

Cultures in Organisations

Section Five

Learner Support Handbook



Contents:

Introduction

- Theory 40 Handy's Model of Organisational Culture
- Theory 41 Deal and Kennedy's Risk and Feedback Model
- Theory 42 Morgan's Organisational Metaphors
- Theory 43 Graves' Cultural Leadership Theory
- Theory 44 Schein's Three levels of Organisational Culture
- Theory 45 Johnson and Scholes' Cultural Web
- Theory 46 Hofstede's Six Cross-Organisation Dimensions
- Theory 47 Hargreaves and Balkanised Cultures

Introduction



The aim of this section is to help you identify the culture that exists in your organisation. The entries give advice on how to use the theories with your staff but their main purpose is to help you identify and understand the culture you work in. This is vital. If you are at odds with your organisation's culture you will find it a very uncomfortable environment to work in. I once worked for a chief executive who made the Emperor Caligula's decision-making processes seem well balanced and logical. It was a power culture (see Theory 40) and as he held all the power he did whatever took his fancy. I couldn't cope with such an arbitrary approach to management and as I couldn't change it, I left.

If your organisation's culture is just mildly irksome you may decide to stay. In which case, you may need to adjust your management style to suit the prevailing culture. If you don't, you'll be like the salmon swimming upstream – brave but likely to get caught out by a bloody big bear or some guy with a rod and line.

But what is organisational culture? I once asked a group of staff from a major car manufacturer that very question. Their answers ranged from 'religious beliefs' through to 'the thing that grows in the bottom of your cup if you don't wash it on a Friday night'.

I had been looking for a response along the lines of the principles, ideologies, policies and practices shared by all within an organisation. Diplomatically, I acknowledged each contribution with comments such as 'values and beliefs certainly impact on culture' and 'just like the blobby bits in your unwashed cup, culture is an organic process in which the end product can have both a harmful or healing effect'. (Personally I've never bought the idea that Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin on a piece of old bread.)

The range of responses demonstrates the complexity of the subject. There are many approaches to culture and even more definitions. Kroeber and Kluckhohn, in their review of organisational culture in the 1950s, reported 156 different definitions. And that was before the management gurus of the 1960s–90s got started. Unfortunately, there is still no consensus as to exactly what is meant by organisational culture. Don't be alarmed by this lack of consensus as just searching for a common definition helps us understand the idea of organisational culture better.

The entries in this section range from the pragmatic to the wildly metaphorical. What they have in common is that they give you different and interesting ways to analyse and think about your organisation's culture. What is it? How was it established? How is it maintained? What influence does it exert over the people in the organisation?

Although organisational cultures do vary widely from one institution to the next, similarities also exist. Most organisational cultures can be categorised as something that an organisation is (the image people have of how the organisation goes about its business) or something that an organisation has (its fundamental values and beliefs).

Read the following and use those ideas that appeal to you and which you can see yourself using in the workplace. All I ask is that you don't rely on just one or two theories. Organisational culture is multi-faceted and you need to look at it from several angles if you hope to get a clear picture of the environment you are operating in.

Good luck

Theory Forty

Handy's Model of Organisational Culture

Use Handy's organisational culture questionnaire when you want to get a quick overview of your culture and how you feel about it.

Charles Handy suggests that all organisational cultures are comprised of four different sub-cultures.

It is the precise mix/influence of these sub-cultures that produce the organisation's unique culture. The sub-cultures are:

<p>Club (or power)</p> <p>A spider's web portrays this culture. The spider is all-powerful and if they move the web shakes and everyone jumps. In club cultures power resides with one person or a small elite.</p>	<p>Role (or bureaucratic)</p> <p>A Greek temple describes this culture. Each pillar of the temple represents a key function/department. The organisation's structure is hierarchical and staff are expected to work to their job description and follow laid-down rules and procedures.</p>
<p>Task (or team)</p> <p>A net represents this culture. Teamwork is extensively used to resolve problems. On completion of the task the team is disbanded.</p>	<p>Existential (or individual)</p> <p>Stars in the firmament portray this culture. It's based on individuals whose allegiance to the organisation is overridden by their own individual needs. Barristers' chambers typify this type of culture.</p>

Although elements of all four cultures will be present in every organisation's culture it is likely that one will dominate the others.

