

Kilian McNevin

Title: An investigation into the impact of culture in post-merger and post-acquisition
integration in Ireland

X20495763

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Student Name: Killian McNevin

Student ID: X20495762

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ChatGPT	I would have used ChatGPT at the beginning of my writing back in February, to give me structural ideas for my thesis and blueprint examples of how to lay out my thesis.	https://openai.com/chatgpt/

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of my lecturers from the National College of Ireland for their continued unwavering support throughout the academic calender.

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Abstract

In Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A), cultural integration is the process of two merging organisational cultures towards the formation of one entity. Large organisations all around have started using M&A activity more and more as they want to advance their organisational portfolios and competitive position on the market by entering new markets that give chances for their companies to reach corporate goals. Ireland has grown to be a major M&A hub in the past ten years. Its economy has been strong through the worldwide economic crisis brought on by COVID-19, Brexit, and the war in Ukraine; it has also kept out-prosper and outperformed that of its surrounding EU competitors. Up 48% from the equivalent period in 2022 and the second-highest total for that time in any of the past five years, the value of mergers and acquisitions involving Irish parties hit \$33.3 billion during the first nine months of 2023 (Goodbody, 2023).

Ireland's business-friendly environment is well-known, and many business owners have been drawn to the nation's abundance of economic opportunities from both domestic and foreign investors looking to grow their company. With 405 mergers or acquisitions finalised in the state (225 of which involve foreign bidders), the total value comes to €11.3 billion (Sheridan, 2023). M&A execution can cost billions of euros, especially in relation to other cultures. But the success of these deals usually depends on the seamless cultural integration of many organisational cultures, attitudes, and practices—a difficult and dangerous process traditionally rife with challenges and uncertainty. Inappropriate cultural assessments before the M&A are one of the several reasons behind failures in M&As; research indicates a significant association between business performance and organisational culture (Angwin, 2020). These mistakes could have disastrous effects on the Irish economy among all the other affected parties.

This paper looks at the criticality of cultural integration in M&A success. It is grounded on different theoretical frameworks like Schein's concept of organisational culture and Hofstede's cultural aspects. Apart from a thorough analysis of pertinent literature, the study comprises qualitative interviews with target businesses from several sectors of the most important Irish economy.

Keywords: Culture, Merger and Acquisition, Cultural Integration, Integration Process Cultural Assessment, Organisational Culture, Change Management.

Abstract

Declaration

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	page 9
Chapter 2	Literature Review	page 11
Chapter 3	Research Question & Objectives	page 21
Chapter 4	Methodology	page 23
Chapter 5	Analysis and Findings	page 29
Chapter 6	Conclusion & Recommendations	page 37

References & Bibliography

Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions, or M&A, are the strategic business activities involving the combination or amalgamation of two or more companies. An acquisition is the process by which one company purchases another usually resulting in the acquired company becoming a subsidiary of the buying company; a merger is the process by which two companies combine their activities to form a new entity. Strategic objectives including entering into new markets, acquiring synergies, or boosting market share drive these exchanges (DePamphilis, 2019) (Gaughran, 2010). M&A operations have an extensive past; major developments during the Industrial Revolution signalled the birth of contemporary M&A techniques (Healy, 1992). During this time, notable Irish firms as Goodbody Stockbrokers and Davy Stockbrokers first arose.

Early in the 1900s Ireland's first known merger and acquisition (M&A) deal took place. One significant agreement occurred in 1902 when the well-known Irish firm Guinness merged under one name with Arthur Guinness Son & Co., an Irish competitor brewery, to form Guinness & Co. Combining two big brewing companies, this merger was a historic event in Irish corporate history and had a long-lasting effect on the Irish economy (Ravenscraft, 1987).

Cross-border mergers and acquisitions (M&A) have become a common tactic for businesses trying to access foreign markets given modern-day globalisation and trade liberalisation. Ireland was historically among the poorest countries in Western Europe, but from the 1990s until the mid-2000s the Celtic Tiger saw strong economic growth accompanied by a fast GDP increase, rising foreign direct investment (FDI), and a flourishing business environment (Harrison, 2001). As a result, the Irish M&A market experienced a spike in activity across various industries, including real estate, technology, banking, and pharmaceuticals (Healy, 1992).

This transformation of the Irish market has seen the country evolve from a heavily reliant and agriculturally centric mono-economy into the fastest-growing multi-faceted economy in the European Union (EU) and one of the wealthiest nations on the continent. Favourable economic conditions, such as the second lowest corporation tax in Europe at 12.5%, and Ireland's strategic location as a gateway to Europe, have drawn numerous multinational firms to establish their headquarters in the country (Gaughran, 2010). Dublin's established financial services industry has been the biggest gainer from Brexit moves. By the spring of 2021, 135 financial firms—more than a quarter of the companies that moved out of the UK—had decided Dublin as their new base (Harrison, 2001).

Despite recent economic progress, persistent global political unrest and economic uncertainty pose risks to the future market. Multinational firms, which are the main drivers of economic growth, innovation, and job creation, continue to have a significant impact on Ireland's economy. Successful cultural integration within M&A transactions is vital for optimising the value-creation potential of these deals

as Ireland continues to attract international investment. However, Ireland's open economy, heavily dependent on international commerce and foreign direct investment, is susceptible to external shocks and uncertainties resulting from geopolitical disputes, trade rows, and economic downturns in essential trading partners (Straub, 2007).

The current state of heightened geopolitical tensions, such as those in Palestine and Ukraine, may significantly affect how multinational corporations (MNCs) integrate their cultures. The resilience and competitiveness of the Irish M&A market depend on its ability to manage cultural complexities. Inadequate attention to cultural integration can result in employee discontent, operational disruptions, and reputational damage, undermining the financial benefits of M&A deals. Cultural sensitivities can be exacerbated among employees, especially if they are from nations directly involved in conflicts or geopolitical issues, leading to divisions and misunderstandings (Damodaran, 2012) (Straub, 2007).

Therefore, if Ireland is to remain a desirable destination for FDI and economic growth, strategic attention should be given to cultural integration projects throughout the pivotal phases of corporate integration inside the Irish M&A market. Giving cultural alignment first priority and fostering a cooperative and open business environment will help Ireland keep its competitive edge, drive long-term growth, and grab possibilities presented by global M&A activity (Damodaran, 2012)

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks and Organisational Understanding

Overview of Organisational Theory

Particularly during mergers and acquisitions (M&A), organisational culture - a complicated and multifaceted concept - plays a vital role in determining the dynamics inside organisations. There are several theoretical models to clarify the nature and influence of organisational culture. One of the most often used models is Edgar Schein's three-level classification of culture. This model separates artefacts, promoted values, and fundamental underlying assumptions (Schein, 2010). These levels assist one to see how underlying, usually subconscious, attitudes and values support apparent expressions (artefacts). Hofstede's cultural dimensions are another prominent theory that offers insightful analysis of organisational environments even though it mostly addresses national culture. Power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs short-term orientation, and indulgence vs constraint are six qualities Hofstede notes (Hofstede, 1984). These dimensions can be adapted to understand the cultural variations within organisations and their potential impact on M&A integration. Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework (CVF) is another significant framework, which provides a prism through which organisational performance and culture could be evaluated. With different traits and ramifications for organisational behaviour, the CVF divides organisational cultures into four categories: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy (Zeb, 2021).

