

CULTURE MATTERS
**Maximising People Contribution through
Collective Behaviour**





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Design and layout: TimelessTime Ltd

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Synopsis

The culture that exists within a firm will in the long run make or break it. Whatever someone does in a particular situation is conditioned by the culture in which they exist and with which they become familiar. An employee is expected each day to do things needed by management, to carry out duties and to generally follow what it says in their job description. Everything the employee does is conditioned by culture.

The effects of culture are felt throughout everyday life. Our families impress culture on us. Our upbringing and ethnicity bring a cultural pressure. Our work and work organisations have a particular culture and during our work hours we exist in that culture. And we experience culture in our social life in the clubs and societies in which we spend leisure hours. Culture is therefore important – particularly when we experience culture conflict. Culture conflict is when our natural desires and innate actions are at odds with the prevailing culture in which we find ourselves. Culture conflict stops us acting in a natural and intuitive way, negatively influencing our performance.

This paper analyses culture. It first discusses culture as a concept. It looks at what part culture plays in our working life and how it affects the firm. It researches current thinking on culture. And finally it looks at how one might measure and where necessary change culture in a firm. The aim is to provide practicing managers with a tool: something theoretically sound and something practical.



Introduction

What is culture and why does it matter to managers anyway? How is it experienced and how then does it influence behaviour? There are simply so many questions making it difficult to know where to start. This introduction sets out to give the reader an idea of what culture is and why it is so important to the principals and managers of a firm.

Why does culture matter?

Ulsworth and Clegg¹ in a recent paper in the Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology discussed why employees take creative or innovative action. They noted that there were six attributes that if present encourage or sponsor employees to act beyond the basic expectation laid out in their job description; six things that would cause the employee to add value to the employer's business beyond the basics. Each of the six has cultural dimensions: motivation, requirement, cultural support, responsibility, autonomy and time resources. Of course one of the six, cultural support, centres on culture and describes the climate or environment that needs to be in place for creativity. If some are missing, and specifically if the culture is wrong, there will be no added value.

Consider this. Every firm needs employees to go beyond the basics. Electricians are expected to be innovative in getting work done expediently. Plumbers are expected to be creative in winning follow-on work from clients. And lawyers are expected to be creative in running seminars to inform clients in the hope that they will feel motivated to use the law firm for their next law piece. Firms need the right culture to exist for employees to contribute to action from retaining the status quo to driving the business forward.

Defining Culture

Trawling the web yields nine definitions², each useful in setting the scene for further discussion.

1. Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.
2. Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people.
3. Culture is communication, communication is culture.

¹ Ulsworth KL & Clegg CJ (2010), *Why employees undertake creative action?*, Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, pp77-99, Volume 83, Part 1, March 2010, The British Psychological Society.

² Culture: Some Definitions; <http://www.tamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html> accessed on 30 July 2010.



4. Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behaviour; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behaviour through social learning.
5. A culture is a way of life of a group of people - the behaviours, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
6. Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions.
7. Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action.
8. Culture is the sum of total of the learned behaviour of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation.
9. Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.



Culture exists wherever there is a group of people. Different cultural groups think, feel, and act differently. Each person in the group is able to sense the culture of the moment.

The way we do things around here

Consider also the story of the five monkeys³. Food is placed high in the monkeys' cage. Every time they attempt to climb for it they all get sprayed with cold water, wherever in cage they are. Eventually they stop trying. Any one monkey who tries is beaten by its fellow monkeys. None of them likes a cold soaking. Then one by one the monkeys are replaced with new monkeys who have not experienced the soaking. Those original monkeys still in the cage prevent the new monkeys from climbing for the food. And even when they have all been replaced, when no original monkeys are in the cage and when none has been soaked, they still prevent one another from climbing. Why? "Because it's the way we do things round here." People function in the same way. So often, employees do things in a particular way because the culture 'tells them' that's the way it's done. And to transgress would be to risk a 'beating' even though no-one can quite remember why.

³ Author unknown. Accessed July 2010 -
http://www.highprobsell.com/html/sales_management.html



And for the individual in the culture bubble?

