Culture

I202, Fall 2003
Session 8
Thomas Haigh

Culture
• Hear about a lot in this class
• Important in these readings
• Never really explained...
• So here it is

Key elements
• Shared beliefs and values
  • Members of culture take for granted
  • Unite against outside world
  • Reflected & reinforced by stories
• Shared actions
  • Including rituals (often not noticed by participants)
  • Constant "enactment" reinforces it
• Way of reproducing
  • "socialization" of new members
  • Sometimes ritual, e.g. fraternity hazing

Different Versions of Culture
• Found in many disciplines
  • Sociology
  • Anthropology
  • Management
• Place stress on different aspects
  • Beliefs and cognition
  • Actions
  • Rituals
  • Folklore, etc.

Exists at Different Levels
• International
  • E.g. culture of industrial societies
• National
  • E.g. culture of modern United States
• Regional
  • E.g. Midwestern culture
  • Even specific Bloomington culture

Two Kinds Key Here
• Organizational culture
  • Shared & reinforced within particular firm
  • E.g. Microsoft in the Microsoft reading
  • Many successful organizations have strong culture
• Professional & Occupational cultures
  • Doctor, programmer, manager, hacker, etc.
  • Formal & informal parts to socialization
  • Can form strong subcultures in single organization
Case of Hackers

- Technology as focal point for a culture
- Initiation involves use of technology
- Values of culture shaped by technology
- Software produced is shaped by culture
- Culture reinforces tendencies of individuals
- Hackers are subculture within MIT
- Distinct from regular grad students
- Take pride in outsider status

Setting Cultures

- Hard to change
- Many firms try
  - Mission statements
  - Culture consultants, etc.
- Often produces “fragmented culture”
  - Official statements & rhetoric
  - Versus actual situation
  - E.g. Enron ethics policies

One Common Problem

- Clash of cultures between
  - Users of technology
  - Producers of technology
- Sub cultures of IT people are distinctive
  - Most users do not share
  - Don’t design the system you want to use!
- Examples
  - Designing search capability
  - Customizing look and feel