



# Estimating the impact of Denison's (1996), "What is the difference between organizational culture and organizational climate? A native's point of view on a decade of paradigm wars"

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## ABSTRACT

Denison [Denison, D.R. (1996), What is the difference between organizational culture and organizational climate? A native's point of view on a decade of paradigm wars, *The Academy of Management Review*, 21 (3), 619–654] offers a paradigm to comprehend the difference between studying organizational culture and organizational climate from a methodological perspective. The present study uses a Scopus analysis to understand the contributions of Denison's work in contemporary research of organization studies, and to recognize benefits of his discussion on organizational culture and organizational climate. The Scopus analysis shows that Denison's article is seminal across academic disciplines from its appearance.

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## 1. Introduction

Organizational culture continues to indicate different trends in academia, as new concepts in understanding the phenomena evolve continuously (Brinkman, 1999; Ouchi, 1978; Pettigrew, 1979). To follow highlights in Denison's (1996) article, "What is the difference between organizational culture and organizational climate? A native's point of view on a decade of paradigm wars," this essay review provides a general overview of some of the main issues that preoccupy organizational researchers (Fig. 1).

The article explores differences and similarities between the concepts of organizational culture and organizational climate, and argues that organizational culture is studied on epistemological grounds concerned with the evolution of social systems over time, while organizational climate examines the impact organizational systems have on groups and individuals. To understand the difference between the two concepts, Denison (1996) applies a comparative method (four tables), while he discusses extensive ranges of literature, which clarifies conceptual and methodological use of organizational culture and organizational climate.

The emergence of organizational culture studies raises a need for a new methodological thinking (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995; Martin, 1992; Sackmann, 1991). As a result a number of scholars (Calori and Sarmin, 1991; Chatman, 1991; Denison and Mishra, 1995; Gordon and DiTomaso, 1992; Hofstede et al., 1990; Jermier et al., 1991) apply quantitative research designs for the study of organizational culture making the subject indistinguishable from the concept of

organizational climate. Denison (1996) turns this concern into a debate and emphasizes the difference in conceptual and methodological use of organizational culture and organizational climate.

The article what is the difference between organizational culture and organizational climate? A native's point of view on a decade of paradigm wars, was cited 219 times (Scopus database, 2009) which indicates the article remains seminal for its contribution to organization studies.

Scopus analysis is applied to disclose the importance of the article in terms of citations, and how the citations influence disciplinary and interdisciplinary academic backgrounds. The discussion is restricted to giving an overview of scholars that cite the article since its publication.

To compare the article to the other published articles in 1996 from the *Journal of Academy of Management Review* 21 (3) a statistical graph is used which includes the standard deviation and mean among Denison's article and all other articles. The graph draws a distinguished attention to Denison's article published in 1996.

## 2. Summarizing Denison's article

Denison (1996) examines the difference between organizational culture and organizational climate literatures, and suggests that traditional methods of studying culture relates to qualitative perspectives. Organizational climate is conventionally studied through application of quantitative research designs.

### 2.1. Background

Culture is "notoriously difficult" to define (Smith, 2001 p. 1). Edgar and Sedwick (1999, p. 1) state, "if we ask what the word 'culture' means we are inevitable able to think of a diversity of possible answers, often depending upon the ways in which we pose such a

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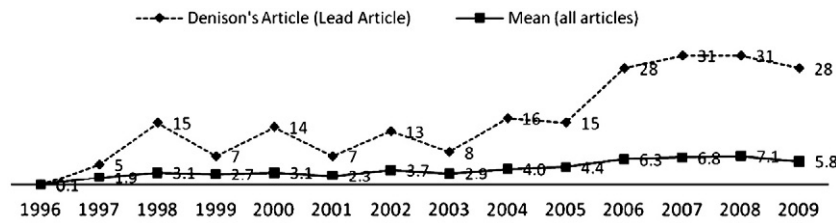


Fig. 1. Academy of Management Review 1996 21 (3) Standard Deviation of Articles (Citations).

question.” Williams, in Milner and Browitt (1991, p. 76) claims that culture “is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”

Academic definitions of culture progressed in anthropology, but with no overarching (Smircich, 1983). Culture is a concept that “has been examined, poked at, pushed, rolled over, killed, revived, and reified ad infinitum” (Lonner, 1984 p.108). Culture is a multidimensional concept and societal aspect that requires a context before culture can be understood (Gordon, 2009).