How to Use It

- Use Handy's questionnaire from the Gods of Management (available online) to identify your organisation's culture and any mismatch between it and the type of culture you would like to work in.
- If you are happy to work in the culture then identify a successful manager within your organisation. Analyse how they behave, and model your behaviours on what they do.
- In a club culture your authority, power and credibility will depend upon your relationship with the central power source, be that an individual or group. To succeed you have to become a member of the 'in-group' (see Theory 18) and do things in a way it approves of.
- In a role culture the expert who understands the organisation's rules and procedures has tremendous power and influence. Therefore, no matter how boring it is, study the organisation's rules, regulations and procedures and know how to use them to your benefit.
- Task cultures offer young managers the opportunity to shine. Volunteer to chair any team that reports to the senior management. If you're a senior manager use the establishment of teams as a way of developing and rewarding your own staff (see Section 4).
- In every organisation there are a few people who believe that the organisation exists for their benefit. Having one or two of these eccentrics around can be useful as they often think outside the box. However, as manager you need to harness their abilities while controlling their excesses.

Questions to Ask

- What is the organisation's dominant culture?
- What are the implications of the organisation's culture for my management style?

Theory Forty One

Deal and Kennedy's Risk and Feedback Model

Use to identify the level of risk and feedback that is culturally acceptable in your organisation.

Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy suggest that the basis of organisational culture is determined by the degrees of risk and speed of feedback which govern how the organisation functions.

They identified four distinct types of culture.



- **Work hard/play hard:** This is a culture that takes few risks because of issues such as health and safety but needs quick feedback in terms of customer satisfaction.
- **Tough guy, macho:** Includes a world of individualists who regularly take high risks and get quick feedback on whether their actions are right or wrong.
- **Bet your company:** In this culture people take high-risk decisions but they may wait years before they know whether their actions actually paid off.
- **Process:** This can also be described as a bureaucratic culture. It exists where risks are low and feedback is slow.

A well-aligned culture that responds positively to risk and feedback can propel an organisation to success.

How to Use It

- List a number of decisions that your organisation has taken in the last 12 to 18 months. Analyse these into low, medium and high risk. Then consider how quickly the organisation expects to receive feedback on the success or failure of each decision. This will give you the organisation's risk feedback profile.
- Consider what level of risk you are willing to take. This requires more than just a superficial appraisal. Think of any decisions that kept you awake at night. They are a good indicator of the level of risk/uncertainty you can cope with. Accept these as your benchmark and compare them to the organisation's profile. If you are too cautious or too adventurous for the organisation you should seriously consider packing your bags, unless you can change the organisation's culture (*see Section 5, and Theories 76 and 77*) to match your power to effect change to the risk profile.
- Provided any gap identified is bridgeable don't mess around. Work out where the differences are between how you act and the behaviour expected by the organisation. Then devise an action plan to close the gaps using the SMART targets (*see Theory 88*).
- In your everyday work and dealings with staff model the behaviour expected of managers by the organisation (*see Theory 11*). If they want a task-focused, hungry young manager who is willing to take risks to get to the top, you have no choice but to give it to them. After all that's what you signed up for.

Questions to Ask

- What types of behaviour gets rewarded in my organisation?
- Am I comfortable with the level of risk that managers are expected to take?
- Is it too high or low for me?

Theory Forty Two

Morgan's Organisational Metaphors

Use this to identify how you and your staff feel about the organisation's culture.

Morgan suggests that organisational cultures can be represented as a series of metaphors.