Cultural Dimensions

Research on the connection of cultural dimensions and M&A outcomes has been conducted in extensive detail; researchers stress the important part cultural compatibility plays. Hofstede's measurements offer a basis for evaluating the cultural fit between combining companies. A high-power distance company combining with a low-power distance company, for example, may have problems with leadership style and decision-making process. Likewise, variations in individuality against collectivism can influence post-merger cooperation and teamwork (Weber, 2011). In 1988, Kogut and Singh developed a cultural distance index to measure cultural variations and how they affected M&A success. Greater cultural distance, they argue, often results in integration difficulties that influence general M&A effectiveness. Echoing this viewpoint, Stahl and Voigt (2008) do a meta-analysis demonstrating how cultural variations could affect employee morale, turnover rates, and length of time of integration. The GLOBE study also adds more complex cultural aspects pertinent to corporate environments, therefore augmenting Hofstede's work. The study underlines the need of leadership styles compatible with cultural values since they might greatly affect post-merger integration (House, 2004).

Theoretical Perspectives In M&A

Different theoretical approaches on M&A results reflect the complexity of major business occurrences. According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), M&A capital and cultural assets have great success (Barney, 1991). RBV argues that as it influences the synergies obtained from the merger, cultural integration is absolutely essential. Another prism through which one might see the expenses of managing and combining several organisational cultures is provided by transaction cost economics (TCE). High cultural dissimilarity might raise transaction expenses, hence creating inefficiencies and lower profitability (Macher, 2008). In order to foresee and minimise these expenses, TCE advises pre-merger phase cultural due diligence is important. An additional perspective is offered by institutional theory, which emphasises how institutional settings and policies shape M&A results. Different institutional environments might provide difficulties for organisations trying to match their practices and routines, therefore influencing the post-merger integration process (Scott, 2001). This theory underscores the importance of considering both organisational and national cultural contexts in M&A.

Conceptual Framework for Cultural Integration

A thorough conceptual framework for cultural integration in M&A consists of many important elements. First of all, the pre-merger culture evaluation is essential and uses instruments like employee surveys and cultural audits to evaluate cultural fit. This analysis helps to spot possible cultural conflicts and create plans of action to solve them (Weber, 2011). Integration requires a concentration on communication and leadership. By matching staff members with new cultural values and goals, transformational leadership - characterised by vision, inspiration, and supporting behaviour - has been found to help to promote cultural integration (Bass, 1994). Managing expectations and lowering uncertainty during the integration process depends on good communication tactics including open information sharing and frequent updates (Schweiger, 2013). Furthermore, the post-merger establishment of a consistent organisational culture is absolutely vital. This entails combining the finest aspects of both civilisations and producing a new, coherent society that advances the strategic goals of the combined entity. Programs for cultural training, cross-cultural teams, and integration seminars help to speed this process (Marks, 2011).

Successful cultural integration is largely dependent on ongoing observation and continuous modification. Regular evaluations of cultural alignment, staff happiness, and integration development are a big part of this. Adaptive techniques and feedback systems help to solve developing cultural problems and support long-term success in maintaining integration (Buono, 2003).

Theoretically and conceptually, the frameworks underline the complex interaction between M&A results and organisational environment. Achieving effective post-merger integration depends mostly on

an awareness of and control of cultural differences, especially in environments with great cultural diversity like Ireland. Strong theoretical insights grounded in effective cultural integration tactics can improve the probability of M&A success, therefore supporting the general development and competitiveness of the combined companies.

Empirical Evidence & Case Studies

Previous Research on Culture in M&A

Empirical studies of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) have looked closely at how cultural elements affect results on post-merger integration. Research repeatedly shows that M&A success depends on cultural fit. For instance, a seminal Datta (1991) study revealed that employee performance and satisfaction are much influenced by cultural differences between merging companies, which often results in integration challenges. This study emphasises the need for cultural evaluations conducted during M&A due diligence. Cartwright and Cooper's 1993 study on the psychological and cultural elements of M&A also noted that cultural conflicts can cause stress, lower morale, and higher employee turnover. To guarantee more seamless transfers, they support thorough cultural integration programs addressing these psychological effects. Moreover, empirical studies imply that cultural integration strategies have to be customised to fit the particular situation of the merging entities. For example, Chatterjee et al. (1992) showed that the effectiveness of cultural integration policies differs depending on the sector and organisational scale. Their results show that a one-size-fits-all approach of cultural integration is usually useless.

Case Studies of Irish M&A Transactions

Analysing particular case studies of M&A events in Ireland offers insightful analysis of the pragmatic consequences of cultural integration. One such instance is the 1997 merger of Ark Life Assurance Company with Allied Irish Banks (AIB). With AIB's risk-averse hierarchical culture running counter to Ark Life's more entrepreneurial approach, this merger brought attention to the difficulties of combining different corporate cultures. Resistance from staff members and mismatched company values were among the various challenges the integration process encountered, which finally affected the original success of the merger (Brophy, 2013). Another interesting case is the 2006 purchase of Eircom by Australian investment company Babcock & Brown. This purchase helped to highlight the difficulties of cross-border cultural integration. The integration process suffered from miscommunications and misunderstandings resulting from Eircom's Irish management's cultural differences with Babcock & Brown's Australian leadership. Notwithstanding early difficulties, the

businesses finally launched team-building projects and cultural training courses to close the cultural divide, therefore fostering a more harmonious corporate culture (Palcic, 2013). Another notable example is the 2017 purchase of Fyffes by Sumitomo Corporation Long-standing Irish corporation Fyffes, in the fruit and fresh produce sector, combined with Japanese giant Sumitomo. Due mostly to disparities in communication styles, decision-making techniques, and work ethics, this merger presented serious cultural integration difficulties. To help with improved cultural understanding and alignment, the businesses set up integration teams and launched intensive cultural awareness campaigns, which finally helped the merger to be successful (Bernal, 2020).

Empirical Studies on Cultural Integration Processes

Deeper knowledge of the mechanisms allowing or hindering effective cultural integration comes from empirical research on these processes. One such study by Larsson and Finkelstein (1999) looked at a sizable sample of international M&As and found that active involvement from top management, clear communication of cultural expectations, and alignment of organisational practices with the desired cultural attributes are most effective when these things happen. Through conducting a thorough investigation of cultural integration in technology companies, Weber and Drori (2011) found that companies with proactive cultural integration strategies - such as cross-cultural training and the creation of integration task forces - showed better post-merger performance and employee satisfaction. Their results highlight the need for methodical and intentional integration in reaching effective cultural harmony. Vaara's 2003 empirical study on the function of power dynamics in cultural integration, Vaara stated that power battles between merging companies sometimes aggravate cultural problems, which prolongs integration times and lowers organisational performance. Vaara also says that reducing cultural conflicts mostly depends on correcting power disparities and promoting a cooperative integrating environment.

Analysis of Success Factors & Challenges in M&A Integration

The analysis of success factors and challenges in M&A integration reveals several crucial elements that ultimately influence the outcomes of cultural integration. Successful M&A integrations often share common characteristics, such as strong leadership commitment to cultural integration, clear and consistent communication, and the establishment of shared goals and values (Schweiger, 2005). Leadership plays a pivotal role in guiding the cultural integration process. Transformational leaders who are able to articulate a clear vision for the merged entity and inspire employees to embrace new cultural values are often successful in achieving cultural integration. Additionally, leaders who demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adaptability can effectively navigate the complexities of merging different organisational cultures (Waldman, 2009). Communication is another critical success factor.

