Understanding culture and change
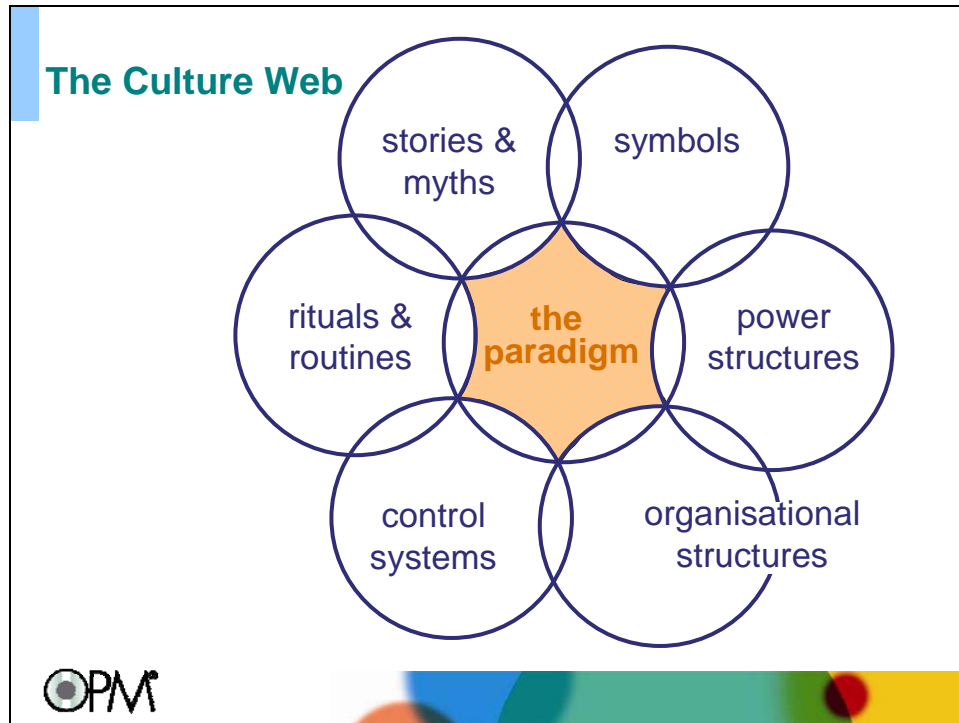
The Culture Web

The Cultural Web identifies six interrelated elements of organisational culture that help to make up what Johnson and Scholes call the "paradigm" – a self-consistent set of ideas and beliefs which act as a filter, influencing how we perceive and make sense of things. The six elements are:

1. **Stories** - The past events and people talked about inside and outside the organisation, including leaders. Who and what the organisation chooses to immortalize says a great deal about what it values, and perceives as great behaviour.

2. **Rituals and Routines** - The daily behaviour and actions of people that signal acceptable behaviour. This determines what is expected to happen in given situations, and what is valued by management.

3. **Symbols** - The visual representations of the organisation including logos, the style of office, dress codes.

4. **Organizational Structure** - This includes both the structure defined by the organization chart, and the unwritten lines of power and influence that indicate whose contributions are most valued.

5. **Control Systems** - The ways that the organization is controlled. These include financial systems, quality systems, and rewards (including the way they are measured and distributed within the organization.)

6. **Power Structures** - The pockets of real power in the organisation. This may involve one or two key senior directors, a whole group of senior managers, or even a department. The key is that

these people have the greatest amount of influence on decisions, operations, and strategic direction.

1. Analyzing Culture As It Is Now

Stories

- What stories do people currently tell about your organization? And from the past?
- What do these stories say about what your organisation believes in?
- What do employees talk about when they think of the history of the organisation?
- What stories do they tell new people who join the organisation?
- What heroes, villains and mavericks appear in these stories?

Rituals and Routines

- What do customers/members of the public expect when they walk in?
- What do employees expect?
- What would be immediately obvious if changed?
- What behaviour do these routines encourage?
- When a new problem is encountered, what rules do people apply when they solve it?
- What core beliefs do these rituals reflect?

Symbols

- Is organisation-specific jargon or language used? How well known and usable by all is this?
- Are there any status symbols used?
- What image is associated with your organisation, looking at this from the separate viewpoints of clients/citizens and staff?

Organizational Structure

- Is the structure flat or hierarchical? Formal or informal? Organic or mechanistic?
- Where are the formal lines of authority?
- Are there informal lines?

Control Systems

- What process or procedure has the strongest controls? Weakest controls?
- Is the organisation generally loosely or tightly controlled?
- Do employees get rewarded for good work or penalized for poor work?
- What reports are issued to keep control of operations, finance, etc...?

Power Structures

- Who has the real power in the organisation?

- What do these people believe and champion within the organization?

- Who makes or influences decisions?

- How is this power used or abused?

What do these responses tell you about your organisation's culture and the core paradigm(s) at play?

Culture and change

Seel argues that most change programmes concentrate on the outer circles but often with limited success. Unless the paradigm at the heart of the culture is changed there will be no lasting change (for example, words can be interpreted very differently e.g. 'I hope you do better next time' can be interpreted as a threat in a 'blame culture' but as encouragement in a 'forgiveness culture'). In his view, paradigms are not imposed by CEO's or invented by consultants, rather 'they emerge from a multiplicity of interactions between individuals within the community'. Therefore, change needs to move away from 'planning change' and onto 'facilitating emergence'. This means:

- Encouraging greater connectivity between people

- Encouraging them to have conversations which they might not otherwise have had, helping them to make sense of their day-to-day working lives

- Encouraging self-organisation, opening up spaces for change

- Nurturing and modelling new behaviours

Reference: http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/describing_culture.htm