the cultural web

The Cultural Web

One of the most regular discussions that we have with our customers centres on culture. These discussions can be very wide ranging and it's worth taking a moment to define what culture actually is.

The dictionary definition includes:

‘State or stage of civilisation of certain people at a certain time’

‘Skills, Arts, Beliefs and Customs of a group of people, passed on from one generation to another’

‘Development or improvement by education or training’

In modern businesses, we believe that culture is all of these things and a lot more, defined as follows:

‘The pattern of shared values, beliefs and assumptions that people have within an organisation through which people make sense of anything that happens to them’

We see a lot of organisations struggling to come to terms with the type of culture that they want to cultivate. Most will probably say that they want to create a vibrant sales and service culture where the customer is all-important and all staff are focussed on delighting existing customers and acquiring new ones.

Typically Senior Managers have a clear vision of where they want the organisation to go. More often than not this vision is well communicated. But funny things can happen to this vision when it gets out into the organisation.

Like the old ‘passing the message’ activity, by the time the vision gets to the front-line it can be unrecognisable. Interestingly, this occurs in all types and sizes of businesses:

management vision

clear vision, well communicated

front line

inconsistent application

the black hole

what happens here?
# The Cultural Web

As organisations change and grow, we generally see the following:

- The time of Senior Managers becomes more precious as ever increasing demands are made from a variety of sources.
- The vision of the organisation, whilst still clear to Senior Management, becomes less clear to the ‘rank and file’.
- Increased ‘administration-type’ functions and demands begin to appear.
- The organisation begins to develop a culture of its own. This can include activities and behaviours that you want to encourage, but may include some that you don’t!
- The need for strong leadership and management practices increases rapidly as the organisation changes and grows.
- Technical-type roles become more inclusive as team members begin to focus on their own roles rather than seeing the bigger picture.
- Staff development becomes more of a challenge as increased staff numbers place more demands upon the time of managers and increases the need for business growth.


They refer to the sets of values, beliefs and assumptions that we mention above as the ‘Paradigm’ of an organisation. Simply put this is the set of assumptions, things that are taken for granted and basically the way things work in each organisation.

### These can include:

**Routines:**

- The way we do things around here. Activities that are a way of life – whether they are necessary or not!

**Rituals:**

- Glorified routines, signals from within the organisation about what sorts of activities are important. For example – ‘We always meet at 9.00 am on Mondays!’

**Stories:**

- Legends of your organisation. Stories that you would tell someone about to describe your organisation.

**Symbols:**

- High level – Building, logo, uniforms
- Low level – Things that happen every day; How people speak to each other; Whether managers listen; Wording of documents; Tone in memos and emails.

**Power Structures:**

- Who makes things happen – could be a person, could be a division, could be part of a business.

**Organisational Structure:**

- What makes the organisation tick? Is it formal or informal? Centralised or decentralised?

**Control Systems:**

- What do we measure or try to control? What behaviours are encouraged and which ones are frowned upon?

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**Making it happen together**
the cultural web

At Partners in Performance we work with you to examine the Paradigm of your organisation and identify positive aspects of your Cultural Web as well as less helpful aspects of it.

At the early stage of development, new businesses have a fantastic opportunity to set up their own defined culture in a way that will drive their business going forward.

In more mature businesses, we often see constant restructuring that often leads nowhere other than further restructuring 12 months down the track. An examination of The Cultural Web of these businesses is often revealing.

In both cases it is common to see businesses developing their own culture and this culture evolving without any strategic input or design from the Executive.

To assist you to build The Cultural Web that will take your business forward, we will help you to:

• Identify the cultural trends that have developed within your business.
• Develop these trends and consider additional practices that will help take your business where you want it to go.
• Create action plans to develop the culture that you want.

Strong cultures do not develop by chance. Your organisation is set up for exactly the paradigm that you deserve. The culture that you seek will remain elusive unless you are proactive in examining your current Paradigm and looking at how your business works. Only then can you begin to create the organisation that your vision has long dictated.

Take our word for it – none of this will happen by accident.