At the individual level we need to be aware that culture is developed through upbringing, education, community and experience. This means that people in one firm will behave in a unique and common way distinct to that firm. People in the same professions tend also to have similar cultural traits brought about through common education. And within firms, one group will behave in a different fashion than others given the same stimulus. Outside cultures come through the door at the start of the working day from such groups as the family and ethnic community current and past. The individual exists in the group culture and contributes to create the group culture.

Tacit knowledge of the prevailing culture type helps the individual to cope, adjust and excel in the environment. Knowledge helps managers get the best out of the people by manipulating the culture to tend to favour particular behaviours that he or she wants in pursuit of corporate goals.

Finally, the individual can assimilate culture, both deliberately and sub-consciously. The Jews from Europe on arrival in the UK in the late part of the nineteenth century onwards did this. They went to Christian schools, quickly became fluent in English and entered 'normal' British life⁴. And yet they kept their own 'Jewishness' alive and well in the family and continued the traditions of generations at home, living a dual life and a complex culture that adjusted depending on which group they were with. In the same way though, culture can be rejected both deliberately and sub-consciously. Assimilating culture (assuming it is a culture contributing to the economy of the firm) might be thought of as positive. Rejecting a firm's culture is deeply unhelpful and as with the Jews, employees can live a dual life apparently assimilating but still rejecting. Culture is truly a complex phenomenon and one that managers need to be sensitive to in order to get the best out of a workforce.

Culture and the leader's style

Culture is a complex construction of behaviours that in some way become common and adopted by the work group. Each individual lives (during the working day) in that culture and contributes to the creation of that culture. One key individual in creating the culture is the leader: the principal of the firm or the managing director. He or she is however not the only one building the culture. The firm's managers and supervisors work in the environment and contribute to the culture. But is it possible to divide the firm into 'us' and 'them', managers and workers, when it comes to describing culture? To what extent is leadership style entwined with and replacing culture?

In today's firms, flat structures are popular. Employees are not supervised minute by minute. As noted above, everyone contributes to culture. Culture is generated both deliberately (by engaging in culture reinforcing and culture creating activities) and sub-consciously. The leaders' styles are contributory to the culture but don't completely replace it. When we describe a firm's

⁴ Sacks, J (2007), *The Home We build Together*, pp27-30, Continuum, London.



culture as ‘progressive’ we are describing both the leadership and the response to that leadership from the employees. Culture is this action and reaction and a whole load more besides, collectively expressed as a series of group behaviours, beliefs and traditions.

And now to detail

By now you’ll have the impression that culture is important but perhaps not what it is and how to deal with it as a manager. The rest of this paper discusses firstly how one senses and measures culture. At this stage the reader is introduced to four of the most useful models for describing culture and determining the likely characteristics of culture. The section following addresses some typical cultures found in today’s firms. It looks at some of the influences that management has on culture and indeed how wider influences play such as the economy and the pressures of globalised business. The paper then moves on to say what we might want as a ‘just’ or right culture in the firm and looks at tools that might be used to describe that culture and how it might be achieved. Finally the paper concludes with an explanation of how managers might effect change in culture by setting culture goals and putting in place a roadmap for change.

The aim of the paper is twofold: to precisely define culture in today’s firm (providing suitable academic rigour and references) and to give managers a working paper to help them understand and effect culture change.

Levels of culture and its management

Culture is like an onion. Consider a nation-state. Peel off a layer or look one level below and one finds several nations, each with a definable culture. In each nation there are many peoples. In each people there are groups and



families. At each level the collective groups interact and when they come together they form a culture. As an example, somewhere in the depths of the onion is a collective group of engineers. They belong to several different groups but come together in their profession. Engineers tend to be introvert, thinking people.

They are also quite judgemental, jumping to conclusions quickly on little evidence. As a collective group they have similar beliefs, behaviours and traditions that come about through common education and style of work. This culture creates a set of interactions with other groups, conditioned by the engineers’ culture.

In this example, if a single engineer finds themselves working in a group of accountants, their innate culture will be suppressed or modified but in some way he or she will also affect the innate culture of the accountants to create a distinct culture of this group when it assembles.