Morgan's Eight Cultural Metaphors are:

1. **Machine:** Based upon efficient, standardised and controlled procedures with each unit operating like a cog in a wheel.
2. **Organism:** A living system with a life cycle of birth, maturity, death – a matter of survival of the fittest.
3. **Brains:** A learning environment involved with information processing with an emphasis on knowledge, intelligence and feedback.
4. **Values:** A value-based organisation with an emphasis on tradition, beliefs, history and a shared vision.
5. **Political systems:** A culture built on preservation of interests and rights with hidden agendas and alliances.
6. **Psychic prisons:** Represents the culture in terms of conscious and unconscious feelings of repression and regression.
7. **Flux and transformation:** Sees the culture as a whirlpool of change; sometimes beneficial but sometimes chaotic and paradoxical.
8. **Instruments of domination:** Represents a culture that is underpinned by aggression, compliance, exploitation and the imposition of values.

Morgan argues that metaphors create windows into the soul of the organisation and allow us to see, understand and imagine the organisation in different ways.

How to Use It

- Use Morgan's insights as a starting point for creating your own metaphors. Give staff a sheet of flip-chart paper and ask them to draw a picture of the organisation's culture. Emphasise that you want a picture not an organisation chart.
- In all likelihood you'll get a selection of trees, watering cans, computers, maybe the odd castle under siege. Some of the more interesting ones may include scenes from an inter-galactic war or a teddy bear with fangs and claws (yes, I've had these). Such pictures provide a great insight into how staff perceive the organisation.
- Ask each person what their picture means. Listen to what they say. Identify where the problems lie; for example, the watering can might have a hole in it or maybe a blockage in the spout which prevents the water reaching its intended target. Deal with the issues in the metaphor first and then return to the real world and deal with the real issue. In this case it might mean that important information isn't reaching staff.
- If you're uncomfortable with ambiguity and emotion, metaphors may not be for you. If you are willing to risk it, try it out in a safe environment and see what staff come up with. I bet it will throw up many valuable insights into how they feel about the organisation.

Questions to Ask

- Do I believe that everyone in my team shares the same image of the organisation as I do?
- What are the implications of my answer for how I treat staff?

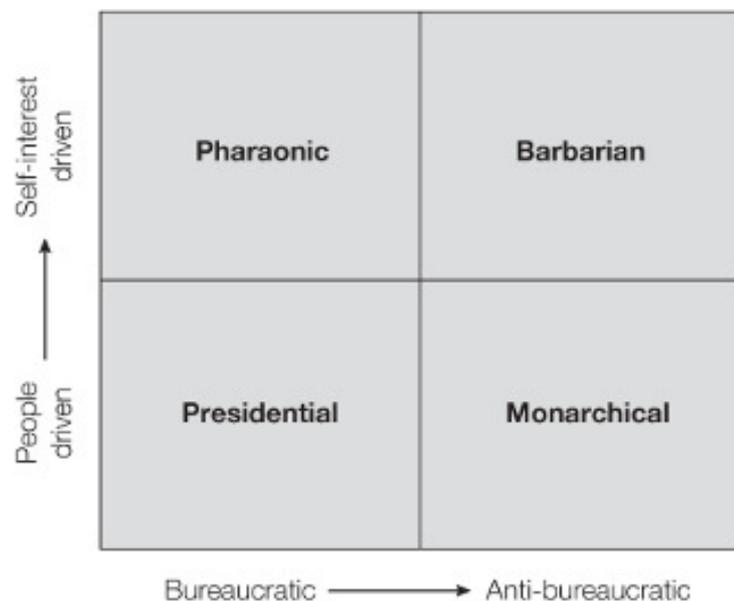
Theory Forty Three

Grave's Cultural Leadership Theory

Use this to identify the dominant culture in your organisation.

Desmond Graves argues that organisational culture can be understood by looking at the character of the people who run the organisation.

He identifies four possible cultures:



- **Pharaonic cultures** are dominated by individuals. They are bureaucratic and ego-driven. Cultural leadership is maintained through a passionate respect for status, rituals and order.
- **Barbarian cultures** are dominated by a sense of foreboding. They are ego-driven and anti-bureaucratic. Cultural leadership is maintained through a mixture of uncertainty, terror and charm.
- **Presidential cultures** are bureaucratic and concerned with democracy, status and coordination. Cultural leadership is maintained through consideration of needs and aspirations of the people.
- **Monarchical cultures** are anti-bureaucratic and dominated by a belief in the absolute authority of the leader. Cultural leadership is maintained through the unquestionable loyalty of followers. In offering these stereotypes, Graves suggests that symbolic leadership is one way of encouraging people that they are working for something worthwhile.