Transparent and frequent communication helps manage employee expectations, reduces uncertainties, and fosters a sense of inclusiveness. It is essential for leaders to communicate the benefits of the merger, address cultural differences openly, and provide regular updates on integration progress (Schweiger, 2013). However, several challenges can impede successful cultural integration. Resistance to change is a common issue, as employees may cling to established cultural norms and practices. This resistance can be mitigated through inclusive change management practices that involve employees in the integration process and address their concerns (Appelbaum, 2012). Another challenge is the misalignment of cultural values and practices. When merging entities have fundamentally different cultural foundations, achieving cultural alignment can be difficult. This misalignment can lead to conflicts, decreased morale, and lower productivity. Effective integration strategies, such as cultural training programs and the creation of integration task forces, can help bridge these gaps (Cartwright, 2012). Empirical evidence and case studies give us a glimpse of the significant impact of cultural factors on M&A outcomes. Successful cultural integration requires a comprehensive approach that includes leadership commitment, effective communication, and proactive integration strategies. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the success factors identified in the literature, organisations can enhance their chances of achieving successful post-merger integration and attain the intended benefits of M&A transactions.

Leadership, Communication & Change Management

Role of Leadership in Cultural Integration

Integration of cultures during M&A processes depends significantly on leadership. Setting the tone for the integration process, matching the cultures of the merging companies, and guiding the united company toward its strategic objectives depends critically on effective executives. Studies show that transformational leadership—which is distinguished by vision, inspiration, and personalised consideration—is especially good for promoting cultural integration. A clear vision for the future inspires confidence and dedication among employees and creates a climate that welcomes change, all of which transformational leaders can do (Bass, 1994). Management of different cultures is another essential component of leadership in cultural integration. Leaders have to be culturally knowledgeable and able to comprehend, value, and combine several points of view. Leaders with cultural intelligence can negotiate cultural complexity, reduce conflict, and advance inclusion (Ang, 2008). In cross-border M&A when cultural differences are more evident, this competency is very important. Leaders also have to be role models, acting in line with the ideal cultural values of the united company.

Their choices and behaviour should represent modern cultural values, therefore strengthening these values all over the company. Studies have revealed that employees are more likely to absorb and internalise the cultural traits they seek to inculcate when leaders exhibit them, therefore promoting more successful cultural integration (Schein, 2010).

Strategies for Effective Communication in M&A

The M&A integration process depends heavily on efficient communication since it helps control employee expectations, lower uncertainty, and build a feeling of affiliation. There are now several techniques recognised to improve M&A communication. First of all, open communication is really vital. Regular updates regarding the integration process should be given by leaders, who should also clearly explain the justification behind the merger, the predicted changes, and the advantages it seeks to provide. Transparency helps to create trust and lowers opposition to change (Schweiger, 2013). Second is two-way dialogue communication should be set up to help management and staff to interact. This entails building channels wherein staff members may express worries, pose questions, and offer comments. Maintaining morale and involvement during the integration process depends on employees feeling heard and respected, hence two-way communication guarantees this (Kitchen, 2002). Third, customised communication plans should be used to handle the particular requirements of several stakeholder groups. Senior management might want thorough strategic information, for example, while frontline staff members might need more pragmatic direction on how the integration will impact their everyday operations. Customising channels and content for various audiences improves the success of communication initiatives (Clampitt, 2000). Finally, using several channels of communication - face-to-face meetings, emails, business newsletters, and social media—ensures that messages get to every employee. A multimodal communication strategy guarantees thorough coverage and fits several communication preferences (Raina, 2010).

Change Management Approaches in Cultural Integration

In M&A, change management - which involves methodical techniques to moving people, teams, and companies toward a desired future state - is a critical component of cultural integration. Many change management methods include structures for handling cultural integration. A frequent tool used for directing organisational transformation is Kotter's 8-Step Change Model. The methods used involve establishing a feeling of urgency, building a strong coalition, formulating a vision and plan, communicating the vision, enabling broad-based action, producing short-term results, consolidating gains, and so grounding new approaches in the corporate culture (Laig, 2021). This approach underlines the need of communication and leadership in promoting transformation and making sure the company adopts new cultural norms ingrained in it. Another powerful paradigm is Lewin's three-

stage Change Management Model: unfreezing, altering, and refreezing. The unfreezing stage challenges the current cultural standards to help the company to be ready for change. While the refreezing stage concentrates on establishing the organisation with the new culture firmly in place, the changing stage comprises adopting the new cultural values and practices (Hussain, 2018). To reach long-lasting integration, this paradigm emphasises the requirement of ongoing reinforcement of new cultural practices. Developed by Prosci, the ADKAR Model emphasises personal transformation and lays out five fundamental building blocks for effective change: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement (Paramitha, 2020). his model emphasises the requirement of addressing the human elements of change, therefore ensuring that employees are aware of the need for change, wish to participate in it, have the knowledge and skills to apply new behaviours and get reinforcement to sustain these behaviours. A crucial change management technique in M&A also is cultural due diligence. Before the merger, extensive cultural studies help to spot possible conflicts and create plans to handle them early on. Analysing cultural artefacts, values, and assumptions helps one to grasp the cultural dynamics of both companies and build an integration road plan (Witzmann, 2016).

Leadership Styles and Their Impact on Integration Outcomes

Different leadership style approaches can much influence the results of cultural integration in M&A. Because transformational leadership emphasises vision, inspiration, and personal involvement, it is quite successful in promoting cultural integration as was already mentioned. By inspiring staff members to accept fresh cultural values and cooperate toward shared objectives, transformational leaders help to improve performance and smooth out integration (Schweizer, 2012). Though it may be less successful in promoting significant cultural transformation, transactional leadership - based on a system of rewards and penalties - can also help to promote cultural integration. Short-term benefits can come from transactive leaders emphasising on reaching particular goals and preserving operational stability. This approach might not, however, adequately handle the cultural and emotional elements of integration (Khanin, 2007). Underscoring the leader's responsibility in serving their team and giving employees a top priority, servant leadership helps to promote cultural integration by developing trust and a favourable environment. Empathy, teamwork, and mutual respect developed by servant leaders serve to lessen opposition to change and advance cultural alignment (Greenleaf, 2002).

Another style that affects integration results is charismatic leadership, defined as the capacity of the leader to inspire and energise staff members through personal charm and conviction. Strong emotional ties between charismatic leaders and their staff can be developed by means of a common vision, therefore promoting cultural unity. But this approach might mostly rely on the personality of the leader, which could be dangerous should the power of the leader fade (Waldman, 2009).

In cultural integration, autocratic leadership - which entails centralised decision-making and rigorous control - is typically less successful. Changes imposed by autocratic leaders without regard for employee opinions could cause opposition and disengagement. This approach can impede the formation of a cohesive organisational culture and affect the results of integration (Lewin, 1939).

The role of leadership, effective communication strategies, and change management approaches are critical in the cultural integration process during M&A. Transformational, servant, and charismatic leadership styles are particularly effective in fostering cultural alignment and achieving successful integration outcomes. By leveraging these leadership styles and adopting structured change management frameworks, organisations can navigate the complexities of cultural integration and enhance the overall success of M&A transactions.

