V. Organisational Culture

The culture of an organisation is a set of norms, values and beliefs. These have developed over time, unplanned and emergent. However, the culture of an organisation is something that can have an enormous impact on the way in which an organisation operates, and its effectiveness. It is also something that can be assessed and, if necessary, changed over time. Organisational culture interventions are notorious for their difficulty and duration, but if culture change is needed this should not deter an organisation from embarking on the process of change. Indeed, it may be the key to its survival.

General

Organisational culture is complex and multi-faceted. Culture is intangible and imprecise. It also changes over time. Different cultures are reflected in different organisational structures and systems. Indeed, it is important that structures and systems are appropriate to the organisation's culture. Also, different people prefer different organisational cultures, depending on their personalities and motivations.

Often an organisation will combine a number of cultures (sometimes with a dominant culture and a number of sub-cultures). A range of cultures is sometimes necessary and appropriate, but sometimes there can be a clash of cultures within an organisation.

Key Cultures

Management theory (Harrison) defines four key cultures: -

Power

A power culture is frequently found in small campaigning societies. It involves a powerful central character or leader. Its structure is depicted by a web: -
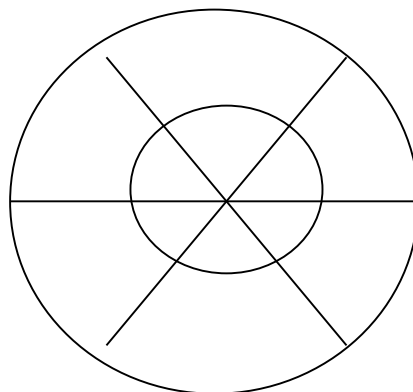

Power culture usually operates informally, with few rules and procedures. Control is exercised by the centre and decisions are taken on the basis of power and influence.

Size is a problem for power cultures, as the web can break if it becomes too large and complex. Then, the only way the organisation can remain web-structured is to develop other 'spin-off' organisations, each web-structures in their own right.

Role Culture

Role culture is what was previously known as a 'bureaucracy'. The structure can be depicted as a Greek temple: -
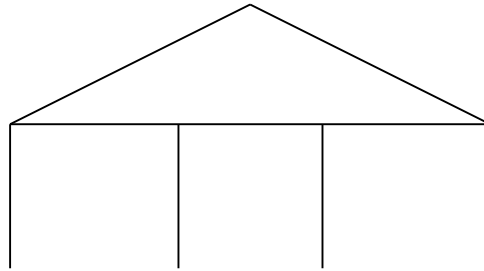
Work is coordinated by a manager, or small number of managers, at the top of the structure. The pillars are strong functional departments. The work of these departments is coordinated and controlled by: -
  ➢ Procedures governing roles e.g. authority definitions and job descriptions.
  ➢ Procedures for communications e.g. document distribution and circulation rules.
 ➢ Rules for settlement of disputes e.g. appeal to lowest crossover points.
With ultimate coordination and control by senior manager(s).

Position power is the major power source in this culture: personal power is not welcomed, and expert power only appreciated 'in its proper place'. Rules and procedures are all encompassing. The success of this culture depends on appropriate allocation of roles and responsibilities. Also, a stable environment is necessary for this culture to work – Greek temples tremble when the ground shakes, and collapse under an earthquake.

Role culture is frustrating for individuals who are power orientated or want control over his or her own work and the way in which it is done.

Task Culture

The task culture is job or project orientated. Its structure can be depicted as a net: -
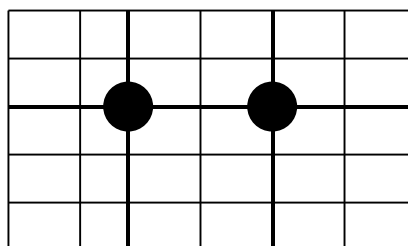
The matrix organisation is one structural form of the task culture.

Task culture arranges human resources around the project in hand, and lets the team organise themselves (self-determining teams). Influence is based more on expert power than on position or personal power.