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How to Use It

- As with the discussions on Handy (*see Theory 40*) and Deal and Kennedy (*see Theory 41*) you'll have to identify the culture that is dominant in your organisation and decide if you are happy to remain working there. Use personal reflections to do this.
- Use both personality tests and job interviews to recruit people who can prosper in your organisation's culture.
- If your team or organisation is new, it may have assumed the characteristic of a barbarian culture; one which leans towards a dog-eat-dog approach. This culture is more suited to winning business rather than retaining it. Sooner or later, you will need to modify the culture in order to create stability and structure.
- A Pharaonic culture might favour creativity and imagination but not the emancipation of its workforce. It is one where position and following the correct procedures is likely to be valued. In times of rapid change you will need to adopt a new approach.
- Presidential cultures are less ego-driven than the Barbarian and Pharaonic cultures but status, cooperation and a desire to take into account the needs of the staff can make it slow-moving and cumbersome. In a time of crisis you will have to adopt a more directive approach.
- Monarchical cultures are epitomised by loyalty to the ruler. In many organisations this is the founder. But as the organisation grows it will become impossible for one person to run the show and they will have to share power with others.

Questions to Ask

- Does the existing culture serve the needs of the organisation?
- If the culture is inappropriate what changes can I make?

Theory Forty Four

Schein's Three levels of Organisational Culture

Use to understand the role that values and beliefs play in your organisation.

Edgar Schein is generally seen as the foremost thinker on organisational cultures. He claims that the organisational culture is determined by a set of basic beliefs that the organisation has about itself.

These beliefs, consciously or subconsciously, define what the organisation is and how it copes with the problems of external competition and internal integration. He argues that the organisation's culture grows out of the legacy of others.



- **Surface manifestations:** These are the artefacts, rituals, myths and legends that send out a message to all concerned about what makes the organisation tick.
- **Espoused values:** These provide a common direction for all employees and a guideline for what is acceptable behaviour.
- **Basic assumptions:** These are the invisible, subconscious and often taken-for-granted understandings held by all employees about the organisation.

Schein's theory suggests that organisations are socially constructed realities that are as much in the minds of staff as they are in the organisation's concrete structures and rules.

Therefore to understand the organisation's culture you must understand how the staff see the organisation.

How to Use It

- In order to understand your organisation's culture you have to play detective and seek out a range of cultural clues.
- To identify the surface manifestations ask yourself questions such as:
 - Are workplaces neat and tidy?
 - Do people work in an informal open plan office and wander around talking to each other or do they work in their own offices behind closed doors and communicate through emails?
 - Are meetings lively with animated debates on new ideas or do they follow a strict agenda devised and delivered by those in authority?
- To identify the organisation's espoused values and basic assumptions, which are buried in people's minds, you will need to talk with them. Workshops are great for this but you need to guarantee confidentiality so that people will feel safe from possible recrimination if they express views that might be unpopular with those in authority. One-to-one interviews may be more suitable provided staff don't feel intimidated by you. You might even think about using a focus group.
- Once you have collected your data analyse it and use your findings to describe and understand the organisation's culture and identify acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and approaches to management and leadership.

Questions to Ask

- What data do I need to collect to make a judgement about the organisation's culture?
- What am I going to do with the information produced?