Employee Perspectives & Organisational Identity

Employee Attitudes & Perceptions in Integration

The success of cultural integration in mergers and acquisitions (M&A) depends substantially on employee attitudes and perceptions. Employees sometimes go through a range of emotions throughout the integration process, including doubt, anxiety, and scepticism, which might affect their opinions of the merger and their consequent actions. Studies of employees' first impressions of the merger have revealed how much they are eager to participate in the integration process (Marks, 2001). Positive opinions of the merger - that it presents a chance for development, education, and career advancement - can boost employee commitment to the new organisational culture and engagement. On the other hand, negative attitudes include fear of job loss, diminished autonomy, and cultural misalignment can cause opposition, disengagement, and possibly turnover (Buono, 2003). Involving staff early in the integration process will help to solve these issues by getting their opinions and open addressing of their problems. Clear, consistent communication on the advantages and effects of the merger assists in creating trust and lowering uncertainty (Schweiger, 2013).

Furthermore, including staff members in decision-making where suitable and integration activities help them to feel ownership and control, which might help to change their opinions about the merger (Steigenberger, 2017).

Impact of Cultural Integration on Employee Morale

The general effectiveness of the cultural integration process depends much on whether or not staff morale is improved by it. Changes in organisational structures, responsibilities, and cultural norms undermine employee morale, which includes work satisfaction, motivation, and general well-being, often during the integration process (Cartwright, 2018). Higher staff morale and more seamless integration usually follow from high degrees of cultural similarity across merging companies. Employees are more likely to feel appreciated and supported when they believe their beliefs and cultural norms are respected and included in the new organisational culture, therefore raising their job satisfaction and motivation (Weber, 2011). On the other hand, conflicts between cultures could cause a notable drop in staff morale. Variations in work ethics, leadership style, and communication style can lead to misinterpretation, strife, and employee alienation. Reduced productivity, more turnover, and more absenteeism (Marks, 2011). To mitigate the negative impact on morale, organisations should prioritise cultural integration efforts that promote inclusivity and respect for diversity. Establishing cultural training courses, encouraging honest communication, and providing forums for staff members to express their worries and experiences will help to create a harmonic and motivating workplace (Buono, 2003).

Organisational Identity & Culture in Post-Merger and Post-Acquisition Context

In post-merger and post-acquisition environments, cultural integration significantly affects organisational identity and the shared awareness of "who we are" as an organisation. Combining two different organisational cultures requires the development of a new, shared identity with components from both former companies (Albert, 1985). Creating a new organisational identity requires negotiating and balancing several cultural elements, values, and behaviours. Employees may have strong loyalties to their pre-merger identities and oppose changes that endanger these attachments, so this can be a difficult and demanding choreography (Van Knippenberg, 2002). Effective integration calls for intentional attempts to combine the finest features of both civilisations and create fresh symbols, customs, and stories supporting the new identity. Using vision and narrative to unite staff members around common values and goals, leaders significantly help to shape and convey this new identity (Gioia, 2000). The development of a strong, cohesive organisational identity can enhance employee commitment and loyalty, as it provides a clear sense of purpose and belonging.

However, if the integration process fails to effectively address identity-related issues, it can lead to identity fragmentation, confusion, and reduced organisational coherence (Schultz, 2013).

Employee-Centric Approaches to Cultural Integration

Adopting employee-centric approaches to cultural integration can significantly enhance the success of M&A. These approaches prioritise the needs, concerns, and well-being of employees, recognising that they are critical to achieving a smooth and effective integration. One effective employee-centric approach is involving employees in the cultural integration process. This can be achieved through the formation of cross-functional integration teams that include representatives from different levels and departments. These teams can provide valuable insights into cultural differences and help develop strategies to address them (Ashkenas, 1998). Providing support and resources to help employees navigate the integration process is another critical aspect of an employee-centric approach. This can include offering counselling services, career development programs, and training sessions to build new skills and competencies required in the merged organisation (Marks, 2011). Recognition and rewards programs that acknowledge employees' contributions to the integration process can also boost morale and engagement. Celebrating milestones and successes, both small and large, reinforces positive behaviours and fosters a sense of accomplishment and unity (Osborne, 2017). Furthermore, maintaining a strong focus on communication and transparency throughout the integration process is essential. Regular updates, conference meetings, and feedback sessions can help keep employees informed and involved, reducing uncertainties and building trust (Schweiger, 2013).

Understanding employee perspectives and addressing their needs is crucial for successful cultural integration in M&A. By adopting employee-centric approaches, organisations can enhance employee morale, foster a strong organisational identity, and achieve smoother and more effective integration outcomes. The insights from research and case studies underscore the importance of leadership, communication, and support in navigating the complexities of cultural integration and building a cohesive and productive organisational culture.

Research Question & Objectives

The research question for this study is: What impact do cultural integration factors in post-merger periods have on the success or failure of companies in the Irish M&A market?

Research Aim

This research aims to evaluate the adequacy of the current cultural integration framework in managing workforce diversity during post-merger periods in the Irish M&A market.

Research Objective

The author has identified the following points as the primary objectives of this study. To guarantee that the integrity of the research is maintained, these objectives have been carefully chosen. This is accomplished by precisely defining the research's scope, establishing its restrictions, providing justification for any possible exclusions and preventing misinterpretation. Additionally, the following are the research objectives:

- 1.) Critically evaluate the current integration frameworks in Irish M&A transactions, assessing their strengths and limitations.
- 2.) Identify key cultural factors influencing the success or failure of integration efforts in Irish M&A.
- 3.) Conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature and evaluate data from qualitative sources.
- 4.) Contribute to the literature on cultural integration in M&A, with a specific focus on the Irish market.

This thesis's scope includes a thorough examination of how cultural integration affects post-merger and post-acquisition procedures in the Irish setting. It entails a thorough examination of the cultural dynamics, difficulties, and techniques related to M&A integration initiatives in Irish corporations. The study will concentrate on looking at qualitative data from interviews and secondary methods in order to give a comprehensive picture of how culture affects integration outcomes. In order to guarantee a varied and representative sample, the study will cover the key contributing industries and sectors within Ireland's corporate landscape. Furthermore, the scope encompasses the investigation of cultural integration from many viewpoints, such as those of employees, managers and executives.

The study's scope is restricted to the Irish context, which may limit its generalisability to other nations or areas with distinct cultural, regulatory, and economic contexts.

Furthermore, this research depends on data gathered from interviews and secondary sources, all of which may be subject to biases or inaccuracies. Thirdly, not every potential cultural element or integration tactic significant to M&A deals in Ireland may be included in the research's purview. Finally,

due to time and resource constraints, given the regulatory nature of this topic, this study might not be able to explore the long-term impacts of cultural integration on organisational performance due to time and resource restrictions.

