

Cultural Web – Questions and Types of Culture

In another article, I introduced the [cultural web](#), and suggested that I would review some useful questions which can be asked for each ‘circle’. I will then review four basic culture types.

As a reminder, here is the cultural web, as introduced last week:



Useful Questions: the cultural web

Here are some useful questions to ask when using the cultural web:

Stories:

- What core beliefs do stories reflect?
- How pervasive are these beliefs (through levels)?
- Do stories relate to:
 - strengths or weaknesses?
 - Successes or failures?
 - Conformity or mavericks?
- Who are the heroes and villains?



- What norms do the mavericks deviate from?

Symbols:

- Are there particular symbols which denote the organisation?
- What status symbols are there?
- What language and jargon are used?
- What aspects of strategy are highlighted in publicity?

Power structures:

- How is power distributed in the organisation?
- What are the core beliefs of the leadership?
- How strongly held are these beliefs (idealists or pragmatists)?
- Where are the main blockages to change?

Organisational structures:

- How mechanistic/organic are the structures?
- How flat/hierarchical are the structures?
- How formal/informal are the structures?
- Do structures encourage collaboration or competition?
- What types of power structure do they support?

Control systems:

- What is most closely controlled/monitored?
- Is emphasis on reward or punishment?
- Are controls related to history or current strategies?
- Are there many/few controls?

Routines and rituals:

- Which routines are emphasised?



- Which would look odd if changed?
- What behaviour do routines encourage?
- What are the key rituals?
- What core beliefs do they reflect?
- What do training programmes emphasise?
- How easy are rituals/routines to change?

Overall:

- What do the answers to these questions suggest are the (four) fundamental assumptions that are the paradigm?
- How would you characterise the dominant culture?
- How easy is this to change?

4 Different Culture Types

There are four main culture types:

1. The power culture – the organisation revolves around, and is dominated by one individual or small group. Strategic change is likely to be fast or slow depending on the management style of the leader;
2. The role culture – this organisation relies on committees, structures, logic and analysis. There is a small group of senior managers who make the final decisions, but they rely on procedures, systems and clearly defined rules of communication. Strategic change is likely to be slow and methodical.
3. The task culture – the organisation is geared to tackling identified projects or tasks. Work is undertaken in teams that are flexible and tackle identified issues. The teams are likely to be multi-disciplinary and adaptable to each situation. Strategic change will depend upon the circumstances but may be fast where this is needed.
4. The personal culture – the individual works and exists purely for him/herself. The organisation is tolerated as the way to structure and order the environment for certain



useful purposes, but the prime area of interest is the individual. Strategic change can be instant, where the individual decides that it is in his/her interest to make such a move.

Three important qualifications

In examining the four main types of organisational culture, there are three important qualifications:

1. Organisations change over time. Therefore, an analysis may need to be reassessed after some years;
2. Several types of culture usually exist in the same organisation. It may even be necessary to determine whether different types of culture are appropriate for different parts of the organisation;
3. Different cultures may predominate, depending upon the headquarters and ownership of the company.

This article takes the analysis of an organisation using the cultural web a stage further by outlining some useful questions which can be asked for each of the 'circles'. It concludes with an outline of four different types of culture that might exist.