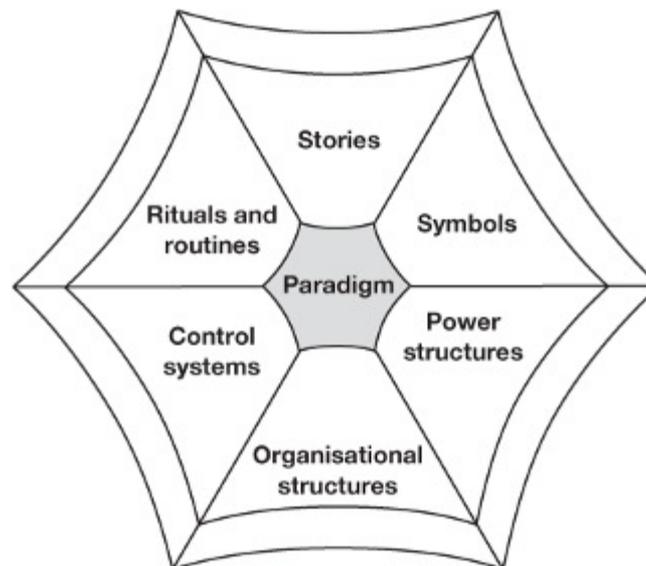
Theory Forty Five

Johnson and Schole's Cultural Web

Use this to understand what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate behaviour within your organisation.

Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes' cultural web model depicts the culture of an organisation using seven interlinked elements.

These elements form a set of behaviours that identify what are considered appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in the organisation.



- **The paradigm** is the set of assumptions about the organisation which are taken for granted and shared by everyone.
- **Rituals and routines** describe 'how we do things around here' and how members of the organisation behave towards each other.
- **Stories** are told by members of the organisation to each other, to outsiders, to new recruits etc., and embed the present in the organisation's history.
- **Symbols** are things such as logos, jargon and image that have become a shorthand representation describing the nature of the organisation.
- **Power structures** relates to the real movers and shakers in the organisation. They may be specific individuals, small groups or departments.

- **Control systems** include performance management and reward systems that emphasise what is important in the organisation and focus attention on specific activities.
- **Structures (Organisational and Power)** relate to management hierarchies, reporting systems and decision-making processes.

How to Use It

- Use the questions below to review each element of the organisation's cultural web and identify any changes required (*see Section 6*).
- What cultural paradigm does the organisation operate in? How much of the organisation's culture is linked to the past? How uniform is it? How long has it been like this? Do I and other managers in the organisation attempt to align the organisation's strategy and culture? Or does the organisational culture 'dictate' strategy rather than management?
- What rituals do I and others unconsciously follow? What aspects of the way I operate do I take for granted? Do I, or my colleagues, need to change the way we operate?
- What stories or messages does the organisation tell staff, customers and suppliers? What impression do they create? Ratners, the most successful jeweller in Britain at the time, collapsed overnight when the chairman Gerald Ratner was filmed saying that the reason he could sell a 'gold' necklace for £3.99 was because it was crap. He meant it as a joke but it revealed what the organisation thought of its customers.
- What messages do the organisation's symbols such as logos, publicity material, website and press releases give out about the organisation?
- How do the power bases within the organisation impact on my capacity to function effectively? (*See Theories 55 and 77.*)
- Use the above information when dealing with staff, colleagues and senior management to answer their questions in culturally acceptable terms. You will also know when, where and how to lob a cultural hand grenade into the mix when it's required and is to your benefit.

➤ Questions to Ask

- What are the great unwritten rules of my organisation?
- In whose interest is it to maintain the current organisational culture?

Theory Forty Six

Hostede's Six Cross-Organisational Dimensions

Use this as a checklist when you are engaged in changing organisational culture.

Geert Hofstede suggests that there are six dimensions which can be used to describe the organisation's culture.

He poses these as a series of opposites and asks the user to plot where their organisation is on each of the six continuums.

Hofstede's Six Dimensions Are:

- **Process vs result:** Process-oriented cultures are low risk and low effort. Results-oriented cultures welcome change and challenge and are high effort.
- **Person vs job:** A person-driven culture places employee welfare at the heart of the organisation. A job-driven culture emphasises completion of tasks over regard for the staff.
- **Parochial vs professional:** Staff working in a parochial culture display the same characteristics at work as they do at home. Those in a professional culture differentiate how they act at home and work.
- **Open systems vs closed systems:** Open cultures welcome newcomers and outsiders. New people joining closed cultures struggle to gain acceptance.
- **Loose vs tight control:** In a loose control culture, working practices are flexible and things such as dress codes and timekeeping are relaxed. Tight control cultures allow very little leeway on issues such as working place practices and behaviour.
- **Normative vs pragmatic:** In a normative culture there is strict adherence to rules, regulations and procedures. A pragmatic culture allows flexibility in following procedures if it means customer needs can be met.