Culture can be thought of to exist at:



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- The national level: Associated with the nation as a whole;
 - At the regional level: Associated with ethnic, linguistic or religious differences that exist within a nation;
 - At the gender level: Associated with gender differences (female vs. male);
 - At the generation level: Associated with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children;
 - At the social class level: Associated with educational opportunities and differences in occupation;
 - At the corporate level: Associated with the particular culture of an organization. Applicable to those who are employed.

Culture is like an onion – or more, it's a series of intersecting onions, intersecting at every level. The discrete culture at any one point in space (describing the culture in a single firm) is a complex construction of the various contributory cultures. The degree to which any one culture prevails depends on its strength and the receptiveness of those sensing and assimilating it.

The effective culture manager

So far we've suggested that culture can be described and later in this paper we see how. We've suggested that it can be manipulated within the firm to effect change. So what does a manager need to succeed considering that he manages in a culture and by his existence and style modifies the prevailing culture?

To succeed in managing culture, a manager needs three things. The first is knowledge of culture, of how it manifests and the beliefs, behaviours and traditions that can possibly exist. The manager needs a model for building and expressing their understanding.

The second essential is a mindfulness of culture and an ability to 'tune in' to their surroundings and the firm. This starts with the basic acknowledgement that there is such a thing as culture, that culture in the firm is unique and that it is built from many parts. Sensing can be learned so long as the manager is open to learning.

Finally the manager needs a basket of behaviour or leadership skills and the ability to choose an appropriate behaviour to suit the culture in hand and the culture change desired.

Measuring culture

In the introduction we established that culture affects the way people act. It follows therefore that culture is a major influence on individual and group motivation. Motivation can be thought of as the output of a culture system. We can say something about the culture system by observing this output. We can say something about the prevailing culture by looking at its effects;



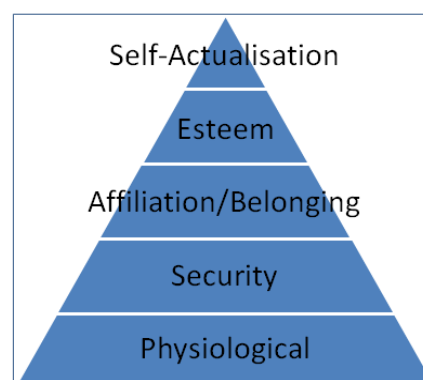
effectively saying “this culture causes people to...”. Put another way, we can say that people from a given culture typically exhibit a particular behaviour. Again we are describing how the cultural system works by observing its output or the result of its action. We do this using models or ways of looking at complex culture, behaviour and motivation. There are four popular models: those after Maslow, Hofstede, Myers-Briggs and Hertzberg. This section looks at the role of each in defining culture either directly or indirectly by describing resultant actions.

The idea of a model

A model is a way of looking at an issue. Models are typically used for describing systems comprising input(s), activity and output(s). Models allow issues to be explored by varying the input or activity and experiencing a change in output. In this case we view the output and speculate about the inputs and activity in order to explore the culture system.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow described a five-level hierarchy that all humans exist on, moving between levels as our environment changes. At the lowest level there are the most basic physiological needs: breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion. If we don’t have these we die. We really can’t expect an employee to contribute in any way if these are an issue for them. Then there’s security of body, employment, resources, morality, the family, health, property. If the culture in which the employee exists reduces the security of any of these aspects, their motivation will suffer. If there is a weakened employment security, this threatens all the other attributes such as health and the family and hence the employee will be motivated to take such action as might be necessary and available to him or her to improve that security.



Next come affiliation, friendship, family and belonging. People go to work as much as anything for friendship. If this is missing (perhaps because the employees are in a culture in which interaction with colleagues is frowned on), motivation and hence productivity will suffer. As we get to the upper levels we progressively move to the most desirable motivational levels.

Next there are self esteem, confidence, achievement, respect for others and respect by others. Here we hope that managers can design jobs to give a sense of achievement.

