



Church Cultures

ELEMENTS OF HEALTHY
CHURCH CULTURES

What is culture?

Culture describes the sustained mind-sets, symbols and patterns of behaviour that determine 'how things are done' within a defined group.

- Culture is largely instinctive and sub-conscious within a group (tacit)
- It is emotionally driven and is a significant source of energy and power
- It is remarkably resistant to change

Culture is embedded in:

- Symbolic reminders (artifacts that are visible within the group's space)
- Keystone behaviours (recurring ways of doing things that chain with other dependent behaviours, these are both visible (informal) and invisible (tacit))
- Mind-sets (subconscious attitudes that are widely shared but almost exclusively invisible (tacit))

Systems Grid

| | Formal | Informal | Tacit |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Rules | Constitution Policies | How we really do things.. | Hidden rules |
| Roles | Position Descriptions, Titles | Gatekeepers, Patriarchs Team builders | Assumed roles |
| Rites/Rituals | Order of Service Agendas | Pre-meeting post-meeting processes | Subconscious processes |
| Goals | Vision, Values Priorities | Team motives | Unacknowledged drivers |

Multiple relationships create systemic behaviour so that we can manage complexity.

Human beings are socially attuned to detect and operate within systems.

Systems are inherently stable and will resist change.

Systems can be aligned and functional or highly oppositional and dysfunctional.

People
create
Systems

GROUP CULTURE

Across the many instruments that explore group culture there are several common constructs which form the basis reflection on culture. These are:

- The degree of people orientation
- The degree of process (rule) formalisation
- The degree of strategic realisation
- The degree of flexible innovation



Adapted from Delobbe, N. (2002) *Core Dimensions of Culture*

PEOPLE ORIENTATION

- Refers to the caring and supportive environment, relational emphasis, trust and teamwork, present in the organisation's culture.
- When it is healthy this dimension includes belonging, trust, co-operation, recognition of diversity, inclusion, mutual respect, consideration and supportive interpersonal relationships.
- When dysfunctional, relationships become conflicted and competitive, trust is lost, miscommunication flourishes and people lose their sense of belonging.
- The two opposite dysfunctional extremes can involve social enmeshment or disengagement.

PEOPLE ORIENTATION

- The three measures:
 - Belonging
 - Trust
 - Support

PROCESS FORMALISATION

- Process or rule formalisation explores the mechanisms of healthy facilitation with the group. The dimension commonly describes rules and roles, power, hierarchy, processes and the existence and application of helpful policies, rules and procedures.
- Healthy cultures establish agreed processes, rules, roles and rituals which serve to enable groups of individuals to relate easily, safely and in a constructive way. They are described as helpful, fair and practical.
- Unhealthy cultures become bureaucratic, inefficient, rigid and rule-bound if there are too many rules or the rules are overbearing. They can become chaotic, and unsafe when there are no rules or when the accepted rules are permitted to be disregarded.

PROCESS FORMALISATION

- The three measures:
 - Process and rule clarity (Presence and consistency)
 - Role clarity (Individual and collective)
 - Fairness

STRATEGIC REALISATION

- This element is the degree of strategic focus, outcome orientation, and mission and vision realisation within the church. This aspect of culture includes the degree of alignment around direction and vision, the capacity for focus and the clarity around strategy. It also includes the degree to which the ends for which the church exists are actually achieved.
- When underemphasised, the church lacks vision, purpose and direction and programs become self serving.
- Over emphasised (not common) the church can become driven.

STRATEGIC REALISATION

Measures

- Charter clarity (vision, mission, values, strategic priorities)
- Program alignment
- Reflective evaluation (review and reset)

FLEXIBLE INNOVATION

- This construct involves the willingness and capacity to engage positive developmental change within the church. This dimension includes creativity, risk-taking, willingness to experiment and includes the reflective learning which comes from trying new ideas.
- Churches can often be tradition bound and resistant to change. These become asynchronous with surrounding culture.
- Some can also lack stability and identity, changing frequently and responsively, without reflection, to what is occurring around them.

FLEXIBLE INNOVATION

Measures

- Critical contextual awareness
- Creative space
- Systemic responsiveness



CULTURAL AUDIT

- Exegeting the culture of the church
 - The Cultural Audit Survey Process
- Reflecting on elements to enhance
- Reflecting on aspects which need to be addressed
- Reflecting on missing elements or new aspects which need to be embraced