How to Use It

- If you decide to move from a process-driven to a results-driven culture, don't overwhelm people with too many challenges. If your change is in the opposite direction ensure that high performers don't get bored by a lack of challenge.
- Sensitivity may be required if employees, who have been used to an employee-oriented culture, are asked to be more job-focused. But don't molly-coddle those moving in the opposite direction as they may find such treatment uncomfortable.
- Some people with well-organised home lives may bring those disciplines to work. Their parochial way of doing things might be better than what you've got and forcing a professional approach on them may be counter-productive.
- Look out for the people used to working in a closed system culture. In extreme circumstances, they may think that they are the 'chosen ones'. They will be suspicious of people moving into their domain and if they are moving into an open culture they may be overwhelmed and a bit suspicious of the welcoming nature of their new colleagues.
- People used to informality in dress code and general behaviour may find it difficult to accept a more formal environment. The same is true of those moving in the opposite direction. Give both groups time to adjust.
- People moving from a pragmatic to a normative culture and vice versa will need to come to terms with the differences in expectations regarding following rules and procedures. Make it absolutely clear what these are and what's expected of staff.

Questions to Ask

- Why do I want to change the organisation's culture?
- What are the benefits of changing the culture?

Theory Forty Seven

Hargreaves and Balkanised Cultures

Use when you want to motivate staff and strengthen the team spirit

Hargreaves, writing in the context of education, noticed that while a school or college would have a single over-riding culture many individual departments had very distinct cultures.

For example, the culture in Arts and Humanities was very different to that which existed in Science or Engineering faculties. He likened this to the Balkans where, to an outsider, there can appear to be a fairly uniform culture shared by numerous states but when examined closely each state has a very distinct culture

The five Key features of Balkanised Cultures are:

- Each division, department or team (sub-group) sees itself as a separate entity from the rest of the organisation.
- Over time each sub-group develops its own unique culture.
- There is 'low permeability' between the cultures of different groups. With each group erecting walls to keep out the influences of others.
- Once these barriers have been erected it's difficult to breach or remove them.
- Over time people become attached to the identity of their sub-group and develop a set of self-interests that they actively promote even when they conflict with the good of the whole organisation.

Although focused on education, the model is clearly applicable to any large-scale organisation. For instance, just look at the very different cultures that exist within the accounts and sales departments of any organisation

How to Use It

- Use this as a theory to strengthen the team spirit within your group. Start by talking up the differences between you and other sub-groups in the organisation. Differentiate your team from the rest of the herd and encourage the development of traditions and practices that are unique to your team.
- Encourage your team to think of themselves as different, even special. Make your people feel proud to belong to the best team in the organisation and promote the idea that only the best get into your gang.
- Remember, everyone likes a bit of competition. Establish a friendly rivalry with other groups in the organisation and celebrate when you 'beat' them – even if the other group didn't know they were in a contest.
- While you want your team to think of themselves as special, they must understand that it's no good if they win but the organisation loses. Their ultimate loyalty has to be to the organisation. Don't fall into the trap of sub-optimisation.
- Think about Balkanised cultures whenever you move jobs within your organisation. Take time to discover your new team's culture. Only when you understand it and have evaluated its strengths and weaknesses should you consider changing or destroying it.
- The quickest and easiest way to upset your new staff is to say something like 'When I was at the Wolves we did it this way.' Automatically staff will think 'If it was so bloody great at Wolverhampton why didn't you stay there?'

Questions to Ask

- What Balkanised cultures exist within the organisation?
- How can I use the idea of Balkanised cultures to improve my team's results?