At the very top of the pyramid is so-called ‘self-actualisation’: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice and acceptance of facts. These are for most managers the most desirable traits in an employee. Managers want problem solving. They want spontaneity and creativity. The



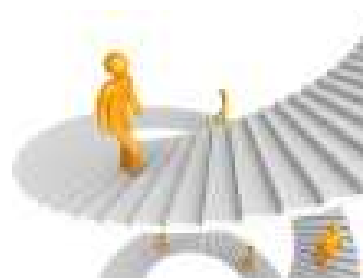
basic concept of Maslow's hierarchy is that if the lower level needs are not satisfied, the upper behaviours cannot be expressed and satisfied⁵. This model shows the manager that he or she needs to be attuned to where on the hierarchy his firm is currently. He or she needs to be aware of how the firm helps satisfy employees' needs and hence how this affects employee motivation to strive on the firm's behalf. If the manager wants spontaneity, then they'd better ensure that the firm's culture fosters self esteem and the lower level needs first.

Hofstede

The Hofstede model⁶ is often used to describe behaviours, beliefs and traditions in nations and peoples. An example is that we might describe Americans as very masculine in that they are very assertive. We likewise might describe Chinese people as not liking to act alone (since they come from a very 'collective' culture). The model can be extended to the level of the firm and has some very useful ideas for expressing action in the firm such as decision making.

In the Hofstede model there are five indices: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and orientation. These are described below applied to the firm.

Power Distance Index (PDI) is the extent to which the less powerful members of firm accept and expect that power is distributed unequally, particularly from principal to shop floor worker. This represents inequality, but viewed from below, not from above. It suggests that a firm's level of inequality is endorsed and legitimised by the employees as much as by the managers.



Individualism (IDV) has as its opposite, collectivism. Collectivism is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find firms in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate team. On the collectivist side, we find firms in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, from which they gain protection in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Masculinity (MAS) versus its opposite, femininity refers to the degree to which employees exhibit masculine behaviour. Masculine behaviour is often aggressive and assertive whilst feminine behaviour is nurturing. In a masculine environment, problems are solved by argument with some employees exhibiting dominance. Note that a firm with mostly female staff can still be a pretty masculine environment using this definition.

⁵ For further information and the diagram used here see http://www.bschoolvoyage.com/2010_02_01_archive.html accessed on 30 July 2010.

⁶ For further information see <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/> accessed on 30 July 2010.



Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) deals with a employee group's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to man's search for truth. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations.

Long-Term Orientation (LTO) versus short-term orientation: this can be said to deal with virtue regardless of truth. Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance, perhaps signalling 'in it for the long haul'. Values associated with Short Term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face' perhaps suggesting 'just get on with it, forget tomorrow'.

The simplest way to apply the Hofstede model is to describe the firm using terms such as 'tends to' or 'tends strongly to' and to then look at whether this is the culture that management want or need for the future of the firm.

Myers Briggs

Myers-Briggs is a personal style inventory⁷. It is a means of describing how a person normally likes to behave or would behave unless some influence prevents it. It's used in understanding motivation but it also tells how a type of person (existing in a particular culture) would be expected to act. Using the example of the engineer, normally engineers are judgemental; hence a firm of engineers would collectively be highly judgmental when making decisions day by day and that may be highly undesirable in a given strategy. Myers-Briggs tells how employees view their firm and make decisions in that firm.

Like the Hofstede model, Myers-Briggs uses a set of indices.

Favourite world: Do you prefer to focus on the outer world or on your own inner world? This is called Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I).

Information: Do you prefer to focus on the basic information you take in or do you prefer to interpret and add meaning? This is called Sensing (S) or Intuition (N).

Decisions: When making decisions, do you prefer to first look at logic and consistency or first look at the people and social circumstances? This is called Thinking (T) or Feeling (F).

Structure: In dealing with the outside world, do you prefer to get things decided or do you prefer to stay open to new information and options? This is called Judging (J) or Perceiving (P).

People tend to exhibit preference for one side of the pair than the other.

⁷ For further information on the Myers-Briggs Personality Type inventory see <http://www.myersbriggs.org/> accessed on 30 July 2010.

