

2009 School Seminar Series

Waikato Management School
Te Raupapa



The Problem of 'National Identity': A Case Study

Wednesday, 26th August 2009
3.00pm – 4:15pm
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Abstract

The proposition that 'national identity' is a useful concept for analysing individual and organisational differences seems irresistible, in spite of the immediate theoretical problems it throws up. How can one generalise about the 'culture' of a whole nation? What are the boundaries of a nation anyway? For a range of reasons organisational scholars want to be able to talk about national identity - all the better to govern those other foreigners perhaps, or to contest the implied universalism of North American management theories. The work of Hofstede has been especially dominant in providing an incessantly-referred-to model of national difference.

In this presentation I will discuss the problem of national identity in relation to a current project with Bronwyn Boon of Otago University, 'The voice of the creative economy'. This examines the links between the discourses of national identity and of the creative economy in Aotearoa New Zealand through an analysis of Idealog magazine - the local 'voice of the creative economy'. I will use this project as a case study to explore our difficulties in finding ways to use the concept of national identity, while also trying to find a way to address its problems.

There are two main lines of critique of Hofstede's work. The first takes a functionalist line and argues that Hofstede's theorisation and methodology is deficient from a positivist point of view. This line of work calls for better and more robust functionalist models. The second line takes postcolonial and post-structuralist perspectives in questioning the underlying assumptions of Hofstede's work in relation to culture, nation and identity. This is the line we are taking. I will outline the problems with national identity and talk about how we propose to address these in our revised paper. I will especially welcome discussion of how others would approach this concept in their own research or teaching.

Deborah Jones is an Associate Professor at Victoria Management School. Much of her research revolves around issues of difference, including national identity, gender and ethnicity. More recently she is combining this interest with studies of the creative industries, and especially the New Zealand film industry. She has a background in literature, language and communication studies, and now brings perspectives from cultural studies to the study of work and organisation. Other current research addresses 'biculturalism' in New Zealand organisations and gender equality in academia.

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