This culture is extremely adaptable, and appropriate for task-centred, mission driven organisations - particularly campaigning organisations – as it enhances creativity and motivation. It is flexible and enables reactivity. However, task culture finds it difficult to achieve economies of scale, or to replicate good success amongst different teams.

Management control is largely ceded, apart from determination of tasks and the allocation of people and resources. 'Control freak' managers would certainly be out of their 'comfort zone' in this culture!

This system can become strained when the organisation is short of funding or people. Then, the manager can tend to attempt to wrestle back control, and team leaders can begin to compete for funding or staff resources – leading to a breakdown of team mentality and a move towards power or role culture.

Person Culture

Person culture is rarely found in animal protection organisations. It is where the individual is the focus of the organisation. Communes and partnerships (e.g. management consultants or architects) sometimes have this culture. It can be depicted by a cluster: -
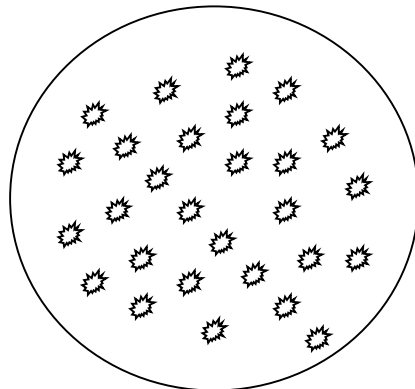
This would be extremely unusual for an animal protection society, where a mission or aim is central.

Determinants of Culture

There are various factors that contribute towards the development of organisational culture. These include: -

> *History and Background*

> *Owner/Founder*

Often the owner or founder will have an enormous role in establishing its culture, although the impact will wane over time. Organisations dominated by the owner or founder will tend to have a power culture.

> *Size*

Culture often changes as an organisation grows. For example, as the number of staff and functions of an organisation expand, a move towards role culture is often seen.

> *Organisational Environment*

In a rapidly changing environment, task culture may be appropriate. In a static environment, role culture may be preferable. A challenging environment (for example, in times of dictatorship or other challenge, power culture may be appropriate.

> *National Culture*

Different nationalities may work better in different organisational cultures (see Chapter on International Work).

> *Function and Purpose*

Different cultures may be appropriate for different functions or purposes. For example, as previously examined, a task culture may be more appropriate for campaigning and role culture for service delivery.

> *Goals or Objectives*

Quality of service delivery is more likely to be achieved under role culture, whereas successful campaigning is more likely under task culture. A power or task culture is more appropriate for growth goals.

> *Staff*

Different individuals prefer working under different organisational cultures. It may be counter-productive for an organisation to attempt culture change if key staff would feel uncomfortable or alienated in the desired culture.

> *Technology*

The move towards increased use of technology tends to push organisations towards role culture, with associated procedures and protocols.

Policies

An organisation's policies also become part of its culture, and impact strongly on its work. It follows that these should be formulated and agreed carefully, with full staff consultation.

Changing Cultures

Most animal protection organisations will feel that a balance of two or more cultures would be appropriate for their organisation. Management consultants have tools for assessing appropriate organisational culture(s) and staff preferences in this regard. Different organisational cultures can be successful, there is no optimum – appropriateness and 'fit' are the keys. Organisational culture interventions can be complex and time-consuming. However, it is clear from company analyses that if successful companies fail to adapt their culture when the environment changes, then they cease to be successful.

Even without proactive intervention, organisational culture changes over time as organisations grow and progress. When first founded, an organisation tends to revolve around its founder and his/her vision. As the organisation grows, activities need to be 'departmentalised' and organisational systems established. Work is delegated to functional units. This often proves difficult for the founder or first Chief Executive, either because they struggle with the loss of control or because they find themselves ill equipped to deal with their new organisational role. Often these new systems become inflexible, and other cultures break through to cope with a changing environment. Then new systems of communication and coordination are introduced to bridge the various cultures and structures.

Managing an organisation with various cultures, and achieving coherence and integration, is not a simple matter. However, if a manager can recognise the different cultures involved in various parts of the organisation (and the need for these, or the need to change these), then at least he or she will be able to understand the nature of the task and the potential problems involved, instead of grappling in the dark with associated problems and 'solutions'.

Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around.
Henry David Thoreau