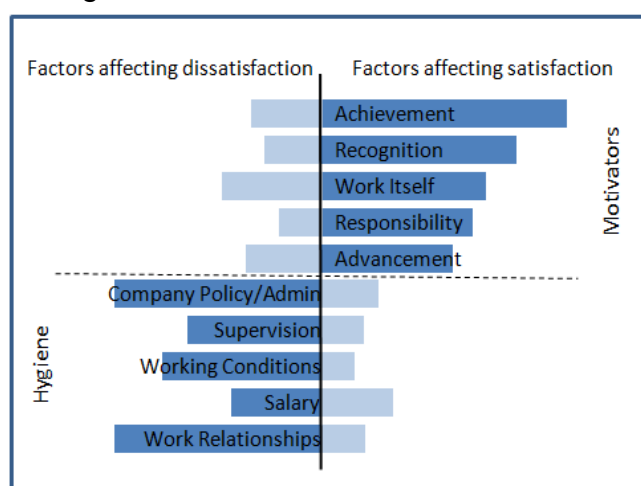


Extraverts are action-oriented, while introverts are thought-oriented. Individuals who prefer sensing are more likely to trust information that is in the present, tangible and concrete. Thinking and feeling are the decision-making functions. Those who prefer thinking tend to decide things from a more detached standpoint. Types with a preference for judgment need a conclusion whereas those perceiving prefer discussion.

Whilst Myers-Briggs is not a device for identifying features of a culture, it does illustrate the preferred action of people in the culture. It is therefore a valid descriptor for the output of the culture and hence, when experienced, says a lot about the prevailing culture that produced the particular behaviour or preference.

Hertzberg

Hertzberg described a number of motivators. If these are present, employees tended to work more diligently. He also identified a number of 'hygiene factors' which, if absent, tended to de-motivate but if present in abundance did nothing additional to motivate.



Some of the motivators include advancement, responsibility, the nature of the work, recognition and achievement. Some of the hygiene factors include (absurd) company policy and administration, (lack of) respect for supervision, (poor) interpersonal relations and (insufficient) salary.

Whilst not structured in a form that management can measure using indices, the model does help to explain why staff take certain collective actions and hold particular beliefs⁸. If the firm pays at the lower end of the pay scale for the job, this may explain poor motivation. No amount of recognition can balance this poor pay and hence the culture can be described in this case by the inputs to the culture system. A conclusion may be drawn perhaps linking factual inputs to collective behaviours, beliefs and traditions.

Some cultural characteristics

It's worth dwelling at this point to look at some culture traits. The following is a list of results or outputs of particular business cultures.

⁸ For further information see http://www.lindsay-sherwin.co.uk/guide_team_leadership/html_motivation/5_hertzberg.htm accessed on 30 July 2010.



- Managers explain tasks clearly, understand employee emotional issues and give support. They get their hands dirty.
- Loyalty is eroded and employees don't know where their loyalties belong. Weak loyalties are prevailing over older job-for-life norms.
- Time is money. Urgency and deadlines are key. Making work urgent is a deliberate strategy.
- Compensation and benefits are complex with profit related pay and share options.
- Decision making is logical and rational. Facts and evidence important. Decent treatment and fairness prevails.
- Empowerment is taking over from hierarchy. Delegation is important. Setting, motivating, and monitoring are used.
- Knowledge-is-power is giving way to a culture where manipulation of information itself is the essence of work.
- Tasks are structuring logically. Behaviour is reserved and indirect approaches favoured. The task becomes the focus.
- Individualism prevails over collectivism. But individuals will cooperate to get the job done.
- Plans are important. Timeliness rules.
- Feedback is provided indirectly and the employee is expected to read between the lines.
- Conflict is distasteful. The prolonged stress and tension of confrontation is dreaded.
- Staff development and succession planning is vogue.

These are cultures or attributes of culture that exist in firms in Britain. These are caused by prevailing culture, from the culture norms in the country to the norms in particular work groups. It is for management to determine if these behaviours are desirable or whether a culture change is necessary in order to better meet the firm's strategy and objectives.

Culture in today's firm

Culture in today's firm is influenced by a number of things. This section briefly discusses each. The degree to which culture is influenced by these depends on the innate culture in the firm and a great number of external culture factors and personal circumstances.