The format of this dissertation will mostly resemble that of conventional research articles. The significance of “reader flow” has been emphasised by the author, who has also arranged the research’s structure in order to provide the greatest coherence. The structure is shown in the outline below:

Chapter One (Introduction)	Introduction to the research, rationale, and contextualisation within the Irish corporate landscape.
Chapter Two (Literature Review)	Critical evaluation of existing literature on cultural integration in M&A, a summary of key findings, research gaps, and themes.
Chapter Three (Research Question & Aim)	Description of the research question, research aims and scope for the thesis.
Chapter Four (Methodology)	Description of the research design and methodology, focusing on qualitative approaches.
Chapter Five (Analysis & Findings)	Interpretation and analysis of findings, comparison with literature review.
Chapter Six (Conclusion & Recommendations)	Summary of findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Methodology

The methodology section outlines the various actions taken to investigate the impact of cultural integration on post-merger and post-acquisition (M&A) integration in Ireland. This research employs a qualitative approach, combining in-depth interviews with secondary data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of cultural integration processes. The methodology is structured to ensure alignment with the research aims and objectives, focusing on the Irish M&A context.

Philosophical Assumption

The philosophical basis of this analysis is aligned with an interpretive paradigm, following the outlook the reality is shaped and constructed in a social context in addition to understanding subjective occurrences (Bryman, 2016). This makes it an appropriate paradigm for specifically studying cultural integration in post-merger and acquisition (M&A) periods, as in this context, we need to become more sophisticated about the multiple ways that human practices, perceptions and interactions led by local actions shape organisational culture. Interpretivism is very different from positivistic research, where the goal is to find and describe an objective reality that we can measure or observe (Akcem, 2019). Positivism is useful when the goal of a study is to conclude general laws that can be generalised with quantitative data, but positivism limits deeper exploration into human understanding.

In contrast, interpretivism is based on the notion of an interdependent reality that has been made through shared social interaction and can be best understood by focusing on the meanings individuals have through their experiences. In the context of this study, interpretivism is a lens that will enable a deeper exploration into how stakeholders and employees throughout the Irish M&A landscape experience and perceive cultural integration during M&A processes. It focuses on the significance of interpreting meanings, and what definitions are given to certain experiences by individuals, which is vital for understanding the factors that influence the success or failure cultural integration. The interpretive approach is in accordance with the research objectives of this study to assess current cultural integration frameworks with key observable cultural variables and in understanding macroeconomic events. This approach also permits a nuanced analysis of the data, allowing for a detailed account of how cultural integration is perceived and conducted within the organisational contexts. For example, when studying leadership position roles in M&A firms, the interpretivist method allows the researcher to delve into varying leadership style techniques by capturing firsthand experiences and perceptions from leaders who have managed integration processes. This type of evaluation can provide invaluable information and insights on those strategies used by relevant organisations to determine the beneficial practices to contribute to an effective integration, while also outlining possible methods to avoid (Patton, 2014).

Interpretivists emphasise the utility of qualitative methods, e.g. in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, which are well established in uncovering rich, contextually bound data that is requisite for understanding cultural integration in M&A.

These methods enable the researcher to be deeply involved with participants in order so that their cultural experiences are adequately portrayed. In this study, a semi-structured interview method was implemented to provide an over-arching but flexible structure in which our participants could voice their cultural integration experiences. It provides the researcher with a way to explore thematic issues in more depth and detail, whilst still being sensitive to how participants express themselves as individuals, making sure that their unique experiences are included (Kvale, 2009). The use of thematic analysis works inherently with the interpretivism method, to identify the key concepts and data patterns inherent in the set of interview perspectives, thus generating contextually appropriate themes.

Reflexivity, a key aspect of interpretivist research, refers to the researcher's critical reflection on his or her own role in the potential biases and inherent biases, which may exist consciously (and perhaps unconsciously) as part of the research process. It is essential that these biases are acknowledged and corrected in order to make the research fair, rigorous and overall credible. The researcher is aware of their own preconceptions and views, while continuously working to incidents and experiences as viewed by participants.

Conclusion

The philosophical underpinning of the interpretive approach provides a solid basis to explore cultural integration in the context of M&A. Its emphasis on the individual level of subjective experiences facilitates a detailed and in-depth understanding of what affects cultural integration. Through careful consideration of reflexivity and researcher positionality, the study aims to ensure coherent and credible insights in order to contribute and build upon the existing literature in the area of cultural integration in the Irish M&A context.

Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative and exploratory. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of cultural integration in the Irish M&A context. The qualitative approach is chosen because it effectively captures detailed and nuanced insights into complex phenomena like organisational culture.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection involved two primary methods: in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were selected for the interview design of this research study, as this construct retains a primary line of inquiry but allows for additional flexibility to go in deeper on different conversation points, with an overall "loose script", accompanied by some mandatory point questions for framework consistency. The interview structure includes a set of questions related to participants' experiences with regard to aspects of cultural integration, employee perspectives, challenges and factors for success, as well as external factors. These questions acted as a guide to prompt interviewees on particular topics.

The Interview Questions were the following:

Could you briefly describe your role within the organisation?

How long have you been with the organisation?

What was your involvement in the merger/acquisition process?

Was there an assessment of cultural compatibility conducted between the merging organisations before the merger? If so, how was it conducted?

What were the most significant cultural differences between the two entities?

How did you integrate the different cultures organisationally?

What strategies were employed to integrate the different organisational cultures?

How did leadership communicate changes that were happening during the integration process?

Were there any specific communication channels or methods that were effective?

How were employee's thoughts and feedback collected and incorporated into the integration process?

How did the merger/acquisition affect employee morale and engagement?

Were any programs or initiatives launched to maintain employee morale during the integration?

What were the biggest challenges faced during the integration process?

What factors do you believe contribute to the successful integration of cultures?

Did external factors, such as COVID-19 or Brexit, affect the integration process?

Would you have any recommendations or suggestions for organisations going through a similar process?

Secondary data was collected from sources including academic journals, case studies and industry reports. This data was used to reinforce the findings from the interviews, while also adding additional context to the research.

Data Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse qualitative data collected from interviews and secondary sources. This technique comprises grouping together and interpreting patterns (thematic) in data. Thematic analysis was chosen as a flexible method for qualitative research that allows for the capture and interpretation of complex data.

For the theme analysis of this study, interviews were transcribed to retain the accuracy of the testimony. This step is important to capture the essence of responses from people interviewed. Following transcription, multiple familiarisations (re-reading transcripts at intervals of a few days or more) are performed to identify preliminary recurrent patterns and themes. The initial coding stage which essentially creating in-depth and comprehensive codes from what interview questions were asked to upcoming patterns. These initial codes summarise what the participants said and allow for targeted coding.

Relevant data was used to develop the themes in an ongoing process, iterating back and forth between constant comparisons of the data until satisfied that they accurately reflected the issues raised. Themes were derived from the data based on patterns and their interconnectedness. Through this process, themes are verified to represent the data and then explored further for cultural integration insights. Continual comparison and analysis was carried out to refine these themes so that they accurately reflected those experiences and insights provided by participants within an identified theme. Themes were interpreted by grounding them to the research questions and objectives. This last section connects the themes to the literature and theoretical frameworks, which allows a deeper understanding of results. Key Insights from the Topics: These practices are then interpreted into themes to tease out some of the underlying factors that affect cultural integration in M&A. The last step was the interpretation of the results as a narrative, which makes sense out of these

findings. This done so using exact wording from the participants in each major theme to further explore views on cultural merging during M&A.