Denison (1996) argues culture amalgamates with organization studies in the 1980s. The work of Denison (1984), Dyer (1982), Gagliardi (1986), Ouchi and Wilkins (1985), O’Reilly (1983) and Smircich (1983) appear in the academic literature and examines various areas of organizational management, (Schwartz and Davis, 1981) organizational performance (Peters and Waterman, 1982) and organizational change (Kanter, 1983). As a result more quantitative methods to study culture in organizations appear, releasing qualitative methods, which traditionally apply to understand aspects of culture in organizations. Denison (1996 p. 620) states “authors have applied survey methods to study comparative ‘dimensions’ of culture in a way that appears to contradict the epistemological foundations of culture research within organizational studies”.

Abraham, Fisher and Crawford (1997), Brubakk and Wilkinson (1996), Burnes and James (1995), Chapman, Murray and Mellor (1997), Denison and Mishra (1995), Denison (1996) and Goffee and Jones (1998) examine organizational culture, linking organizational culture to the concept of organizational change, organizational performance, and organizational climate.

Organizational climate is a concept Tagiuri (1963) defines that appears in the academic literature during the 1970s (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1974; Schneider, 1975), 1980s (Schwartz and Davis, 1981; Joyce and Slocum 1984) and 1990s (Ashforth, 1995; Denison, 1996). Ashforth (1995 p. 837) argues that “a precise and widely shared definition of the climate construct does not exist, it is defined here as a shared and enduring molar perception of the psychologically important aspects of the work environment.”

Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) explain organizational climate “is based on the assumption that individuals within a given subsystem or organization and at a given hierarchical level should have similar perceptions about their climate” (p. 256).

Denison (1996) argues that organizational culture is studied using qualitative research methods, and organizational climate quantitative research designs. The shift in methodological use has made it complex to distinguish between traditional ways of studying organizational culture and organizational climate. Four tables are presented to give an overview of organizational culture and organizational climate, which makes it evident the two concepts are different, and thus must be examined differently from a methodological perspective. The first table presents organizational culture in the category of sociology and anthropology, and organizational climate in the territory of psychology.

Table 2 covers the concept of organizational culture and organizational climate literatures, concepts and method. The third table summarizes organizational culture and organizational climate research-

ers. The fourth table outlines the theoretical foundations for the two concepts. The conclusive remarks of Denison (1996) discuss the necessity of distinguishing between organizational culture and organizational climate in order to apply an appropriate research method.

The two perspectives have generated distinct theories, methods, and epistemologies as well as a distinct set of findings, failings, and future agenda (Denison, 1996 p. 644).

### 3. Scopus analysis

Scopus is an academic database, which is employed to retrieve various articles from. Scopus also provides the number of citations articles receive from 1996 onwards, and is applied to give an analytical overview of the academic contribution that Denison’s article makes across disciplinary and interdisciplinary research areas. The article was cited 219 times from 1996–2009 according to Scopus, which makes it a seminal article for analysis.

Six tables are outlined using Scopus to analyze and track the number of citations of Denison’s article and other articles that relates to his article. A comparative process is also used to show how important the article continues to be.

Table 1 addresses the total number of citations the article received since its publication in 1996. The article was cited 219 times, which makes it an influential article to investigate.

Table 2 is another overview, and shows the number of citations the article had each year from 1996–2009. The year after the article was published an almost steady rise in citations are received. The years of most citations are from 2006–2009.

Table 3 highlights the peripherality of citations from the year 1997, after the article was published. This year is chosen since the year of publication only shows one citation, which makes it complex to discover any significance in citations. All articles that cited the Denison article in 1997 are outlined showing source title and the amount of citations they received in total, after their publication. The importance in Table 3 looks at interdisciplinary research areas the article contributes to, mainly organizational management. Following this blueprint Tables 4 and 5 are employed to analyze a similar pattern.

Table 4 shows the contents of citations by centrality and primacy highlighting year 2008, which was the year the article was cited the most.

Table 1  
Citation analysis of Denison’s article.

Author and Year	Seminal Article	Cited by	Source Title
Denison, D.R (1996)	What is the difference between organizational culture and organizational climate? A native’s point of view on a decade of paradigm wars	219	Academy of Management Review

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