The pace of business

Time constrains the way decisions are made. It constrains the time available for individual tasks. In turn it is a huge influence upon the culture in the firm. A typical example is that there's no time now to build friendships whilst at work and hence staff cease to understand one another and cease to rely on one another.



Timeless time

Those working globally and specifically across time zones and across different religious regions will know how the working day extends from when the Arabs start to when the Americans finish – a period of about sixteen hours spanning the full seven day week. Time is timeless. This now presses on the culture in the firm, generating beliefs of unfair treatment.



Culture and the economy

In a recession, the culture of a firm will be different from that prevailing in boom times. Culture clash may occur and may be tolerated by employees in a recession when their normal actions are suppressed. Staff are just glad they have a job but they'll be off to pastures new as soon as things improve. In another sense staff may come to rely on one another more since the prospect of unemployment creates its own bonds and hence behaviours.

Culture in the high skill firm

High skill professionals tend to take many years to be trained. In today's economy there are skills gaps in many disciplines. This means that management often recognise rare skills and afford this group extra privileges. Whilst the beneficiaries rejoice in their improved state those not so fortunate feel disenfranchised and this reflects overall in the culture. The culture in a non-homogenous and high technology or high skill workforce is particularly complex. A classic example is the culture existing in airlines with pilots and cabin crew forming two distinct cultural groups.

Culture in the service firm

In the service firm, such as perhaps a hotel, the employee pool often comprises low paid, unskilled staff from developing European countries. The obvious result is a unique culture where staff have little loyalty, no expectation of development and perhaps high power distance. Of course, this must not be allowed to prevail or hotel guests and profits suffer. Ways must be found to enhance staff engagement.

The psychological contract

The psychological contract is the unwritten, implied contract that exists between employee and employer. It is informed by the expectations of both parties. It describes the natural 'give and take' of work. Culture is hugely influenced by these unwritten terms defining things like the degree to which the employee will give extra time and the degree to which the employer will allow use of business facilities for family benefit.

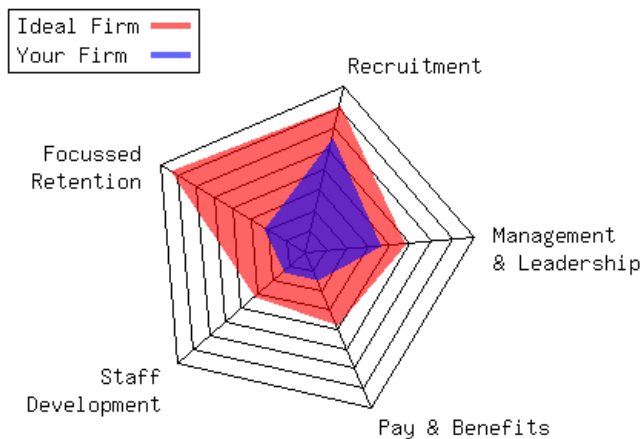


Defining a ‘just’ culture

There are a number of useful tools for defining culture and specifically for defining a ‘just’ culture; a culture desired by management in order to maximise benefit to both employees and shareholders. In a sense this is the ‘Holy Grail’ of management – the identification of, the working towards and the achievement of a just culture. Creating the ideal culture is what managers do. Tools that might be used are described below.

Watson Wyatt

Watson Wyatt (now Towers Watson) was a management consultancy firm that researched the links between human resource management (itself a determinant of culture) and the result on the profits made by the firm. Watson Wyatt identified five attributes that affected results: the way in which employee resourcing was done, the leadership practices in the firm, pay and benefits and related factors, the degree of focus on employees as people and finally the negative-acting paternalistic environment where poor performers are allowed to continue in post⁹.

