culture by creating a campus-wide strategic plan that acknowledges the existing organizational culture and the individuals who created it.

From the four institutional participants, Burnett and Huisman (2010) identified three organizational types: collegial and enterprising; collegial and autocratic; collegial and bureaucratic/enterprising. They concluded that the variation between the four universities was attributed to policies, institutional characteristics and institutional cultures. Burnett and Huisman found “...a clear connection between the cultures and strategic approaches to internationalisation activities” (2010, p. 139). Burnett and Huisman (2010) provided recommendations to each of the universities that they studied about how each institution could improve and move forward in its efforts towards internationalization based on its existing organizational type.

Agnew (2012) researched the question, “How does the interplay between university culture and ideology support or impede internationalisation?” (p. 477). Agnew (2012) combined Stier’s (2004) ideology framework (idealism, instrumentalism, educationalism) with Agnew and VanBalkom’s (2009) CRI model to research three American universities from the same state. Agnew (2012) employed three levels of analysis: micro (Faculty members), meso (Deans) and macro (Senior University Leaders). Agnew found that the three ideologies operate simultaneously and are “...patterned across professional roles — academic, deans and senior leadership...” (Agnew, 2012, p. 487). Her findings identified “... a contradiction in how participants think about internationalization and... the ways in which contradictory ideologies simultaneously operate to support and impede internationalization efforts” (Agnew, 2012, p. 479). Agnew (2012) concluded that the many ways that internationalization is understood within one institution influences to what degree faculty members will support internationalization.

Agnew (2012) recommended that when internationalization is identified as an institutional priority, it is necessary for the institution to develop a receptive organizational culture by creating a campus-wide strategic plan that acknowledges the existing organizational culture and the individuals who created it.

Conclusion

The study of organizational culture as relevant to higher education began with Tierney (1988). In the late 1990’s researchers began investigating internationalization in higher education. It was not until Bartell’s work (2003) that the two were combined and organizational culture was identified as a key indicator for the successful implementation of internationalization.

Bartell (2003) was the first to demonstrate the significance of organizational culture on the success or failure of institutional internationalization. Stier’s (2004) identification of three ideologies underlying internationalization introduced the complexity of stakeholder perceptions, assumptions and values. Agnew and VanBalkom’s (2009) systems-level analysis of both organizational culture and internationalization created a means to assess institutional readiness for internationalization. Burnett and Huisman’s (2010) research about types of organizational culture revealed institutional characteristics that supported or detracted from internationalization. Agnew (2012) used a systems-level analysis to understand the impact of contradictory yet simultaneous ideologies on the implementation of institutional internationalization efforts.

Understanding the impact of organizational culture on institutional internationalization will increase leadership effectiveness and provides a means to assess institutional readiness for internationalization.

The reviewed literature used faculty members, deans and senior leaders as the research participants. Research on organizational culture and internationalization frequently omits students as research participants. Further research is needed on the unique contributions of students to an institution’s organizational culture and internationalization goals.

This literature review suggests a strong link between organizational culture and internationalization. Further research needs to address the role of internationalization as a “change agent” within institutions where the leadership wants to use internationalization as a means to transform the institution’s organizational culture.

The typologies and models introduced in this review can enhance understanding and inform decision-making by those charged with creating and implementing institutional goals and strategies. Further research is needed to determine whether institutional leaders have introduced such models into their approach to internationalization and, if so, whether they perceive this framing as essential and effective in accomplishing their internationalization objectives.

This review suggests that understanding the impact of organizational culture on institutional internationalization will increase leadership effectiveness and provides a means to assess institutional readiness for internationalization. Knowledge of one’s institutional organizational culture provides an important underpinning for planning, implementing and assessing internationalization strategies and goals. However it is insufficient in and of itself; sustainable internationalization requires policy, resources, infrastructure and continuous strong leadership support (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012).

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