Analysis

In the analysis section, the following steps have been followed to analyse data collected via interviews and/or secondary sources. The thematic analysis approach was implemented to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data. Transcription and familiarisation was carried out as a part of the data preparation. By transcribing the interviews, it allowed for me to be more accurate and comprehensive in the recording of people's comments, surfacing all kinds of details that would otherwise go unnoticed. During familiarisation, the transcripts are read and re-read to establish initial patterns or themes. The first round of coding involved building a vast quantity of descriptive codes with ties to the interview questions and areas of emergent patterns. The codes belong to the participants' narratives. Once the initial coding group was formed, the code was converted into higher level themes by arranging similar sets of codes into broader categories and identifying overarching theoretical concepts. Focused codes were organised into themes that represent clear and concise data around cultural integration in M&A. Refining the themes was done so through an iterative process of continually comparing the data against new analysis, ensuring that it accurately reflected the participants' experiences and insights as experienced in this framework. The themes were then interpreted to the context of the research questions and objectives in relation to current literature and theoretical perspectives. This was done so through a narrative structure which allowed the findings to be presented coherently and meaningfully, with direct quotations from participants illustrating themes that provide thick descriptions of cultural integration in M&A.

Ethics

Before conducting this research piece, participants were provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, methods, and potential impacts. This information was provided in a written consent form prior to the subsequent interviews, which participants signed before participating in the study. All participation in this study was voluntarily completed, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any time. To preserve the anonymity of participants, their identities were treated as confidential. Transcripts and the final report will have pseudonyms. Interview data and secondary sources, as well as identified cases, are kept in confidence and guarded by the researcher from access by third parties, with the exception of authorised personnel.

Limitations

This research acknowledges the following limitations that may affect generalisability and to which further, replicative work would profit. The study was conducted within the Irish M&A context and as such there may be limitations on the generalisability of findings to other areas/countries with different social, regulatory or economic challenges. This paper considers a wide range of industries within Ireland, but the results may not broadly apply to all industry sectors. Although the problems and factors of cultural integration are more diversified depending on industries. The sample size of this study is limited due to time and resources. A larger sample might provide deeper understanding about M&A related with culture integration. The study was also based on self-reported data - which can be imperfect, sometimes subject to bias or imprecision. Consumers might provide socially desirable answers, or maybe too embarrassed about their actual situation. While the qualitative method gives a wealthy and in-depth insight into this study, it may not gain full intricate cultural integration phenomena concerning M&A. Having said this, the findings would be complemented if we were to have a wider spectrum and potentially provide quite specific additional questioning. The secondary data available to the study may be limited by how accessible and accurate sources are. Some data, which may be needed for the complete analysis is not available.

Conclusion

This methodology provides a detailed qualitative method undertaken to study the effects of cultural integration on post-merger and acquisition integration in Irish organisations. The interpretive approach encouraged the use of in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis to achieve a deep understanding of participants experiences without any predetermined assumption. This approach to thematic analysis allows systematic and rigorous data interpretation together with ethical considerations, therefore enhancing the internal validity of the research process. While limited in scope, it offers a strong heuristic to map the cultural integration constraints within an M&A environment consistent with Irish experiences.

Analysis and Findings

Background

All four candidates had been involved in an acquisition process that saw their organisations acquire, or be acquired, by another entity. Each candidate presented a wealth of knowledge regarding M&A and cultural integration methods and processes, from their specific industries. One of the candidate's professional knowledge and expertise was primarily gained through the financial services industry. One of the candidate's knowledge and expertise was specifically tailored to the pharmaceutical industry. Another candidate's career experience and knowledge were solely within the shipping industry. The final candidate's knowledge and expertise were specifically regarding the airline industry. All candidates held senior organisational roles including Managing Director, Business Unit Director, Regional Operations Manager and Director of Group Operations and Safety. All candidates were a part of organisations within industries that are highly regulated, customer-centric, capital-intensive, have a focus on compliance and have operations globally. All cultural integration processes involving candidates' companies occurred in the head or primary offices throughout the Dublin region. Two candidates are currently still working with their companies. One candidate has moved to another organisation within the same industry. One candidate has recently retired.

Candidate I was recently involved in the acquisition of his company by a larger financial auditing firm. The acquisition and cultural integration process were not new to him, as his previous company had dealt in M&A activity and deals within the Irish market, but at a smaller scale dealing primarily with SMEs. During his forty-year career within the industry, he qualified as a chartered surveyor and economist. Candidate II was a part of the integration team during the acquisition process at his company after they acquired a smaller pharmaceutical company. His company's motive behind the acquisition was to expand the company's portfolio and add to the pharmaceutical manufacturing side of the business. When he first joined the company, he started out in a sales role and has since then progressed to become Business Unit Director and the head of one of the four business units. Candidate III formerly held the position of Regional Operations Manager and oversaw his previous company's acquisition and integration process for the Dublin region. After being used to the culture and customs of his previous company, he found it difficult to adjust to the acquiring organisation's business model and culture. After forty years of experience in the shipping industry, he retired during the COVID-19 period to fulfil his dream of achieving his master's degree. Candidate IV has over twenty-five years of experience in the airline industry and currently holds the position of Executive Chairman at one of the world's leading airlines. During his career, he founded a number of airline companies and was at the center of each company's M&A and cultural integration processes.

Cultural Alignment

All four candidates were involved in organisational acquisitions, from both a joining and acquiring perspective. Although each acquisition was successful, differing pre-acquisition cultural assessments were evident.

Candidate I described the acquisition and integration of his company as a transparent transition, that involved adequate processes, ensuring culture was maintained and prioritised throughout; "we would have got a very good insight into the culture of Company A and they would have got a very good insight into our culture - so these discussions and insights were all shared on the various cultural aspects of the merger". He further emphasised how having similar company values and goals helped prevent further integration challenges; "in terms of cultural integration challenges, we were very fortunate not to have any of these. I think both of us having diverse and mixed cultures before joining was a huge help and also, the fact we shared similar company values and goals made the transition in that aspect far easier".

Candidate II spoke about his experience in a similar fashion, and said an assessment of Company B was carried out beforehand; "they would thoroughly have looked at, in terms of resources, the personnel that Company B has, the kind of knowledge base within each section, and if they had a similar company mission and goals, in line with our own, to see how they can merge the two together". Research has shown that pre-merger or pre-acquisition assessments directly impact the success of cultural integration between two organisations.

Weber (2011) highlights how assessment methods, such as cultural audits, further facilitate an organisation's ability to gauge cultural alignment and compatibility.

Candidate III & Candidate IV, both candidates shared a similar experience of cultural alignment methods and leadership strategies involved in their processes. In their experience, company leaders had demonstrated an autocratic leadership approach during the early stages, where staff faced a new employee-centric integration method that gave little consideration to the acquired company's cultural values or practices. Candidate III said; "so the major contrast was that Company A cared about the individual and was very centred around clear communication and understanding of their workforce, whereas, with Company C, there was little to no personal care and nurture to develop the cultural integration between the two companies". He further commented on Company C's autocratic management style; "there was really no discussion here, it was really Company C's way or no way". The autocratic leadership style in the case of Candidate III was detrimental to any cultural integration efforts and shared a lack of consideration for the joining organisations perspective".

Lewin (1939) states that autocratic leadership involving single-minded decision-making and regimented control often has a negative effect on integration efforts and leads to staff resistance and hindrance in company unification.