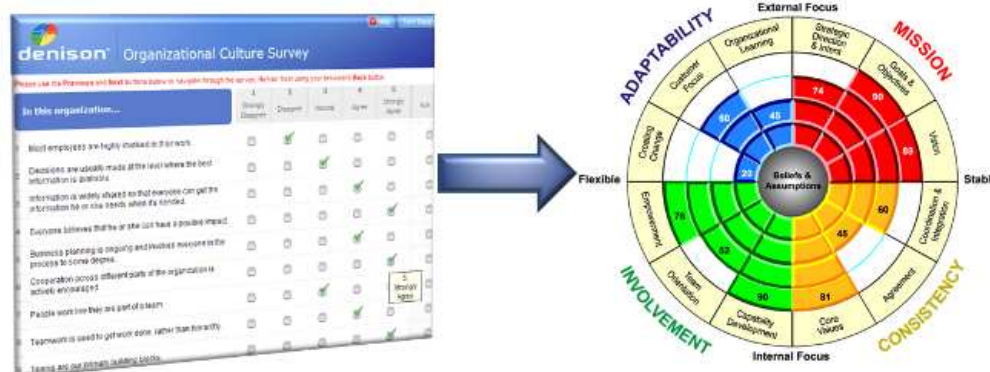


An online version of Watson-Wyatt’s survey is available at <http://www.timelesstime.co.uk/tools/management-tools/> and this can be used to benchmark a firm’s current practices against what Watson-Wyatt styles as the ideal (leading perhaps to a ‘just’ culture).

Denison

Denison is an American firm of psychologists. At the core of the Denison approach is a set of diagnostic surveys, rooted in Denison’s research linking organisational culture and leadership to performance outcomes. This diagnostic technology is supported by a consulting network that aids in interpreting results and working with management to make culture and leadership change.

⁹ Watson Wyatt (2000), *The Human Capital Index: European Survey Report 2000*, Watson Wyatt, Reigate, UK.



The Denison model and diagnostic surveys¹⁰ can help organisations align culture and leadership to accelerate the achievement of strategic goals. The assessment measures the management traits of Mission, Consistency, Involvement, and Adaptability in the firm as a group of people. Accurately diagnosing specific culture strengths and weaknesses is the first step in the change process and directs the individual, group or organisation towards specific actions. The Denison approach helps build accountability into the change process by enabling management to track and monitor progress towards the desired culture and leadership.

Investors in People

IIP (Investors in People¹¹) is a UK Government scheme that a firm can join by adhering to certain management and leadership practices. Specifically it asks a firm to have a strategy, communicate the strategy to employees and evaluate how the strategy is aiding in achieving corporate goals and the goals of the employees as they develop. In that sense it can be thought of as a means to achieving a just culture.



IIP relies on employee survey to confirm that policy and strategy is being effectively developed and communicated.

IIP is possibly the best way to assure that a just culture is achieved whereby the culture created maximises results for all stakeholders in the firm: management, employees, shareholders and customers.

¹⁰ For details of the Denison Organisational Culture Survey see <http://www.denisonconsulting.com/products/cultureProducts/surveyOrgCulture.aspx> accessed on 30 July 2010.

¹¹ For further information on IIP see <http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/Pages/Home.aspx> accessed on 30 July 2010.



The benefits of a just culture

This paper has suggested that there is some culture that is optimal for a particular firm. If realised, external culture, employee expectations and firm's culture are in balance. There is no culture clash and hence all cultural aspects are reinforcing. It has suggested that management can make change to culture in the firm to achieve this balance. This alignment gives tangible benefits and further research into the work of Towers Watson, Denison and IIP will show this quantified. In qualitative terms if the various cultures are aligned and the firm's strategy is in concert with the culture, employees will be optimally motivated to contribute to the firm's strategy.

A roadmap for change

So how does management effect culture change? Culture does not change overnight. Culture does not change with one single action. As a complex set of beliefs, behaviours and traditions it must be engineered to change through a long term and decisive culture change project. This project must contain the following elements.

Initial data gathering

The start point is the culture audit. Denison offers this and the other models cited above can also be used to assess where the firm is now.

Where are we now?

There's a presumption that management have a problem. Something is not right in order to have management feel it needs to initiate the culture assessment and change project. It could be a feeling that staff are not behaving correctly and sales are being lost as a result. It could be that staff are leaving and the firm has a problem recruiting to replace. Whatever the issue is, the classic consulting lifecycle can be used.

This begins with the development of a hypothesis (or speculation about the cause). From this, management can develop further sub-hypotheses. The audit or survey is then used to gather evidence in support of the hypothesis. If ultimately the hypothesis is disproved by the evidence then speculation needs to begin again. This 'where are we now' stage ends once the hypothesis is proven and the root cause(s) are established.