When speaking about the cultural alignment effects of Company A, Candidate IV describes both airline companies as being cultural opposites, and this led to Company A's aggressive acquisition method. He further commented on how low-cost airlines customer policy closely reflects staff policy; "so, like one thing on the cultural side of you're dealing with customers. So low-cost airlines are generally pretty tough on customer standards. They generally would say "no" rather than "let's see what we can do for you". And similar to the hiring criteria for job positions if you don't fit in with their model generally they will move on without you". He further explained how the low-cost airline industry was highly competitive, and the lack of market saturation made an autocratic business culture a necessity for success. He said, "With low-cost airlines, we're carrying a million passengers a month, and it would be impossible, you know, to allow the two per cent minority of them to change the way we do business and demand that we used to think different for them because they're different. You know, it's along these lines, and the same thing applies in terms of the business model to people working within the company".

In research conducted by *Chatterjee et al. (1992)*, cultural integration strategies were shown to have varied across individual industries and organisational sizes. The result of their research revealed a common "one size fits all" approach to integration is often ineffective, as each industry possesses its own personal characteristics and trends such as market saturation, levels of competition and high barriers to entry, as shown in both these cases involving the airline and shipping industry.

Change Management

During the integration phase of each candidate's company acquisition, various change management processes were displayed in each case.

Candidate I spoke briefly about the difference in governance and management controls, and that getting his team up to speed with the new changes was made comprehensible and easy due to the on boarding initiative of Company A, "they had unbelievable business training and on boarding programs in place for taking on new employees. And these are all the time at different levels, all different levels. So you have these continuous, ongoing training and learning programmes, and these were really helpful in facilitating us". He also spoke about Company A's employee-centric integration approach, where a delegated integration team helped with the process; "we had a specific team in Company A assigned to us to ensure the integration process was as smooth as possible, and it was very structured and very much at a suitable pace for everyone".

Marks (2011) highlights how additional support mechanisms can be greatly beneficial in conducting a successful employee-centric integration, and says additional development programmes and training can help build required skills in newly acquired staff.

From an acquiring perspective, Candidate II illustrated low adequate change in management processes, such as due diligence, were carried out before the acquisition process was finalised, and this process was overseen by Company A's CEO and CFO; "well before anything, Company A would have an assigned integration team that would have carried out their mandatory due diligence, looking at staff like values, similar goals and workforce".

Witzmann (2016) describes cultural due diligence as a crucial factor in successful change management practice, that aids in uncovering potential harmful opportunities for future cultural clashes, in order to develop proactive counter strategies.

In both cases of successful change management practices experienced by Candidate I and Candidate II, the delegation of integration teams to ensure success arose as a common underlying theme.

Ashkenas (1998) states that involving employees in the cultural integration process is an effective employee-centric approach. This can be done using cross-functional integration teams consisting of members varying in seniority and department.

Change management techniques experienced by Candidate III and Candidate IV shared a continued autocratic company attitude during each organisation's integration period. Candidate II described Company C's negligence in terms of implementing sufficient change techniques and believed the acquiring company could bypass what they deemed were unnecessary measures; "it was quite an aggressive and ruthless business approach, where they obviously believed that they could still "reap the rewards" of their business without tending to their employees or putting a massive emphasis on integrating the two cultures of the different workforces". He further commented that this made things very difficult, and despite appropriate processes being used by others in the industry; "that was not the case for Company C".

Cartwright (2018) writes the impact of cultural integration on employee morale is a decisive element in successful integration, and employee job satisfaction and overall well-being are often challenged during the process as a result of organisational structure changes and differing cultural practices.

Candidate IV described the aggressive acquisition approach within the airline industry, and deemed the approach to be centered on a primarily results driven basis; "it was very quick and very brutal as you can imagine. When trying to quickly and aggressively acquire another airline, it's about getting it over the line and finalised".

He also commented that the cases presented from his experience were dictated, with little consideration for staff views or inputs; "the examples we spoke about wouldn't be good examples of cultural integration; it was more of a cultural appropriation if you like".

Steigenberger (2017) states involving employees in integration efforts and fostering a sense of control can leave a positive impression on joining staffs attitude toward the acquisition, but subsequently the latter can have a reverse effect.

In both cases of Candidate III and Candidate IV, they shared a common theme of experiencing a negative integration through an aggressive acquisition and changed management style.

Fostering Inclusion

All four candidates experienced ranging efforts by each company to establish a level of inclusiveness during their integration processes.

Candidate I confirmed on-going meetings and regular updates took place during the integration process, and were of an inclusive and accommodating nature; "you had on-going meetings and discussions with various teams in Company A, very structured, very organised, but all on a very friendly non challenging basis. To make it work, people have to feel comfortable and be able to work together in a friendly environment, that's essential". He further commented on the consideration for employees and how his staff were continuously talked through the process; "being very mindful and respectful to them".

Candidate II described the inclusive ethos behind his company's integration strategy, and said social interaction was the key. He said; "that would have been the business integration strategy, a lot of people talking, setting up committees, setting up groups in terms of integration such as social clubs and groups, and trying to find the best practices and sharing of information, that would have been a big part of it".

Ang (2008) states cultural intelligence within leadership roles of organisations allows for navigation of cultural differences, including promoting inclusiveness and integrating different cultural perspectives.

Candidate III explained how the acquiring organisation placed little to no importance on social integration initiatives in order to bring employees closer together; "they did not put emphasis on face-to-face meetings, social events, etc., even during the acquisition period with Company A".

Buono (2003) highlights how companies should place cultural integration methods such as creating platforms for employees to share their experiences and concerns, and opportunity to promote further inclusiveness and instil respect for a diverse work culture.

Candidate IV experienced a lack of integration workshops that could have added to the integration program set out by Company A; "they would have still had the likes of town hall meetings and different conferences throughout the calendar year, but integration workshops and that sort of thing would have been considerably less".

Marks (2011) speaks about the crucial factor of a unified organisational culture and suggests cultural integration workshops can enable blending the best elements of both cultures to create a new cohesive culture that supports both entities.

Communication

Communication played an integral part in each of the candidate's company integration processes. In each case, the degree of communication was influential in its own context and posed different benefits and obstacles for each candidate.

Candidate I experienced the benefits of organised communication and reiterated that continued communication took place between both entities through the entire integration process. He noted over the yearlong acquisition period, ongoing meetings of both work type and client type kept staff informed. In his experience, the most important channel for communicating is face-to-face; "I think the most important is obviously face-to-face contact and being available to talk to staff members". He also placed a large emphasis on transparency: "I think openness, fairness, and the ability and need to proceed at a certain pace so that everyone can feel comfortable with the discussions, new practices, and procedures. Transparency is any organisation's greatest tool when going through an integration process."

Candidate II spoke about the initial challenges in team communication methods as Company B had previously conducted business unit projects independently with very little communication being carried out between each team. This was an opposite method in comparison to Company A's collaborative communication; "a big difference would have been the format of the teams, how different units worked alongside each other. Company B would have had a previously independent approach in terms of projects and communication, and business units did not mingle too often. So, getting them on board with that way of thinking took some time".

Schweiger (2013) speaks about how transparency through communication is crucial in explaining the motive behind an acquisition and what changes to expect, and through this method, trust can be built.

Candidate III reminisced about the two-way dialogue between employees and company owners in his previous company and highlighted the noticeable differences that arose after being acquired by Company C.

A lack of communication and collaboration had become apparent under the new entity, in particular, scenarios this distance was apparent; "Company A had opened a central hub in Cork. I had plans of moving there, but before I could, Company C had taken over the operation, and within nine months,

they had closed Cork despite the demand from within the company. There really was a lack of transparency and communication, it was a bad start in terms of bringing people together".

When asked about how employees' thoughts and feedback were collected, Candidate IV reiterated his previous point about the lack of consideration for the employees' thoughts and opinions and quickly addressed Company A's communication system: "At Company A? No, no, definitely would be just dictated. Company A generally depends on salaries, competitive salaries. In terms of collecting feedback to be incorporated, it would be very little."

Schweiger (2013) states transparent and frequent communication helps manage employee expectations and creates a feeling of inclusivity, both important factors for integrated success.

Final Advice

Candidate I advised for organisations and professionals going through an integration, to be organised and keep good "financial records and accounts" in order to have a smooth transition period. He noted it was massively important for the success of the acquisition of his company. He also put great importance on carrying out transparency for success and said; "I would not try and put a square peg in a round hole", eluding to the need for the transition to be complimentary for both parties involved. He concluded; "the fit has to be right. People must be open, honest and fair with each other. That's absolutely crucial".

Candidate II said integration is a continual process, and for a successful integration, bringing people together and receiving feedback while integrating is key to continuing to understand new colleagues. He also pointed out that transparency is really important, especially for senior management, and that consistent communication is essential to understanding people's concerns.

Candidate III advised acquiring companies and leaders to retain joining staff and realise the talent that could possibly come with a newly acquired company. He also highlighted the importance of having the appropriate pre-acquisition processes in place to achieve cultural synergy and harmony between two newly introduced groups of individuals. In his closing comment, he encouraged open communication between leaders and employees and the establishment of an approachable level by leaders from the beginning.

Candidate IV opened his conversation about advice for professionals going through integration with a quote: "Your culture strategy at breakfast will be your culture strategy for everything."

In this quote, he eludes to the principle of preparing your designed culture from the beginning and later says, "Culture can be tricky, but if you get it right, it can be your most powerful driving force in business". He concluded on the idea that cultural integration takes time; "it's not going to begin the day

after you sign the papers. It takes years and particularly where it's a service business with a lot of people, that takes more time to achieve".

The four themes of recurring advice from all interview candidates revolved around the importance of open communication channels, transparency, having absolute processes in place and that successful integration is a continual process that takes time to perfect.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The following chapter will conclude this research by summarising the key findings in relation to the research question and aim and highlighting their value and contribution. This section will also include recommendations for future actions and research. This research study aimed to answer the question - What impact do cultural integration factors in post-merger periods have on the success or failure of companies in the Irish M&A market? The aim of this study was to evaluate the adequacy of the current cultural integration framework in managing workforce diversity during post-merger periods in the Irish M&A market.

This study's analysis of cultural integration frameworks across four prominent business industries in the Irish M&A market revealed both common aspects and significant differences in cultural integration processes and cultures. Successful integrations such as those experienced by Candidate I and Candidate II shared similar pre-acquisition processes and had adequate measures for the merger in place during this period, such as cultural assessments. Assessments such as these allowed both companies to gain a deeper and more comprehensible understanding of the joining company's values, mission, company goal, and personnel before finalising the transaction. This further underscores Datta's seminal study (1991), which outlines the importance of cultural assessments during the early stages of a transition in order for it to be successful. Contrastingly, the lack of consideration for appropriate cultural alignment methods during the integration process in the case of Candidate III and Candidate IV, created challenges between lower and senior roles, as well as a general lack of cohesion between both sets of employees. These results highlighted the importance of having adequate pre-acquisition frameworks and assessments in place such as cultural assessments, in order to achieve cultural alignment and avoid future culture clashes.

Different business models and change management styles throughout each industry had significantly different impacts on each of their companies. Although all four candidates worked in industries that were similar due to being highly regulated, highly competitive and capital intensive, the integration and organisation culture differed greatly. Candidates I and II experienced a collaborative organisational culture, that had an employee-centric approach and supported newly joined staff. These methods of change management ultimately led to successful integrations in each candidate's company.

Candidates III and IV experienced autocratic change management styles that showed negligence in consideration for new employee's thoughts and perceptions and were counter-intuitive for the purpose of cultural integration, as newly joined staff were left feeling apprehensive. A participative and supportive management and leadership style as demonstrated in the cases of Candidate I and II, was more efficient in managing transition and creating a positive environment for employees. Waldmann (2009) says leaders who can demonstrate cultural sensitivity can mitigate oncoming issues when

integrating two separate companies. Applebaum (2012) also comments on change management styles for successful integration and states inclusive change management practices can help mitigate feelings of resistance and apprehension in newly joining staff by listening to their concerns.

Communication played a vital role in the successful company integrations of Candidate I and II. Transparency was a reoccurring theme that both reiterated the importance of. They also determined the success of their company's mergers to the establishment of two-way dialogue with senior positions in the company, and employee involvement during the integration period. An insufficient amount of communication and overall lack of inclusive workshops and company initiatives resulted in a communication breakdown in Candidate III and IV cases. This ultimately led to disengagement and disillusionment in employees. These results show the importance of having adequate communication and further validates Kitchen's (2002) point, about creating feedback systems and establishing a two-way dialogue for maintaining morale and engagement during the transition process.

The study revealed that organisational integration strategies must be tailored to a specific industry or business context, in order to be successful. As each industry has its own characteristics and demands of companies, business models vary depending on that company's goal and there is not a "one size fits all" solution, e.g. when speaking to Candidate IV, he explained that it is unfeasible for low-cost airline companies to allow employee to mould their business model, in the same way other larger airlines would do so, and that small margins for profitability meant there was little time left to allocate toward an extensive cultural integration. This autocratic business style was successful in terms of the M&A deal being completed but was unsuccessful in terms of Company A retaining staff and conducting a smooth integration process. In a similar instance, Candidate III found it difficult to adapt to the new company business model due to its dictated policy and lack of communication, but ultimately the merger was a business success for the acquiring company. For Candidate I and II, the financial services and pharmaceutical industry required a collaborative and supportive business model in order to succeed in more saturated business markets. Although both industries are competitive like the shipping and airline industry, the nature of each industry's work requires differing approaches.

After conducting initial research on the Irish M&A market and cultural integration frameworks within various industries, the assumption of this researcher would have been that most corporate companies within the Irish M&A landscape would have the appropriate cultural integration frameworks to handle cultural diversity. The reality was that two of the candidate's companies recognised and used these frameworks successfully. One candidate's company recognised integration processes but opted out. Another candidate's company did not even recognise integration frameworks within their industry. This research provides insight into the cultural integration frameworks and processes that are carried by

companies within the Irish M&A landscape, and the factors that influenced the success or failures of those integrations.

It is recommended that future organisations going forward should implement comprehensive cultural assessment measures in order to guarantee a successful and fully transparent transition between two merging entities. This research has shown how adequate pre-merger processes mitigate risks of future culture clashes and employee disengagement.

A recommendation is that companies should also establish transparent, and clear channels for communication. Inclusivity and additional workshops and company initiatives can also help in maintaining good relations between newly merged groups of employees.

It is suggested that similar research is carried out with businesses in other similar industries, to gain a wider understanding of cultural integration processes and what their implications might be for other organisations. These research results would add valuable information for future research.

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