Where do we want to be and why?

The next stage is to vocalise where the firm wants to be as regards culture. This can best be done by telling a story: "we believe we want to achieve a state where employees and managers...". This statement should go on to describe the behaviours, beliefs and traditions that management believe are right to support the firm's strategic goals.



Ideally this vision statement for culture should be described in the same terms used to evaluate the current culture effectively creating a common currency for the project.

Main data gathering

Nothing can happen until data has been gathered to model the culture currently in place and to determine the changes to each of the culture attributes. Refer back to the various models for ways of expressing the current culture and the desired future culture. At the end of this stage management should have an accurate model of the state before and after change actions.

How do we get there?

It is then a question of proposing change activity and evaluating the activity to confirm that it would likely have the desired effect in moving the firm towards its just culture.

This then becomes the culture change plan.

What steps are there along the way?

As with any plan, the resulting action and result needs to be evaluated along the way to repeatedly ask “are we getting there” and “did that last action have the desired effect”. Simply there needs to be continuous progress assessment.

Some tenets

There are three core tenets or truisms. Three things that have to be in place. If they are missing or not acknowledged and accepted in the culture change project, the project will fail.

Change comes from the top

If the boss does not believe in the need for change and potentially change in his or her style, the project is doomed.

Change takes time

No one action taken on its own to change culture will be the panacea. The project will likely contain tens of individual changes over a period of time. One year is typical in order to see tangible outcome and perhaps two to three years to see a lasting change.

Example leads change

Change comes easy if the key players lead by example. Unlike the situation where the monkeys accepted the culture, if a leader (or change agent) explains why the change is necessary and leads by example, a positive outcome is more likely.



Conclusions

This paper has addressed culture; what it is, how an employee senses culture and the traits needed in managers to sense and work with culture to optimise the business result given a prevailing culture. It has discussed some typical cultures in today's firms and the pressures on the firm that 'make' culture in the modern globalised business environment. It has expressed the concept of a 'just culture' and suggested how management goes about quantifying this and setting plans to achieve it. Finally it described how to set about creating a culture change project in order to move from where the firm is today to some other culture tomorrow.

Culture is a complex thing. It has many facets. There is however a huge body of knowledge existing that aids culture practitioners in making culture change to the benefit of the firm.

TimelesTime is expert in culture change. Its consultants have effected change in many organisations and can manage change for any form and size of firm. In sensing and dealing with a firm's culture, it is difficult for management to take an objective view. People consultants have a clear role to play.





The Author



Sue Berry is a founding Director of TimelessTime, and has over 25 years of HR experience across many industry sectors in large multinationals and smaller enterprises. Operational HR experience has been gained in many industry sectors including aerospace, electronics, chemicals, service industries, the Health Service, academia, not-for-profit NGO's and the charity sector. Prior to setting up TimelessTime she headed the HR function in three very different sectors, gaining valuable experience at board level. She has published two books and written many HR papers.

With a BEd(Hons) in sociology and environmental science she is a qualified trainer. She holds a Masters degree in Human Resource Management and is Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Her current research studies are in psychology.

For a full CV visit the 'Background' section of the company web site at www.timelesstime.co.uk. Sue may be contacted by telephone on 07554 420419 or by email at sue.berry@timelesstime.co.uk

TimelessTime

TimelessTime is based in Sussex and works with companies across the South East and London providing consulting services to small to medium sized enterprises in people management. TimelessTime offers an extended portfolio of support for organisations of all sizes covering projects, interim HR support at partner/Board level and telephone and email support for day to day issues to senior management.

Unlike large organisations TimelessTime can be extremely versatile and nimble with the support service offered to clients. TimelessTime understands that managers don't work '9 to 5' anymore. Timeless time is a fact of life, as is flexible working for senior business professionals. TimelessTime can help principals and managers manage their work-life balance by providing the support needed when it is needed.

By teaming with other like-minded professionals who can support the work of TimelessTime we offer an extended portfolio of support for organisations of all sizes.

For more details about the concept of TimelessTime please visit the 'Background' area of the company website at www.timelesstime.co.uk